

Keep your marriage alive

If you find your marriage stagnating, or find that you are too tired to keep the spark of romance alive, you need help. Marriage requires effort to make it vibrant and enduring. Sometimes it means listening to your spouse when you'd rather go to sleep, hanging up the wet towel once again, and even taking out the garbage. Putting your partner first through little daily acts of kindness, or mounting a concerted effort to replace negative habit patterns with positive ones, will help you treasure your marriage.

How to keep your marriage alive:

Choose to really listen to your spouse. Don't just think about how you are going to respond.

Look for ways to serve, not be served. Let your spouse choose the movie, have the favorite section of the newspaper, or choose the menu for dinner. Be ready to say, *Let's do it your way.*

Become friends for life. Men value doing things together, while women value talking together. Foster quality time together that combines activity and conversation. Take a cooking class together, walk around the soccer field while your children practice soccer, or run errands together.

Go on a date. Dates are really just scheduled time together. Time is more valuable to a marriage than money. Create time in your day by turning off the TV for 24 hours, or getting up a half hour earlier each day to talk and pray. Let your children know that you need time for just the two of you.

Be silly. Write each other notes or poems, buy little gifts, call just to say *I love you*, give lots of hugs and kisses, and consistently encourage one another.

Make a prayer date. Prayer is a unique resource for couples that share a common faith or religious practice.

Adopt a daily sharing time. Set a *regular time* each day when the two of you can spend 10 minutes and talk about these four questions: 1. How are you feeling since we last talked? 2. Is anything troubling you? 3. What plans do you have for the next 24 hours? 4. Are you aware of any issue in our relationship that we need to talk about? Ideally, this would be the first thing in the morning, before you start your day.

Do for others. Help build a house for Habitat for Humanity, mow the lawn in your neighborhood, adopt a needy family, be an aunt and uncle for a child in a single-parent home, help an elderly neighbor with special needs.

Develop the encouragement habit. Be ready to give support and comfort during the critical and the

mundane times of life. Decide to think positively. Decide that you are in the marriage for the long haul and that it is going to be an adventure and a delight.

Claudia and David Arp, MSW

How to Have a Happy Marriage When You're Busy Parenting

From [Elizabeth Pantley](#)

Is your marriage everything you ever hoped it could be? Or has it been pushed down your list of priorities since having children? Let's face it, parenthood is a full-time job, and it dramatically changes your marriage relationship. But marriage is the foundation upon which your entire family is structured. If your marriage is strong, your whole family will be strong; your life will be more peaceful, you'll be a better parent, and you'll, quite simply, have more fun in your life.

Make a commitment

To create or maintain a strong marriage you will have to take the first critical step: You must be willing to put time, effort and thought into nurturing your marriage. The ideas that follow will help you follow through on this commitment and will put new life and meaning into your marriage. A wonderful thing may happen. You may fall in love with your spouse all over again. In addition, your children will greatly benefit from your stronger relationship. Children feel secure when they know that Mom and Dad love each other -- particularly in today's world, where 50 percent of marriages end in divorce; half of your children's friends have gone, or are going through a divorce; or maybe it's your kids who have survived a divorce and are now living in a new family arrangement. Your children need daily proof that their family life is stable and predictable. When you make a commitment to your marriage, your children will feel the difference. No, they won't suffer from neglect! They'll blossom when your marriage -- and their home life -- is thriving.

The surprising secret is that this doesn't have to take any extra time in your already busy schedule. Just a change in attitude plus a committed focus can yield a stronger, happier marriage.

So here's my challenge to you. Read the following suggestions and apply them in your marriage for the next 30 days. Then evaluate your marriage. I guarantee you'll both be happier.

Look for the good, overlook the bad

You married this person for many good reasons. Your partner has many wonderful qualities. Your first step in adding sizzle to your marriage is to look for the good and overlook the bad.

Make it a habit to ignore the little annoying things -- dirty socks on the floor, a day-old coffee cup on the counter, worn out flannel pajamas, an inelegant burp at the dinner table -- and choose instead to search for those things that make you smile: the way he rolls on the floor with the baby; the fact that she made your favorite cookies, the peace in knowing someone so well that you can wear your worn out flannels or burp at the table.

Give two compliments every day

Now that you've committed to seeing the good in your partner, it's time to say it! This is a golden key to your mate's heart. Our world is so full of negative input, and we so rarely get compliments from other people. When we do get a compliment, it not only makes us feel great about ourselves, it actually makes us feel great about the person giving the compliment! Think about it! When your honey says, "You're the best. I'm so glad I married you." It not only makes you feel loved, it makes you feel more loving.

