

5 Steps to a Healthy Marriage

We all know that it takes effort to maintain our health. We have to eat good food, exercise, try to limit stress. The same is true for our marriages. It's easy to take our partners for granted but doing so too easily leads to stagnation. Worse, we start to feel disconnected from the person we once felt closer to than anyone in the world. How does that happen, and more important, how can we prevent it?

The good news is that the research is clear: simple actions and habits make an enormous difference. Here are some of the most effective:

- 1) **Have a Yes mindset.** This means cultivating an attitude of welcoming, curiosity, and humor with your spouse. Early in our relationship my husband and I agreed that “no idea is too crazy to consider.” That's been a tag line for us ever since. We use it to remind each other to keep our minds open. After all, we're on the same team. We both want what's best for our relationship.
- 2) **Laugh together.** Having fun and sharing joy are the glue that holds the relationship together. These moments are what make us feel close. If you think about it, that's why we get married to begin with— to enjoy each other.
- 3) **Fight fair.** Conflict is inevitable in any relationship, but it doesn't have to be hurtful. Don't hit below the belt. Making provocative statements and comments, using sarcasm, or being intentionally unkind make it so much harder to resolve disputes. Worse, those behaviors can leave scars which linger and create distance. Loving makes us vulnerable to each other; it comes with the territory. We know what to say that will hurt— a lot. And those hurts can last too long. It's not worth it.
- 4) **Practice patience and persistence.** Instead of lashing out to get your spouse's attention, find a good time to raise your concerns respectfully. Give your spouse time to consider what you've said and be prepared to come back to it. Be gentle when you revisit the subject. It's probably a sensitive area, and so requires the greatest of care. Remember, you love each other, even if that's hard to feel in the moment.
- 5) **Get help. Don't wait.** If following these steps feels out of reach, seek professional support. No one wins any prizes for doing this without assistance. This is your marriage we're talking about. It matters. Few things in life matter more. Rarely in my practice have I met with a couple who couldn't benefit from some professional help; more often I meet with couples who may have waited too long. A good couples therapist will work with both of you, helping you interrupt patterns of conflict so you can feel close again.

Interested in scheduling an appointment? Contact me at 571-269-3108 or email me. I look forward to helping you and your spouse strengthen your marriage.