



WHAT *Happily* MARRIED COUPLES DO

Ten ideas for enriching your marital relationship.

HAVING SPENT MY CAREER HELPING COUPLES STRENGTHEN THEIR MARRIAGES, I have learned that couples who are experiencing marital troubles often face a twofold problem: they have lost the Spirit of the Lord in their relationship because of contention, and they are not doing the kinds of activities that would bring them closer to each other. Happily married couples do some specific types of things to keep their marriages vibrant and meaningful for both partners. The following ideas may help you and your spouse evaluate and enrich your relationship.

Have positive conversations. Sharing experiences and feelings in depth with each other is the solution to most marital problems. Couples need time just to talk about marriage, family, career, Church callings, children, the ward, the neighborhood, goals, and many other subjects.



You both must feel comfortable exchanging your thoughts and feelings without fear of criticism, feeling inferior, or being smothered.

Show affection. We all need to feel loved, cherished, needed, and wanted. Physical embraces, hugging, kissing, holding hands, caring for each other, and

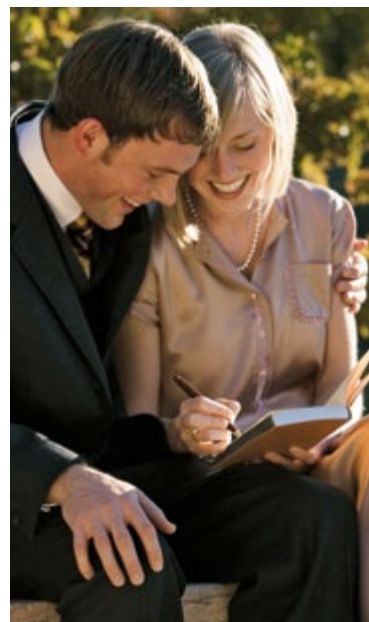
seeing to each other's needs can help spouses show and feel affection that is crucial for married couples.

Remember that you are each other's therapists.

No counselor or outsider knows the two of you better than the two of you do! You know each other's likes and dislikes and strengths and weaknesses. A good therapist listens attentively; provides new perspectives on situations; compliments on progress; is patient, kind, and nonjudgmental; and helps us think things through in ways that allow a better solution. Superficiality dooms relationships because such a shallow level of communication does not create positive emotions and feelings between spouses.



Be humble and cultivate Christlike attributes. When you have a disagreement, realize that both of you have the responsibility to resolve it. Sometimes seeing a situation from the other person's point of view is difficult. However, with humility and kindness, you can work together to solve problems in a manner that accommodates both of your needs.



Date frequently. You and your spouse need time together to renew your relationship. New perspectives come with time away from the mundane. That means dating is essential. If you have children but few resources, look for creative ways to go on dates. For example, you might ask in-laws or neighbors to watch your children while you two get away for a mini vacation. You might exchange childcare with other couples for different date nights. Above all, recognize that a babysitter is cheaper than a divorce.

Enrich your intimacy. Intimate relations were designed by the Lord as a sacred opportunity to renew marriage covenants, provide therapy, and keep you two in love. It is essential in a stressful world that the two of you enjoy your physical and emotional relationship. Intimacy is not to be abused. This is your spouse, companion, confidant, lover, and therapist all rolled into one, and you two should enjoy the privilege of sharing your masculine and feminine traits in a wholesome way. Of course, the relationship must be healthy if this part of the marriage is to be cherished. Intimacy should not be used as a punishment or a weapon to hurt the other spouse or reward "good behavior." It is also important not to solicit behavior that is offensive to your spouse. Rather, loving, kind interactions facilitate greater unity.



QUICK TO FORGIVE

“Marriage partners must be quick to forgive. If we will sue for peace, taking the initiative in settling differences—if we forgive and forget with all our hearts . . . if we forgive all real or fancied offenses before we ask forgiveness for our own sins—if we pay our own debts, large or small, before we press our debtors—if we manage to clear our own eyes of the blinding beams before we magnify the motes in the eyes of others—what a glorious world this would be! Divorce would be reduced to a minimum; courts would be freed from disgusting routines; family life would be heavenly; the building of the kingdom would go forward at an accelerated pace; and the peace which passeth understanding would bring to us all a joy and happiness which has hardly ‘entered into the heart of man.’”

The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 242.



Spend time with children and grandchildren. Be kind to children. A wife will have a hard time feeling affection toward her husband if he mistreats or is unkind to their children. The reverse is also true. Husbands and wives who take an active, positive role in parenting engender love from their spouses.

Seek feedback and help each other. From an eternal perspective, we are all new at marriage and have a lot to learn. A humble approach toward each other allows husbands and wives to learn from one another. Seeking feedback from your spouse about how you are doing and how you could improve might be just what you need to be a better spouse and parent. Remember that insisting on being right is not as important as being united and having the Spirit.

Eliminate anger. Anger is a great destroyer of marriages and families. Displays of temper are not of God but of the devil (see 3 Nephi 11:29–30). If you become angry when something upsets you, your family members may be hesitant to share their deepest thoughts and feelings with you.

Be sensitive to each other’s stress levels. Mothers generally make sure children get to school and other events, fix

food, nurse everyone, and serve as the family psychologist—in many cases, for most of the day. Working spouses often come home tired and drained. This can make emotions extra raw. Both spouses will benefit from seeking to make homecoming a positive experience for each other and the children. That may mean leaving frustrations at the door on the way into the home, or it might mean adjusting daily routines from time to time to accommodate one or both spouses. The key is to seek to support each other through good times as well as those difficult moments.

In addition, here are a few more specific things all couples can do that, through consistent effort, will bring happiness into the home and invite the Spirit into your lives:

1. Kneel together in prayer morning and night to call down the powers of heaven to bless your marriage.
2. Study the scriptures individually and as a family.
3. Attend the temple together regularly.

My all-time favorite short piece of counsel on marriage came from President Gordon B. Hinckley, who shared this important key to a great marriage: “A happy marriage is not so much a matter of romance as it is an anxious concern for the comfort and well-being of one’s companion.”¹ If you want a happy marriage, do what happily married couples do. ■

NOTE

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “What God Hath Joined Together,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 73.