

10 Tips

FOR A



STRONG Marriage

BY PAM KNEPPER

trust friends kindness share forgive family time

Pause for a moment and think about your marriage. What thoughts come to mind? How do you feel about your relationship? Your marriage may generally provide great happiness and satisfaction for both of you. Or, because of high levels of conflict and unfulfilled expectations, your marriage may be a source of great anxiety and frustration. Another possibility is that life for you and your spouse has become so hectic that you never seem to be able to connect with each other as you once did. Do any of these situations sound familiar? If so, you are not alone. There are many spouses who can relate to one of these descriptions.

About half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce. It is obvious that many people do not get married and live “happily ever after.” However, marriage continues to be an important goal for most Americans. In fact, more than 90 percent of adults will get married at least once in their lifetime. Most spouses start out full of hopes and dreams and are truly committed to making their marriage work. Yet as the reality of living with a less-than-perfect spouse sets in and the pressures of life build, many individuals feel less romantic and do not find as much satisfaction in their relationships. All marriages change over time. But with hard work and dedication, people can keep their marriages strong and enjoyable. How is it done? What does it take to create a long-lasting, satisfying marriage?

Here are 10 tips for strengthening and maintaining the “magic” between you and your spouse:

1. REMAIN *Good* FRIENDS

Many people say that having a friendship with their spouse is an important goal of their marriage. Life usually becomes more complicated as marriage progresses. If a marital relationship is not built upon a solid foundation of friendship, it may become more difficult for partners to stay connected over time. It is also easy for spouses to become less polite and respectful to each other as time passes because they feel more comfortable with each other. However, spouses who remain good friends throughout life usually find much more enjoyment and satisfaction in their relationship.

John Gottman, one of the nation’s leading experts on marital relationships says there are many things spouses can do to keep their friendship alive. These include:

♥ Set aside a specific time each day to talk and reconnect. “In some marriages, spouses stop confiding in each other and stop having stimulating discussions, only to later discover that they do not know each other very well anymore,” says John. “All people change over time and partners need to continue to learn about each other’s thoughts, feelings and ideas.”

♥ Another way to maintain friendship in marriage is to have weekly “dates.” Dates allow spouses to spend time alone together, which can be especially important if they have children. Partners can also build friendship by trying to avoid conflict during “couple times,” making the time spent together more enjoyable and memorable.

2. SHARE ENJOYABLE ACTIVITIES

Do fun things with your spouse. "Exercise together, take leisurely walks or share a pursuit that's mutually acceptable," recommends David Sunshine, author of *Thirty Tips to Build a Strong Marriage*. Such activities strengthen your relationship and make it easier for the two of you to endure the hard times that come in every marriage.

3. Trust

Trust is something that must be earned and built. "It does not appear overnight and there is no magic way to get it," says David Sunshine. "Trust is created by an open and honest relationship and giving your spouse a soft place to fall." In this way, your spouse knows that you are his or her biggest fan and supporter and you believe that your spouse can accomplish anything.

4. Perform Daily Acts of Kindness

Another way for couples to strengthen their marriages is to express fondness and concern for each other on a daily basis. "Showing kindness in little ways is important for several reasons," says Jim and Sally Conway, authors of *Traits of a Lasting Marriage*. "First, it enables spouses to increase their love for each other and become better friends. It also keeps little annoyances from being blown out of proportion, which helps the relationship stay strong." Daily acts of kindness can also promote the growth of romance in the marriage. When many people think about romance, they envision going away for a weekend to celebrate their anniversary or receiving a dozen roses. Instances such as these are certainly romantic. However, John Gottman has found that true romance is best preserved when partners frequently respect and care for each other in ordinary ways.

"There is an endless variety of little things spouses can do to show thoughtfulness to each other on a daily basis," says John. "A few examples include writing love notes or sending special e-mail messages, helping each other with a project and preparing a favorite breakfast. It is important that spouses do not take for granted the power of such actions. Performing small, simple acts of kindness regularly can have a dramatic impact upon the quality of one's marriage."



5. SPEND FUN TIME *Together*

Most relationships start out with a lot of emphasis on dating and having fun together. After they get married, many spouses become busier and stop making special times a priority. How-

“Research has shown that the amount of fun time spouses spend together is a major factor in the happiness of their marriage,” says John Gottman. “Sharing enjoyable times prevents people from getting bored with their relationships and helps rejuvenate them when they are very busy and preoccupied with other cares and concerns.”

ever, it is very important for partners to take the time to enjoy their relationship.

In order for spouses to increase the amount of enjoyment in their relationship, it is likely that they will have to deliberately plan leisure time into their schedules. Planning and scheduling goes a long way in ensuring that the activity will actually happen and not be shoved aside by a more pressing matter.

Spouses can have fun together in simple ways, such as going on picnics, taking walks, laughing together and

having long talks. They can also plan more extensive times for pleasure, such as all-day outings or vacations. It does not matter what the activity is, as long as it allows both partners to relax and enjoy each other's company.

