

Essentials for Creating a Fulfilling and Lasting Marriage

By Jack H. Grossman, Ph.D.

Sometime in the next few months you will exchange marriage vows with the person you have chosen to be your lifelong partner. That day for which you have been preparing is special, as it should be. But after the wedding and honeymoon is when your marriage actually begins. There are no magical formulas for creating a healthy, happy and lasting marriage, but the following principles when followed can help you and your husband-to-be build a good life together.

- 1. Get to know each other's inner world – your likes and dislikes, your needs and desires, your vulnerabilities, your values and whatever other qualities define each of you as the person you are.** Learning what each of you wants from life and needs from each other will increase your respective sensitivities so both of you can respond lovingly to each other's unique and complex world.
- 2. Be sensitive to each other's feelings, and be kind to each other.** Don't undermine your partner's feelings by saying things like, "You shouldn't feel that way." Or, "You're making a big deal out of nothing." Realize that the things that are important to you as individuals may not be to your partner. That doesn't mean that either of your feelings is wrong. Feelings are neither right nor wrong, they just are. Why? Because you and your partner each experience life in your own emotional way. Therefore, it is inappropriate, and even insulting, to judge your partner's feelings. Doing so is not being kind.
- 3. Take time to make each other feel special.** If you want to be each other's best friend, you must discover what actions will make your partner feel like that. Those actions will change with time, but what you'll discover in your search is worth the effort you put into it.
- 4. Listen to each other's emotions as well as words.** As you probably know, emotions are conveyed through your tone of voice, as well as your choice of words. Frequently those emotions are far more powerful than the words your partner uses to convey thoughts and feelings. Listen carefully to those emotions and respond appropriately to them. Your response may say, in effect, "I hear what you're really saying and care deeply about your feelings." Simply saying nothing may convey that attitude. Or, some sensitive comment will also convey it.
- 5. Respect each other's differences.** You are different people and, therefore, have different likes and dislikes. That's O.K. Don't try to remake your partner so he or she is the same as you. Enjoy each other's differences.

6. **Avoid being defensive and placing each other on the defensive.** Defensiveness is like weeds. Just as weeds rob gardens of valuable nutrients and prevent plants from blooming, defensiveness is a barrier to meaningful discussion. Placing blame, finding fault and making excuses are common defensive behaviors. One way to determine if you or your partner is in a defensive mode is for each of you to ask yourself, “Will this action or reaction get me one step closer to what we want to accomplish?” If the answer is “no,” you can be sure one or both of you are acting defensively. The alternative is to decide specifically what you want to accomplish and pursue that objective.
7. **Resolve problems before parting for the day or going to sleep at night.** Problems, particularly those that cause either of you to be angry at each other, have a tendency to fester and grow out of proportion to the importance of the issues involved. Resolving such problems before that happens is beneficial to the health of your marriage.
8. **Neither of you is perfect. Being human, both of you have weaknesses. When either of you displays a weakness which offends your partner, you have a choice: one, you can make a big deal out of it by focusing on your partner’s misdemeanor or two, you can think of all the good qualities he or she possesses and the things he or she does that please you.** If you took the latter position, your positive feelings would overshadow the negative ones. Before you know it, whatever anger you would have experienced would be overshadowed by your positive feelings. Try it
9. **Never take each other for granted.** Words like please, thank you and I’d appreciate it if you would --- go a long way to demonstrate that you don’t take your partner for granted. So does the attitude that nothing is really coming to you and your partner. Rather, you have to earn what you receive from each other through your kind and loving actions.
10. Finally, treat each other as you would like to be treated: as a cherished friend and lover.

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These Essentials were excerpted from the recently published book, *After the Wedding—A Postnuptial Recipe for Creating a Healthy, Happy Marriage*. It teaches the principles I’ve briefly discussed through a variety of simple exercises. In so doing, couples can create the kind of marriage they envisioned before they exchanged their marriage vows.

Although it is currently not in bookstores the book can be ordered by calling: **847/477-7566** or by downloading an order blank from our website: **www.managingothers.com**