

Lasting Marriages

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“There is no more lovely, friendly, and charming relationship, communion, or company than a good marriage.”

– Martin Luther
(1483-1546),
German priest
and scholar

American culture is filled with books and movies that end with the couple falling madly in love and ideally living “happily ever after.” Small, simple wedding ceremonies of the past have given way to elaborate nuptials orchestrated by professional wedding planners. For many couples, the wedding itself takes priority over the impending marriage. But once the honeymoon is over, where do couples go from there? How do they achieve a lasting marriage in a society where one out of every two marriages ends in divorce?



What Is Marriage?

Marriage is a process of a constantly changing relationship. Just as people grow, mature, and adapt to new life responsibilities, so does a marriage. A couple’s relationship is challenged by additions to or alterations in its original form of “self.” Children or other family members may become part of the framework. Work responsibilities and changes in employment such as retirement can affect the amount of time a couple spends together. Although marriages change, the keys to sustaining a healthy and lasting marriage are companionship, communication, and commitment.

Happily Married People

Not all good marriages are alike. However, researchers have found that certain characteristics are more likely to occur among husbands and wives in vital (happy) marriages than in less content couples.

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The Magic Ingredient

Experts and married couples agree that the simple but magic ingredient in a love relationship is the expression of affection. They are just as quick to point out this aspect of a couple's life together is usually the first to grow dim.

Those who research satisfaction in marriage have found that expressing affection regularly is important. In other



words, couples who indulged in frequent terms of endearment, nonsexual touching such as hugs and pats on the head, and tokens of affection such as little gifts reported extremely high levels of marital satisfaction.

Couples often think that candy and flowers, sweet nothings, and silly names are just preludes to a real relationship. On the contrary, they light up a relationship.

To put a little love back into your relationship:

- Start each day with a big hug.
- Send a card or love note to your spouse.
- Telephone to say "I love you" during the day.
- Give the gift of listening – refrain from judging or giving advice.
- Complete daily chores together and let this time become special sharing time.
- Dance to a slow song before retiring.
- Give your spouse a list of 10 terrific memories.
- On a clear evening, do some stargazing.
- Assure your spouse often that you care, and show you care by your actions.
- Thank your partner for compliments and kind gestures – and you'll get more of them.
- Help without being asked.

- Always take each other's feelings into consideration.
- Make having fun together a priority.
- Praise the good in your partner.
- Admire each other's achievements.
- During tough times, think of why you fell in love and dwell on those things.
- Always make your partner feel special.
- List all the ways your partner enriches your life and share your list with your spouse.

Whether you have been married for five years or 50, make your marriage and partner a priority and cultivate your relationship!

For more ideas of how to improve and nurture your relationship, and to learn more about healthy marriage initiatives, check out these resources:

Howard J. Markman, Scott M. Stanley, and Susan L. Blumberg; *Fighting for Your Marriage: Positive Steps for Preventing Divorce and Preserving a Lasting Love*, Jossey-Bass, 2001, ISBN 0-7879-5744-5,

Betty L. Polston and Susan K. Golant; *Loving Midlife Marriage: A Guide to Keeping Romance Alive from the Empty Nest Through Retirement*, John Wiley Publishers, 1999, ISBN 0-4713-1453-6

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center
www.healthymarriageinfo.org

The Marriage Garden www.arfamilies.org/family_life/marriage/default.htm

West Virginia Healthy Families-Healthy Children Relationship Initiative www.hfhc-ww.org

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