

7 Marriage Tips for Lifelong Lasting Love

Believe your marriage will thrive, and it will.

By Sheila Weber

Do you remember how you felt when you first met "the one"? It was likely an exciting time as you prepared to embark on a lifetime of love with your soulmate. All too often, however, that love that feels so all-consuming in the early stages can go cold as the years pass. To keep that love from diminishing, couples need to be intentional about building and developing their relationship.

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It won't happen by accident, marriages like any good relationship require work. But the effort required will be far outweighed by the benefits to creating a marriage that is built to last.

Some key skills and principles will help fan the flame of your romance and keep your marriage strong. [National Marriage Week USA](#) (Feb. 7 to 14) exists to help strengthen marriages around the country and highlight the importance of marriage to our society. To celebrate National Marriage Week, here are 7 tips to help married or engaged couples start well and stay on solid footing for the long haul.

Manage Your Expectations

One hundred percent of marriages will experience disagreement - recognize that conflict is completely normal. While it is

unhealthy to live in a pattern of hostility, don't think that unexpected difficulty or conflict means you should start looking for the exit ramp. Find someone to help you navigate the issues together and work on communicating effectively to resolve problems that arise. Marriage is life's greatest tool for personal growth and maturity, and great marriages are built by working through those conflicts that produce growth.

Communicate Well

Communication is obviously the key to any great relationship. There are some important principles to remember as you seek to communicate well with your spouse. First, make sure you are really listening to one another. We don't really "hear" what another person is saying because we either react defensively or think only of what we want to say in response. Let your spouse know that you have heard them and understood their feelings. Secondly, learn how to wisely make your deepest needs known. Certainly do not bury your feelings, but learn to recognize and express what are really important issues and what are more minor. Thirdly, avoid saying "You always..." or "You never..." Learn to express how actions make you feel ("When you do Y, it makes me feel Z"). Ask directly for forgiveness ("Will you forgive

me?"), and respond with forgiveness ("Yes, I forgive you"). Holding hands when you talk helps break a cycle of anger. Finally, pray together - research has shown that couples who pray privately and regularly together have vastly more successful marriages.

Intimacy is Key

Keep the sexual part of your marriage alive. Don't take your partner's fidelity for granted. Even if there are times of understandable sexual slow down, (raising children can cause exhaustion, aging brings changes in capacity), stay determined not to let these seasons bring intimacy to a halt. Unavoidable seasons of abstinence should not be used to create guilt or foster bitterness, but rather lead to a mutual determination that even in stressful times you will not let weeks pass without sex. Allowing intimacy to fade puts your relationship in the "friend" zone, and that can be a challenge to work your way out of (but you can and must). No matter what, stay faithful.

No "D" Word

Divorce should not be a part of your relationship vocabulary. If divorce is even subconsciously an option, there will almost certainly come a time when you want to use it. Marriage functions best when it is viewed as a covenant and not consumer relationship-meaning it is a lifelong vow, not something

disposable if your needs are not met. When divorce is taken off the table, it does not give you free rein to do whatever you please, but it should motivate couples to make the relationship as good as it can be. Removing the option of divorce can bring security to the relationship and a deeper motivation to make the relationship as happy and rewarding as it can be.

Marriage functions best when it is viewed as a covenant

Keep Dating

It may seem you have plenty of together time when you plo p in front of the TV every night, but a strong marriage is also about quality time. Go out for dinner, take in a movie, go for a walk. Find something you might like in common-cross country skiing, book clubs, ballroom dance classes, or church study groups. Have regular sit-down dinners with soothing music and candles. Talk about your day, current events or personal challenges. Make plans to do something fun--whether it's ping pong, visiting a museum, biking, going to theater, playing games, or making a picnic.

Learn the Distinctions Between Love and Respect

Of course, men and women need both love and respect, but research shows the hierarchy of deepest need is different. Women have a greater need to feel loved. Men have a greater need to feel respected. Credit is due to Dr. Emerson Eggerichs and his best-selling book, "Love and Respect," where he explains that without love, she reacts to him without respect; without respect he reacts without love towards her, and the crazy cycle starts spinning out of control. Jump off that "crazy cycle," by meeting your spouse's greatest emotional need.

Begin with the End in Mind

It is hard to imagine when you are young, but one day you will be old and potentially lonely. Your kids will have their own lives. If you carefully tend to your marriage, there will be the succor of companionship with someone who has been a witness to most of your entire life. Research shows that married people have longer lives, better health, more personal happiness, and having both parents in the same home provides by far the best environment for raising children. Keep those long term goals in mind.

There are countless stories of folks who worked through the seemingly impossible middle years, and came out on the other side of comfort and companionship in old age. Plus, the best way for the average person to build financial security for old age is to stay married.

Believe in Your Marriage

No one starts at marriage believing it will fail. There is no need to wallow in past regrets, except to learn for the future and aim to improve and mature. People can and do grow and change. With commitment and care, a person or couple-- whatever their current state-- can realize their deepest hopes for lifelong lasting love. Marriage is worth it.

Yours for strengthening marriage,
Sheila Weber, executive director
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www.NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org

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