

Secrets of a Satisfying Marriage

Margery D. Rosen, author of **Seven Secrets of a Happy Marriage**, a book based on her Ladies' Home Journal column Can this Marriage be Saved? has interviewed hundreds of couples whose marriages were in distress and appeared hopeless.

"The book is a compilation of columns over the years as well as information from social scientists to help couples have hope." said Ms. Rosen. "All of the stories are true. I actually interviewed husbands, wives and the therapist. Interestingly, the main topics for couples in the 1950s and 60s are the same struggles couples deal with today. While the specifics of the story change from month to month, the circumstances that can shake the foundation of a marriage remain the same."

When Ms Rosen posed the question, "Why do some marriages burn out and others burn on?" she found something very interesting.

"The phrase 'intentional commitment' comes up often, the conscious desire and choice to make a marriage last," said Ms. Rosen. "While commitment and acceptance don't get a lot of press and they're not the stuff of sound bites on the network news, it is clear that marriages are stronger when couples focus on what they like and appreciate about each other, rather than what irks them. Happy couples argue, get depressed, lose jobs, battle over disciplining the kids – but their sense of we-ness over me-ness allows them to encourage each other during the good times and empathize during the bad."

When the research was all said and done, Ms. Rosen found that the issues couples struggle with boil down to these seven topics: trust, communication, fighting fair, power struggles, money, sex and balancing parenthood. It is these topics that Ms. Rosen believes holds the secrets to a lasting marriage. Below is a taste of some of the wisdom imparted from couples that ended up making their marriage work under very difficult circumstances.

Trust – Trust is the cornerstone of a healthy, deeply satisfying marriage. In a trusting relationship, partners are, quite simply, honest with each other. Their words and actions are not shadowed by deceit; they don't sacrifice a partner's needs for their own or pursue their own goals at the expense of their mate's.

Communicate – Over and over again, communication problems are targeted as the number-one cause of marital strife. "We're just not communicating" is a common lament. In many cases, couples think they are communicating, but the messages aren't getting through. In this area of conflict more than any other, there are specific techniques and strategies for sharing ideas and feelings that couples can learn and

practice – often initiating dramatic changes in the way they relate.

Fight Fair – If two people are living together, they are bound to disagree. Numerous columns showed that it is possible to direct anger constructively to improve a marriage rather than destroy it. A key step is for each person to recognize that part he or she plays in provoking and sustaining the anger.

Defuse power struggles – Power struggles permeate every relationship. Being able to recognize marital power struggles is a key step in defusing them, but equally important is understanding why a partner is so desperate for total control. Ultimately, the only lasting way to defuse a power struggle is to learn to accept each other fully, without competing, criticizing, or blaming.

Be money smart - Surveys have singled out money matters as the number-one trigger for everything from the occasional marital skirmish to all-out war. Money is and always has been a symbol for power and control, for love, for security, as well as for self-esteem and accomplishment. Those couples who navigate best through the churning financial waters have made a conscious effort to chip away the emotional veneer surrounding money issues and instead talk openly about finances, what they need, what they want, how they can best attain these goals and how to live with the anxious uncertainty that they just may not.

Make Love – A couple's sex life is in one sense a barometer of their marriage. The stress of juggling work and family obligations can be so physically and emotionally exhausting that husbands and wives forget the importance of expressing love and tenderness not only outside the bedroom, but inside, too. Couples who have successfully kept their sex lives vital understand that the passionate, romantic love they felt in the beginning of their relationship gives way to a more enduring, but equally satisfying love.

Team Up – Most couples are unprepared for the enormous changes that come with the transition to parenthood. The very arrival of children and their can't-be-ignored demands often propels couples into a therapist's office. The Seven Secrets of a Happy Marriage found that a couple's relationship is their child's blueprint for intimacy. By watching how you and your spouse get along, kids learn about themselves and relationships.

"It takes courage to face marital problems head on," said Ms. Rosen. "Can this Marriage Be Saved? proves that both partners can transform their actions and reactions. That openness and ability to change brings them a giant step closer to where they both want to be."