

How To Strengthen Your Marriage as You Grow Older

By Amy Kennedy

Studies of happily married couples have shown that making marriage a priority is one of the best ways to assure long-term success. Every marriage has its ups and downs, but there are proven ways to ensure that you get past the bad times and learn to appreciate the good.

One of the reasons many couples renew their marriage vows after many years together is to assure each other and the world that they are committed to making the marriage last. If one partner is unsure about the other's commitment, insecurity can lead to resentment and disappointment.

Couples who have been together for many years have a tendency to take each other for granted. Many psychologists advise finding something positive to say aloud about your spouse each day. Honest communication seems to be one of the keys to maintaining a strong marriage. Constant criticism, lies, contempt, jealousy, and defensiveness can slowly eat away at your relationship.

Sometimes older couples have a difficult time reconnecting during the retirement years. While many couples welcome the chance to spend more time together, others tend to get on each other's nerves. Make an effort to find new interests you can enjoy together such as traveling to new places, playing golf, or learning how to refinish furniture. Don't feel that you have to spend every hour of the day together. Spending some time apart seeing friends or pursuing separate hobbies will give you more to talk about when you are together.

Some wives complain that their husbands don't listen to them when they talk. The problem is men tend to interpret phrases like, "Honey, we need to talk," with a sense of dread. His first reaction is "Oh, no! What have I done wrong now?" You will have a better chance of having a good discussion if you approach your partner at a time when he isn't distracted watching sports or doing some chore around the house. Wait until he is relaxed and in a more receptive mood to talk about serious topics.

Many women become resentful when their spouses don't help out enough around the house. Rather than letting resentment simmer, it's a good idea to speak up and ask for help. Men aren't mind readers and most will gladly do more chores if you ask them in a nice way and tell them specifically what needs to be done. A man who receives compliments on a task he has completed, is more likely to offer to do more.

Some people tend to be control freaks and criticize every little task. Hammered with negativity day after day, it's no surprise that some spouses give up and stop trying. If your husband offers to fold the laundry, let him do it his way and thank him for the effort instead of criticizing him for folding the sheets the wrong way.

If one spouse continues to work after the other retires, don't expect the retiree to take on all of the household chores. Divide responsibilities and allow the retiree the freedom to spend some time doing what he or she chooses.

Your marriage will be happier if you just accept each other's flaws rather than constantly trying to change one another. Sure, your husband may slurp his soup, or your wife may spend too much time talking on the phone. Think about why you fell in love with him or her in the first place and all of the positive attributes that won you over. If he or she has changed so much over the years that you feel you are living with a different person, talk about your concerns in an uncritical way.

There will always be times when you disagree about something. Try to keep the debate about the subject at hand and don't drag the past into the argument. You can debate an issue with mutual respect for differing opinions. Find a way to resolve the issue without hurting each other's feelings.

Don't allow yourselves to get into a rut. Make a pact with your spouse to explore new activities. Volunteer some time to a worthy cause, sign up for an adult education class, or plan a vacation. Take a spontaneous weekend getaway, redecorate your bedroom, or go out dancing just for the fun of it. The more you have fun together and make each other laugh, the stronger your bond will become.

Dedicate some time each day to making your partner happy. It could be giving him or her a backrub, cooking a special dinner, or bringing home a surprise gift. Holding hands, hugging, and kissing isn't just for 20-somethings. Showing your partner with your words and actions that you cherish the time you have together is the most important thing you can do to strengthen your marriage.