6. Never Say “I TOLD YOU SO”

Remove the phrase “I told you so” from your lexicon. Saying these words only causes ill will between you and your spouse.

According to David Sunshine, people say this phrase for two reasons: to show off that they were right and to get their mates to listen to them in the future. “What they don't realize is that the message that comes across is, ‘Aren't I smarter than you?’—which is insulting,” says David. “When you're proven right after an argument, your spouse will realize this on his or her own. There is no need to point it out.”

The poet Ogden Nash wrote the following poem to encourage people to act this way:

*To keep your marriage brimming,
With love in the wedding cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;
Whenever you're right, shut up.*

7. *Forgive*

YOUR SPOUSE IS NOT PERFECT AND NEITHER ARE YOU. YOU ARE BOTH IMPERFECT PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO MAKE MISTAKES. WOULDN'T YOU RATHER FORGIVE THAN LET IT BUILD INSIDE YOU UNTIL YOU ARE IN A RAGE?

FORGIVENESS MEANS THAT YOUR SPOUSE UNDERSTANDS WHEN HE OR SHE MAKES A MISTAKE THAT YOU STILL LOVE YOUR SPOUSE. THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT YOU MIGHT BE IRRITATED FOR A LITTLE WHILE, BUT YOU WILL FORGIVE YOUR PARTNER AND PICK BACK UP WHERE YOU LEFT OFF.

8. Take Time For Self

This is very important for both men and women, but women are most often the ones who do not follow this advice. “As women, we get caught up in taking care of everyone around us and our own self gets ignored,” says Sally Conway. Then one day, we wake up and don't know who we are anymore. This is why it is so important to have your own goals, dreams and desires to keep yourself grounded.



9. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

A family court judge once commented that 99 percent of the divorce cases he presided over, the couples were upset about very small matters. Here are some of the types of complaints he was referring to:

"She never lets me leave the window open at night."

"He always wears that loud shirt that embarrasses me."

"She never replaces the toilet roll when it's finished."

"He always leaves his socks on the floor."

These small matters can be very detrimental to a relationship, so watch out for them.

There is, however, a silver lining to this cloud. "Just as little things can ruin a relationship, they can also build one," says David Sunshine. A brief phone call to ask how your spouse's day is going can make a big difference in his or her feelings toward you. Remembering your mate's birthday with a little gift can mean a lot. Even just bringing your spouse a chocolate bar or a novel you think he or she will enjoy can mean a great deal, because it shows you care.

10. CREATE Family TRADITIONS

Observing family traditions and rituals is a great way to strengthen a marriage. Traditions and rituals serve many important functions in families. First, they enable husbands and wives to figure out what is important to them and their relationships. They also give meaning and predictability to marriages and families. Rituals help couples recharge themselves from the stresses of everyday life and increase the amount of intimacy in their relationships. A marriage that is marked by many traditions and rituals is often richer and more purposeful than those that are not.

John Gottman suggests several ways to incorporate traditions and rituals into the marital relationship.

- ♥ Having a private conversation at the end of each day is one common ritual observed by many spouses.
- ♥ Going on a weekly date is another typical marriage ritual. However, traditions and rituals can be less formal than these examples. In fact, many marriages include traditions and rituals of which the spouses may be unaware.
- ♥ Kissing each other goodbye each morning, talking on the phone during lunch and taking walks on a regular basis are all examples of less obvious rituals.
- ♥ Many spouses also have rituals connected to special days, such as Valentine's Day and wedding anniversaries.

These traditions enable them to reaffirm their love and devotion to one another. Whether traditions and rituals in marriage are simple or elaborate, they are important and give the relationship shared meaning and significance.

Marriage IS A CHALLENGING ENDEAVOR THAT REQUIRES HARD WORK, DETERMINATION AND DISCIPLINE. HOWEVER, WHEN PEOPLE BASE THEIR MARRIAGES ON THE TIPS OUTLINED IN THIS ARTICLE THEY USUALLY FIND JOY AND HAPPINESS. CREATING A STRONG AND SATISFYING MARRIAGE IS POSSIBLE AND IT IS DEFINITELY WORTH THE EFFORT.

CREATIVE DATING IDEAS

❖ For You & Your Spouse ❖

GO FOR A WALK.

WORK ON A JIGSAW PUZZLE.

PLAY A BOARD GAME.

PLAY "HIDE-AND-SEEK."

COOK TOGETHER.

HAVE AN OVERNIGHT CAMPOUT IN YOUR YARD.

PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY SERVICE.

GET SOME EXERCISE.

FIND SOME QUIET SPACE AND LISTEN TO MUSIC.

LEARN A NEW HOBBY TOGETHER.

FLY KITES.

WRITE POEMS AND READ TO EACH OTHER.