

Simple Secrets for a Stronger Marriage

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Is your marriage not as strong as it could be? A few simple strategies can make the difference between a happy couple and an unhappy couple. To strengthen your marriage...

Don't start a serious discussion unless you have your partner's full attention. One person may pick a time to talk that is good for him/her but not good for his partner -- then get angry when the partner is distracted.

If your partner springs a serious discussion on you when you're busy, explain that you very much want to talk with him, but now isn't a good time -- then suggest a time that is good.

That said, stopping what you're doing to have a conversation with your partner can be a winning move.

Example: Few things score a man as many points with his wife as turning off a sporting event on TV, looking her in the eye and saying, "Okay, let's talk."

Give in on the little things. Remind yourself that "it isn't worth fighting over" when tensions rise on a minor matter.

Helpful: If neither spouse will back down on a particular point, each should rate the importance of the issue on a scale of one to 10. The spouse who rates it higher wins, and the other yields. Of course, you have to play fair -- not everything can be a 10.

Hold a weekly relationship meeting. This way, problems won't fester and escalate, and serious discussions are less likely to take place at inopportune moments. Limit meetings to one hour. Select a place where you both feel comfortable. Schedule a fun date afterward so this isn't something you dread.

Find alternate ways to say "I love you." Many people are self-conscious about saying "I love you," particularly in public. Use a code to say the same thing, and the message will be private and meaningful.

Examples: A professional couple pages each other with "111" to mean "I love you," and "112" to mean "I love you, too." A man squeezes his wife's hand three times before releasing it, as a silent message of "I love you."

Do nice things. It's easy for a spouse to feel taken for granted after years of marriage. In successful relationships, both partners find small ways to make loving gestures on a regular basis.

Example: I know one husband who takes his wife's car to be washed and gassed up every Saturday. His wife brings him coffee every morning.

Don't be confrontational or accusatory.

Example: If the sound of your spouse cracking his knuckles drives you up the wall, say, "Could you warn me before you do that? The noise gets to me for some reason," instead of "Cut that out. I hate it."

Give 100% under all circumstances. Some couples think that the spouse who created a problem is entirely responsible for solving it. That's a recipe for relationship failure. Both partners must give everything they have whenever there's a problem, no matter who is to blame.

Fight fair. Never call your partner names. Always leave the past in the past, and don't bring up old mistakes to win a new argument. Don't threaten to walk out unless you mean it -- emotional blackmail only makes things worse.

Act romantic, and you'll feel romantic. Couples often put off sex for weeks or months because one partner "doesn't feel like it" or doesn't feel "turned on" by the other. Instead of waiting for the mood to strike you, decide to do it and see what happens. Chances are that you will start to feel turned on.