Compliments are easy to give, take such a little bit of time, and they're free. Compliments are powerful; you just have to make the effort to say them. Anything works: "Dinner was great, you make my favorite sauce." "Thanks for picking up the cleaning. It was very thoughtful, you saved me a trip." "That sweater looks great on you."

Play nice

That may sound funny to you, but think about it. How many times do you see -- or experience -- partners treating each other in impolite, harsh ways that they'd never even treat a friend? Sometimes we take our partners for granted and unintentionally display rudeness. As the saying goes, if you have a choice between being right and being nice, just choose to be nice. Or to put this in the wise words of Bambi's friend Thumper, the bunny rabbit -- "If you can't say somethin' nice don't say nothin' at all."

Pick your battles

How often have you heard this advice about parenting? This is great advice for child-rearing -- and it's great advice to follow in your marriage as well. In any human relationship there will be disagreement and conflict. The key here is to decide which issues are worth pursuing and which are better off ignored. By doing this, you'll find much less negative energy between you.

From now on, anytime you feel annoyed, take a minute to examine the issue at hand, and ask yourself a few questions. "How important is this?" "Is this worth picking a fight over?" "What would be the benefit of choosing this battle versus letting it go?"

The 60 second cuddle

You can often identify a newly married couple just by how much they touch each other -- holding hands, sitting close, touching arms, kissing -- just as you can spot an "oldly-married" couple by how little they touch. Mothers, in particular, often have less need for physical contact with their partners because their babies and young children provide so much opportunity for touch and cuddling that day's end finds them "touched fulfilled."

So here's a simple reminder: make the effort to touch your spouse more often. A pat, a hug, a kiss, a shoulder massage -- the good feeling it produces for both of you far outweighs the effort.

Here's the deal: Whenever you've been apart make it a rule that you will take just 60 seconds to cuddle, touch and connect. This can be addictive! If you follow this advice soon you'll find yourselves touching each other more often, and increasing the romantic aspect of your relationship.

Spend more time talking to and listening to your partner.

I don't mean, "Remember to pick up Jimmy's soccer uniform." Or "I have a PTA meeting tonight." Rather, get into the habit of sharing your thoughts about what you read in the paper, what you watch on TV, your hopes, your dreams, your concerns. Take a special interest in those things that your spouse is interested in and ask questions. And then listen to the answers.

Spend time with your spouse

It can be very difficult for your marriage to thrive if you spend all your time being "Mommy" and "Daddy." You need to spend regular time as "Husband" and "Wife." This doesn't mean you have to take a two-week vacation in Hawaii. (Although that might be nice, too!) Just take small daily snippets of time when you can enjoy uninterrupted conversation, or even just quiet companionship, without a baby on your hip, a child tugging your shirtsleeve or a teenager begging for the car keys. A daily morning walk around the block or a shared cup of tea after all the children are in bed might work wonders to re-connect you to each other. And yes, it's quite fine to talk about your children when you're spending your time together, because, after all, your children are one of the most important connections you have in your relationship.

When you and your spouse regularly connect in a way that nurtures your relationship, you may find a renewed love between you, as well as a refreshed vigor that will allow you to be a better, more loving parent. You owe it to yourself -- and to your kids -- to nurture your relationship.

So take my challenge and use these ideas for the next 30 days. And watch your marriage take on a whole new glow.

Valentine's Day Message: Why Marriages Last

Very frequently, I am asked by individuals, couples, even the press, "what makes a marriage last?" I chuckle a little because the answer is so simple (simple is NOT the same as easy).

But before I tell you the secret, I am aware that we are quickly approaching Valentine's Day. At least in the United States, this holiday has become a retailer's dream (and many an individual's nightmare!). We have woven this whole ideal of romance into the fabric of this day.

The secret to a lasting marriage? Two people who choose to stay married. That's it. Marriages that last don't necessarily have less conflict, more sex, more money, less anger, or anything else we assume. Marriages that last do so because each person makes a daily decision to stay married.

The commitment to the marriage, then, is the cake! From that commitment, a couple decides to work through difficulties. And since there is a commitment, a couple realizes they must come to some solution to the problems that arise in any marriage. Their solution just does not involve dissolution of the marriage!

When there is commitment, the cake, then romance really is the icing on the cake! It is not that romance and romantic feelings are unimportant. They just should not lead us into believing that their absence means a marriage is over.

Every marriage, successful or not, has times when passion wanes. That is the natural pattern of relationships. But those that share a commitment end up carrying the day when the passion is not the glue of the relationship.

Have a wonderful Valentine's Day, and commit to commitment in your marriage!

Lee H. Baucom, Ph.D.