

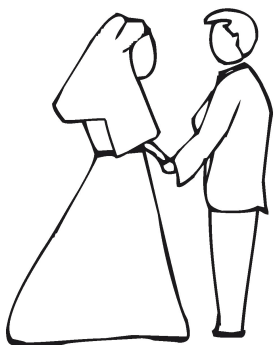
They Lived Happily Ever After: *How to Keep Your Marriage on Track*

Your wedding was a one-time event; however, marriage is an ongoing process. The individuals in a relationship, as well as the marriage itself, go through stages and have the potential for continuous growth. This growth requires trust, commitment, skills, caring, reciprocity, and effort. Strong, healthy marriages do not just happen by chance. Spouses in healthy marriages have chosen to make the effort to make them strong, healthy, and satisfying.

Habits of Happy Couples

All good marriages are not alike. However, researchers have found that husbands and wives in happy marriages are more likely to have certain characteristics than are those in less content relationships. These characteristics of happily married people include the following:

- ⊙ **People in vital marriages are giving people.** They meet their emotional needs by doing for others, and they do not keep score.
- ⊙ **They have a strong sense of commitment to their marriages.** They do not take their happiness for granted and are determined to make their marriages work.
- ⊙ **They are strong-minded.** They do not lose themselves in the relationship. Although they value their independence—the right to form their own opinions, make their own decisions, pursue their own goals—they make marital harmony a top priority.



- ⊙ **They have vigorous sexual drives.** Sex plays a central and profoundly important role in the marriage. Further, the quality of friendship between spouses largely determines the amount of passion, romance, and quality and quantity of sex in the relationship. This means that what happens outside of the bedroom largely affects what happens inside the bedroom.
- ⊙ **They like to talk.** Happily married people spend much time sharing thoughts about all sorts of subjects. They are open and direct, not manipulative.
- ⊙ **They have a positive outlook on life.** Faith that things will get better helps them cope with crises.
- ⊙ **They don't take the good things for granted.** They express appreciation and are generous with praise.
- ⊙ **They are deeply spiritual.** They have strong spiritual or religious convictions and commit themselves to a spiritual lifestyle, though they may not be affiliated with an organized church.
- ⊙ **They are sensitive to other people.** They recognize the needs of others, respect their differences, consider their feelings, and put themselves in the other person's shoes.
- ⊙ **They are willing to grow, change, and work hard at their marriages.** They know that a good relationship requires flexibility and effort to keep it alive.

How to Improve Your Relationship

Have you lost the feeling of loving and being loved? Have you settled into a routine in your sex life? Is everything just a routine—work, paying the bills, mopping the floor, mowing the lawn, and taking care of the family? Has the daily "I love you" disappeared?

Experts and married couples agree that the simple yet magic ingredient to creating satisfaction in a marriage is the expression of affection on a regular basis. Couples who indulged in frequent terms of endearment, nonsexual touching, such as hugs and pats on the head, and tokens of affection, such as little gifts, reported extremely high levels of marital satisfaction. Unfortunately, this aspect of a couple's relationship is usually the first to be ignored, and there is often a correlation between lack of overt affection and the breakdown of intimacy. Couples must make a real effort to show affection in the relationship.

Try the following ideas to put a little love back into your relationship:

- Start each day with a big hug.
- Send a card or love note to your spouse.
- Telephone to say "I love you" during the day.
- Give the gift of listening: refrain from judging or giving advice.

- Complete daily chores together and let this time become special sharing time.
- Put on a slow song and dance before retiring for the evening.
- Give your spouse a list of ten terrific memories.
- On a clear evening share a brief star-gazing experience.
- Assure your spouse often that you care, and show you care by how you act.
- Thank your partner for compliments and kind gestures—and you'll get more of them.
- Help without being asked.
- Always take your partner's feelings into consideration.
- Make having fun together a priority.
- Look for the good in your partner and praise it.
- Admire each other's achievements.
- During tough times, think of why you fell in love in the first place and dwell on those things.
- Always make your partner feel special.
- List all the ways your partner enriches your life and share your list with your spouse.