

COUPLES WHO KEEP LOVE ALIVE

By Ginger E. Blume, Ph.D.

Once in a while you meet couples who, after years of marriage, still appear deeply in love with each other. What is their secret? Are they just lucky? Too often, psychology focuses on what is wrong with people, rather than what is right with them. Let's explore what keeps a long-term couple's relationship on solid footing. Perhaps, some couple's know a secret that you don't know.

Trustworthiness, dependability, responsibility, respect, and a sense of commitment are a great beginning for a list on how to make a marriage work. These key ingredients form a strong groundwork for a solid couple's relationship. Despite the Hollywood hype, without these basics in place, having great fun and/or terrific sex will not sustain an enduring or fulfilling relationship. For couples that lack a mature foundation to their relationship, adrenalin highs will eventually lose their edge and fade with time and familiarity. Without an exclusive, emotional, caring bond between two people, at least one of the partnership will likely search for the next exciting affair, once the thrill of their current relationship wears off. Adrenalin often attacks people, but it doesn't provide strong enough glue to sustain a lasting relationship. In essence, two types of relationships are doomed to fail: commitments without fun and fun without a commitment.

So can couple's have it all? I say, "yes," but with a warning that I'm not suggesting a pie in the sky approach. Realistically, all couples have disagreements and periods of ups and downs. But, if they keep an open channel of communication between them and resolve to manage their differences with mutual respect, they'll both feel positive about themselves, as well as their partner. If you've listened to Dr. Phil, you've also learned that couple's that express contempt toward each other, either verbally or non-verbally, have zero percent chance of saving their marriage.

In the first part of this article, I mentioned some behaviors that provide a foundation for each partner to feel cared about, safe, and emotionally secure. In addition to practicing these behaviors, couple's who remain in love for a lifetime oftentimes engage in some "extra flourishes." Let's examine the secret of couples who feel truly cherished by their partner.

Here is a partial list of things to do to make your partner feel truly treasured. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by committing to these every-day behaviors. Marriage, like any long-term investment, must be continually nurtured along the way. Realistically, you can't say, "I love you," to your spouse on your wedding day and then expect since you've said it once, you won't have to utter those words again!

1. Look your partner in the eyes when you're talking. Engage their spirit.
2. Remind them, at least weekly, how much you appreciate their good qualities.
3. Invest time in your partnership having fun together (i.e. dancing, going to the theater, golfing, camping, hiking, taking classes together, etc.).
4. Both verbally and behaviorally, let your partner know how lucky you feel to be with them. Provide an abundance of appreciation.
5. Do things on a weekly basis that makes your partner feel nurtured (i.e. Buy them that new soda they mentioned was advertised on TV; Call before arriving home to see if there is anything they might need you to pick up for

them; Leave a love note under their pillow; Offer to massage their tired feet; etc.).

All of these small behaviors, when done on a consistent basis, will make your spouse feel special and appreciated. Through the law of reciprocity, it is human nature that they will want to treat you with the same kindness.

Recently, I visited a childhood friend I hadn't seen in six years, who lived out-of-state. When I arrived at her home, she had stocked her refrigerator with my favorite foods, cut fresh flowers from her garden and placed them in the guest room, and arranged extra fluffy towels in the bathroom for me to use. Wow, did I feel special. I knew she had put thought into making my stay with her memorable and she wanted to show how much she cared for me. So often, people will put extra effort into showing their friends how much they care, yet they won't do the same thing for their lifelong partner. This is the key message I've been building toward.

Those long-term couple's who have that extra sparkle in their eyes when they see each other, who feel secure in their love, enjoy their time together and thank God that they have a soul mate in their lives, practice these extra "flourishes" constantly. It is a well-known fact that the biggest factor in your happiness as an adult will depend on your significant love relationship.

If you value something, it makes sense to spend time nurturing it. Relationships are a lot like plants. Yes, they can usually survive with the basics such as sunshine and rain, but have you ever noticed the big difference when you feed a plant a regular dose of fertilizer! That extra boost creates extra-ordinary results. If you want to treat your marriage like the most important investment you've ever made, I'd suggest you begin fertilizing your partner on a weekly basis!

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