

6 Commandments of a Successful Marriage

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Whether you just got engaged, newly-married, or are thinking about taking the plunge in the near future, there's much to learn—and love—about this exciting time and the journey you're about to embark on. First things first: Marriage is beautiful, but it's hard work. It requires both partners to give 150 percent as often as they possibly can in order to maintain harmony. When you sit down to write your wedding vows, truly think about what it is you want—and need—out of your relationship and take cues from these intimacy experts who share the commandments they say are key to a happy and healthy marriage.

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Remember that marriage is hard work.

Anyone who's been a serious, long-term relationship knows this well, but few things prepare you for the challenges that life sets upon you during the course of a marriage. It's important to know that, yes, there will be wonderful times, but there will also be difficult and even painful times, too. As Kathy McMahon, psychologist and president of Couples Therapy Inc., puts it, "You gotta be in it to win it." "The worst thing a couple can do is to be committed 'for now' or 'until something better comes along,'" she says. "When couples engage in 'comparison of the alternatives' they create an unstable bond, and it is the beginning of marital dissolution." Remember that stable marriages are in it for the long-haul.

Understand each other's role in the marriage.

Of course, we're not talking about gender roles—thankfully we as a society has graduated from that archaic institution to some degree. But, Lisa Bahar, L.M.F.T. and L.P.C.C., of Marriage and Family Therapy, Inc., points out the importance of understanding each other's expectations for the roles each of you will play in your marriage. "Many times, couples will have an idea of what they feel their spouse 'should' be doing or being to them, and the spouse has no idea of what those role assumptions are." This is where communication makes all the difference, which leads us to our next point.

Communicate openly and without judgment.

Communication in a relationship is key! Rachel Needle, Psy.D., a licensed clinical psychologist, urges married couples to communicate in a healthy way even regarding issues that they don't agree on. "Listen to your partner and do your best to understand their feelings," she says. "Basic communication with your partner on a daily basis is important to continue connecting on an emotional level." In addition, she adds the importance of respecting and listening to your partner rather than criticizing, attacking, or stonewalling.

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Show appreciation in words and deeds.

After years together, it's easy to take each other for granted—it's human nature. But relationship experts urge couples to try their hardest to reinforce a sense of appreciation for their partner on a daily basis. Whether it's by doling out regular compliments or surprising them with thoughtful gestures, changing the tune of your words and conversations towards positive rather than negative can go a long way, according to Paulette Sherman, Psy.D., psychologist, relationship expert and author of *Dating from the Inside Out*.

Don't ever give up on your sex life.

Many couples who've been together, and especially those with kids, make jokes about how non-existent their sex life can be. Don't fall into this trap. No matter how old you are or how long you've been together, sex is the glue that holds your relationship together. Bahar recommends continuing to work on and improve your sex life. "Be willing to strengthen intimacy with your partner and give your spouse some amazing sex that only you two share," she says. "Marriage is intimacy and 'married sex' should, and can, be the best sex."

Prioritize your partner and plan time together.

This starts with consistently making time for each other—no matter how crazy and hectic your schedules may get. "Connection doesn't just happen or remain, so it's important to make a point of connecting each day," says Dr. Needle, who recommends setting aside 10 minutes each day to talk and spend undistracted time together. "This time is for you to connect with your partner and talk about deeper topics or to continue to get to know your partner," she adds. "This allows you and your partner to reconnect, enjoy being with each other and focus your attention just on each other."