

Best Marriage Practices

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Control Your Conflicts with Repair Attempts

Successful couples make repair attempts toward each other during or after a conflict. They reach out to the other with a comment or action that keeps negativity from escalating out of control. The action can be a smile, humor, touch, or words like, “I’m sorry” or “OK--You’re right.” All couples have conflict. Successful couples practice sending and receiving repair attempts. Your goal in any conflict is to repair and reconcile.

What are three kinds of repair attempts that you commonly use in your marriage?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three kinds of repair attempts that your spouse uses in times of conflict?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Positive Marriage Habits

There are good habits and bad habits when it comes to our personal health or work lives. The same is true in marriage. Daily practice of good marital habits keeps a couple closer and makes their marriage thrive (ex; standing up and giving a kiss when your spouse comes home).

What are three practices that help you feel close to each other?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Which of these are the most difficult to practice—and why?

What is one habit/practice that you would like to start?

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in Marriage

research from John Gottman, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (1999)

Which of the following behaviors do you see in your marriage, and how often? Marital research shows that these are the four worst behaviors which can destroy a marriage.

Assess how often you do these things. Mark the line with an “M” for Me. Next assess how often your spouse does these things. Mark the line with an “S” for Spouse.

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Constantly

Criticism: _____
(harsh startups when talking, goes beyond a complaint to blame and attack)

Contempt: _____
(sarcasm, cynicism, mockery, hostile humor)

Defensiveness _____
(knee-jerk reaction, attacks back without listening or openness to other’s complaints)

Stonewalling _____
(avoiding, silent treatment)

Discuss with your spouse how you can both move closer to the left.

Keeping Your Marriage a Positive Friendship

The longest lasting and happiest marriages are basically friendships that keep a positive attitude toward each other with optimism and humor. These spouses assume the best in the other person’s requests and intentions. They give each other the benefit of the doubt. Once-friendly marriages will sour when spouses turn negative and adversarial to each other. They assume the worst in requests and comments and take even simple complaints as personal attacks.

Assess your marriage/friendship on the scale below from negative to positive.

Mark a “W” for where you were on your Wedding day, mark a “T” for where you are Today.

Negative/Adversarial

Positive/Friendly

Discuss with your spouse what can help to move closer to the right.

Avoid the Six Major Causes of Divorce

Compiled from a survey of the one hundred top divorce lawyers in the nation in *The Divorce Lawyers' Guide to Staying Married*, by Wendy Jaffe, Esq. (2006)

1. Sexual Intimacy and Satisfaction:

Sexual problems span from no-sex marriages—even starting on the wedding night—to sexual addictions to affairs. A healthy sexual life helps to keep couples close and happy together.

How do you show your sexual desire and affection to your spouse?

What ways do you like your spouse to show you his/her sexual desire and affection? What does he or she do that turns on your desire?

What has inhibited or diminished your sexual life with your spouse?

2. Unrealistic Expectations:

What are some unrealistic expectations you had or have about marriage or your spouse?

What are some unrealistic expectations that your spouse may have?

3. Money:

Differences in spending and saving can be small or extreme. Write your names where you see both of you on the following scale.

Excessive Saver

Excessive Spender

What practical ways can you and your spouse move closer together on the above scale?

What are the primary money goals that you both share in common?

4. Control

When one spouse or both try to control the other person—their clothing, food, social life, friends, time, money, etc., a marriage becomes more like a prison than a park. Control that has verbal abuse/profanities or physical abuse will destroy a marriage. The opposite of control is respect and trust. How do you see your marriage on the following scale? Write both of your names on the scale.

Control

Respect/Trust

Give an example of how you or your spouse tries to control the other.

Give an example of how you show respect and trust in your spouse.

5. Substance Abuse

Addictions to drugs (this includes pot) or alcohol don't mix with marriage. If you suspect either of you has such an addiction, don't wait any longer to consult with a professional for help. Write your names on the scale.

Addicted to Drugs/Alcohol

No Addiction

How do you feel alcohol or drugs have affected your marriage?

6. Commitment

Modern American culture practically conspires against marital commitment. We have a compulsion to replace things the moment a newer model, cell phone or job comes along. And when hard times hit a marriage, spouses can also imagine trading in for a newer or funnier or better looking spouse. Easy "no-fault" divorce laws don't help with commitment either. A culture that promotes a "Me, Myself & I" mentality works against a "Me, You and Us" mentality. How committed are you to "We" instead of "Me, Me, Me"? Write both of your names on the Level of Commitment scale.

Zero Commitment

Strong Commitment

What can help both of you move to the right and to stay there?

Your Marriage IRA and Love Bank

A \$200 month deposit in an IRA at age 25 will grow to \$237,183.69 by age 65. Regular deposits in your marriage will make your love grow too. Don't just be committed to your savings account. Regular contributions to your spouse's Love Bank will enrich your marriage. You make deposits or withdrawals every day to each other's Love Bank. Make sure your deposits far outweigh the withdrawals. Over-withdrawals lead to a bankrupt marriage.

What are some practical everyday deposits that you make to your marriage love bank?

Your deposits:

Your spouse's deposits:

What kinds of withdrawals deplete your love balance?

Your withdrawals:

Your spouse's withdrawals:

Make a Change Now

Commit yourself to repair attempts, good marital habits, and daily control over the four horsemen and divorce-prone behaviors. What changes can you practice today?

Picture Your Future

Imagine you and your spouse are over 85 years old. People ask you, "What was the secret to your marital success, love and happiness?" What will you answer?

"Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be." Robert Browning

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