

10 Things You Can Do To Have a Healthy Marriage

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center

It takes work to have a healthy marriage like it takes work to do anything. You can't maintain a house or a car, be successful in a business, art or a sport, take care of a pet, or grow a plant without making effort. The greater effort you put in, then the more rewarding is the outcome. Why do so many people thinking that a great marriage is something you just "fall into" and like magic it's the perfect relationship?

It takes good nutrition and regular exercise over a long period of time to have a healthy body. Likewise, there are things you can do to have a healthy marriage.

Here are 10 Tips you can use to strengthen your marriage (list continues next week):

1. Spend Time with Each Other.

Married partners need time with each other in order to grow strong together. Plan regularly scheduled date nights and weekend activities. If a getaway is not immediately possible make it a goal that you will work toward one. By spending time with your partner, you will better understand your differences and how to negotiate the problems they may cause. Forget the "quality vs. quantity time" discussion - healthy marriages need both.

2. Learn to Negotiate Conflict.

Conflict is a normal part of a relationship. There is a point however when it can increase in intensity and become emotionally and sometimes physically unsafe. Working out problems in a relationship starts with understanding what your issues are and how to discuss them. There are many resources available to help you learn how to deal with conflict. Using these resources can go a long way in preserving how safe you and your partner feel.

3. Show Respect for Each Other at All Times.

When a couple fails to respect each other, they often slip into negative habits. Research shows that nothing can damage a relationship quicker than criticisms and put-downs. Treating your partner as you would like to be treated will do a lot to strengthen the bond between you. Paying your partner a compliment is a quick and easy way to show them respect. When you are tempted to complain to someone about one of your partner's flaws, ask yourself how you would feel if they did that to you.

4. Learn About Yourself First.

Make it a point to work on self discovery. Many partners enter into relationships without knowing enough about themselves. As a result they can also have difficulty learning about their partners. Learning about yourself will better equip you to grow as an individual and a partner. Regardless of how long you've been together, there are always more things you can learn about him or her. What are his dreams for the future? What is her worst fear? What is the way he or she best gives or receives love? Imagine the intimacy and bond you will share over a lifetime together if you commit to discovering new things about one another!

5. Explore Intimacy.

Marital intimacy can open your relationship to a whole new level of enjoyment and closeness. It is important, however, to remember that intimacy does not always mean sexuality. An often

forgotten aspect of intimacy is the emotional type. An example of emotional intimacy is creating a safe space for your partner to share his or her emotions without fear of you being judgmental or making light of them. Learn the difference between emotional and physical intimacy and when each one is most appropriate. Offering your partner one type when they really need the other can create problems in your relationship.

6. Explore Common Interests.

Couples thrive when they share similar interests. That doesn't necessarily mean each partner will enjoy every activity but it opens up the opportunity for greater sharing and compromise. Doing things separately is not bad but common interests are important to healthy marriages. A common interest may be cooking or eating new foods together, going for walks or playing cards. The goal is to have something outside of your family that you both enjoy.

7. Create a Spiritual Connection.

Many couples grow closer when they share some form of spiritual connection. This can be done in many different ways. For example it may be achieved through an affiliation with a church, synagogue or mosque, through meditation or by simply spending time in nature or intimate conversation.

8. Improve Your Communication Skills.

The ability to talk and listen to each other is one key to a healthy marriage. You should never assume your partner knows what you are thinking or feeling. Tell your spouse what is going on—and as a spouse, know when to simply listen. Learning to really hear your partner is a skill that may require practice. There are many resources available like books, marriage education workshops and online courses. All of these options can help couples learn how to communicate more effectively. Tell your spouse what is going on - and as a spouse, know when to simply listen.

9. Forgive Each Other.

If he or she hasn't already, your partner is going to do something that hurts, frustrates or upsets you. Guess what, you are going to do the same thing! Sometimes it might even be on purpose after an argument or misunderstanding. Forgiveness is a tricky but important virtue in a marriage especially since no one is perfect. Try to allow your partner some room to make a few mistakes because you will also make some of your own. When you make a mistake, act quickly to apologize and fix problems. Doing so will help to encourage forgiveness and strengthen your marriage.

10. Look for the Best in Each Other.

When you met your partner, you fell in love with some of his or her wonderful qualities. Over time however, your view of those qualities may have changed. For example, he may have been really good at saving money when you met. Now you just think he's cheap! Give each other the benefit of the doubt and create a list of all the things you love about your partner. It will help you to fall in love all over again!

Thank you to David Jones, a Certified Family Life Educator and author of a variety of relationship tools for fathers, for contributing to this tip sheet.