

TEN TIPS FOR A GREAT MARRIAGE

Harville Hendrix, Ph. D. and Helen LaKelly Hunt, Ph. D.

Harville Hendrix and his wife Helen LaKelly Hunt have distilled 10 simple steps to help couples on the journey to the relationship of their dreams. Practice them and they will take you on a journey to a wondrous love.

Zero Negativity! All criticism, even "constructive criticism" not only fails to get us what we want but it's a form of self-abuse since the traits we criticize in our partners are often projections of unpleasant truths about ourselves.

Instead of criticizing, explore why a particular trait in your partner bothers you so much. For example, perhaps him wanting "too much sex" is really about your own sexual inhibitions.

Acknowledge and Accept your partner's "otherness." We all understand - at least on the surface - that our partner is a separate human being. But deep down we often see and treat him/her as extensions of ourselves. Practice seeing and accepting your partner as someone with different perceptions, feelings and experiences that are equally valid as your own.

Close all exits Identify activities that you engage in that become an escape from the day-to-day intimacy of the partnership (any activity, thought, or feeling that decreases or avoids emotional or physical involvement with your partner). Exits can be functional (car-pooling, work, taking care of kids), motivated (watching TV, reading, sports, hobbies), and/or catastrophic (emotional or physical affairs, addictions). All exits, however, deplete the emotional reserves in a partnership.

Use Sender Responsibility when you talk. That means using "I" language, only. Avoid the word "you" unless you mean something positive. Own your experience by saying how you feel rather than blaming your partner. For example, "I feel bad when ..." rather than "You make me feel bad when ..."

Give and receive unconditionally Offer gifts with no strings attached. The unconscious receives only unconditional gifts. It does not accept a "you rub my back and I'll rub yours" attitude. Similarly, learn to accept gifts. Often we feel unworthy of receiving compliments from our partner and reject it. Instead of saying, "You don't really mean that I'm beautiful/handsome/smart," say "Thank you. It means a lot to me that you feel that way."

Increase your pleasure quotient. Make a list of high-energy activities you would like to do for fun with your partner. Write down as many ideas as you can think of that you are currently doing, that you did in the early stages of your relationship and activities you would like to engage in. They should be activities that create deep laughter and/or that involve physical movement and deep breathing. Make a commitment to enjoy a playful activity at least once a week.

Practice Positive Flooding. Flood your partner with compliments. On a regular basis, tell your partner what you love about him or her. Talk about his/her physical characteristics ("I love your eyes"), character traits ("You are really intelligent"), behaviors ("I love that you make coffee every morning for me"), global affirmations ("I am so happy I married you"). When you have exhausted what you feel, ask them how they would like to be flooded and include those in your daily affirmations of your partner.

Learn How to Have a Safe Conversation. The most important and challenging step to becoming a conscious partner is learning how to talk so your conversations will be safe rather than negative. Imago Dialogue uses three basic techniques - mirroring, validating, and empathizing - to fortify the connection between partners. Check to make sure you understand what your partner is saying (mirroring), indicate that what your partner says makes sense, even if you don't agree (validating) and recognize the partner's feelings when s/he tells a story or expresses an opinion (empathizing).

Replace all your monologues with dialogue and practice having "safe conversations" until you are perfect. Dialogue will not only improve the way you communicate with your partner, it will improve the relations with your children, and with everyone you come in contact with. Practice dialogue until it becomes a habit and a way of life, until you become dialogical.

Change your nightmare into your dream marriage. A committed partnership can become someone's worst nightmare, but through intentionality and commitment, a marriage can also be a spiritual journey. If you married because you chose to marry, you are with the right person - especially if you feel incompatible. See your partner as the person who holds the blueprint for your journey to wholeness.