MAKE A GOOD MARRIAGE GREAT!

BRING BALANCE TO YOUR LIFE

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE AND MANAGED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS

© New Directions Behavioral Health, LLC
April 2008
Introduction

Learn Marriage Basics

Thank you for contacting New Directions Employee Assistance Program. Your EAP provides comprehensive resources to help you, including telephone and face-to-face consultation for problem solving and emotional support, an extensive website with thousands of videos, articles, planners, and calculators, and our Guidebook series.

You have selected the Make a Good Marriage Great Guidebook. Inside, you will learn ways to communicate with your partner to improve your marriage and make marriage a haven rather than another area of stress in your life.

Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................2
Section 1 – Relationships Take Time ................................................................. 3
Section 2 – Empathy and Respect .................................................................. 8
Section 3 - Trust .............................................................................................. 12
Section 4 - Communicating ............................................................................ 14
Section 5 - Kindness ....................................................................................... 18
Section 6 - Fair Fights - Four Tips .................................................................. 20
Section 7 - Money! ........................................................................................... 22
Section 10 - Meeting Challenges Together .................................................... 33
Resources ........................................................................................................ 35
Section 1 – Relationships Take Time

*My husband and I are like ships in the night. We pass each other on our way to somewhere else. I’m not even sure we’re still happy to be married. What should we do to keep our relationship strong? How much time should it take?*

With busy schedules and multiple demands at home and work, it’s easy to take your relationships for granted. But the quality of your relationship with your partner - and children - is the foundation on which your family is built. Good relationships take time and teamwork. You and your partner need to give it both time and attention!

**How Much Time Together?**

A busy life can interfere with even the strongest relationship, but it’s also true that the amount of time your relationship needs depends on your unique situation. Your temperament and that of your partner may demand more or less time together. As your life circumstances change, the amount of time you spend together will change also. For example, taking a job with an expectation for weekly travel will cut down on time together. Or the most common example, having a child may greatly reduce the amount of “couple” time available.

At a minimum, make sure that you reserve at least one evening a week to spend together and one day a week to work together. While exceptions to the rule may apply sometimes, make time together a priority.

**When You Work Nights and Your Partner Works Days**

People today tend to live a 24/7 life, and that can make getting together difficult. When you only see each other going out the door, you need to safeguard your relationship with some creativity.

Face-to-face time together is still the key. But you can supplement this time by slipping in a telephone call, passing notes or emails to each other, and doing small favors for each other, such as emptying the dishwasher, mowing the lawn, or running an errand/

**Time for Fun**

Unless you make time for fun, life can start to feel quite grim. You and your partner will feel better about life in general and each other in particular if you have fun together.
Sometimes, one person’s idea of fun is nothing like what’s fun for the other. If this sounds like your relationship, take stock now. Decide what one or two things you and your partner can do on a regular basis for fun together.

**Your Personal One-on-One**

Sometimes called a “couples meeting” or a “family meeting,” getting together on a regular basis can enhance your relationship and increase your satisfaction with life as a couple.

It’s true that for many couples, little things tend to pile up until conflict and resentments become a regular occurrence. What little things? It can be something as simple as who takes out the trash – conflict over housework is a common theme in marriage counselors’ offices.

This is a time to talk together about where you are and where you need to be – this week, this month, and this year! Answer questions like what should we have for dinner, or what will we do for our summer vacation.

This is also a good time to sketch out responsibilities. What will you do to keep the house organized? What do you need from your partner? When you talk about these things together, you have much less chance of misunderstandings – or children left waiting at the sitter.

**Your Notes & Calendar**

This is also a time to pull out the calendar. If you don’t have one, it’s time to get one! Having a calendar and a place to write notes to each other lets you pass messages when schedules conflict, arrange for important medical, dental, and business appointments, and jot down things you need to remember.

Many couples keep a notepad for the week’s grocery list near the refrigerator for both to use. Whoever goes to the store can grab the list, ensuring that you get the milk you need without buying two bottles!
Why the organization tips? This type of organizing keeps your home from becoming chaotic and you and your partner from misunderstanding one another. Expectations become clear when you have structure than includes time for regular decision making and a way to communicate everyday but important information.

**Involve the Kids**
When children are old enough, start including them in family decisions. Children can help negotiate chores, time on the TV and PC, mealtime menus, and even where to go for summer vacation! Talk about sharing tasks and make day-to-day living more enjoyable for everyone.

Children who participate in these discussions will develop a sense of family identity, the basis for future participation in the community and as a team member at work. Involving your children in decision making teaches them to gather information and problem solve.

Children exposed to family decision-making can learn everything from communicating, compromising, handling money, organizing, managing time, and maybe most important, setting and achieving goals.

**Money and Intimacy**

Having time set apart to talk with each other also gives you an ideal “space” to discuss hot topics – money, intimacy, and parenting. If you’re harboring resentments because of something that happened this week, say so. Remember to use good assertiveness skills and “I” rather than “You” statements!

Agree that this is not the time for “arguing” but for “discussion.” You can disagree with one another while remaining empathic, polite, and respectful.
**Journal Exercise**

How much time does a good relationship take? The amount of time investment varies couple by couple, and has a lot to do with need for emotional closeness. Spend a few minutes listing the activities that you and your partner do together.

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now list the activities you want to add to this list. Discuss how you can make this happen.

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

***Take-Away***

A satisfying relationship takes time and energy!
Section 2 – Empathy and Respect

Empathy – it’s an essential ingredient in any relationship. It’s usually described as “putting yourself in someone else’s shoes.” If you can see life or this situation or this argument from the other person’s perspective, you have empathy.

In a committed relationship or marriage, empathy is based on your deep emotional connection with one another. This gives you a greater ability to understand how the other person thinks and feels.

The difficulty arises when you don’t value your partner’s perspective.

Differences

Marriage counselors sometimes use the word “enmeshed” to describe two people who believe they need to think and feel the same way about everything. No matter how much empathy you feel for your partner and your partner for you, a couple is made up of two different people. By trying to agree on everything, you run the risk of ruining your relationship!

It’s important to understand that differences will crop up in every relationship – maybe every day! You think something is funny; your partner does not. Your partner loves mushrooms; you hate them. You love action films; your partner loves romantic comedies.

Differences like these are natural and usually easy to handle. Bigger differences have to do with issues like parenting, spending money, career priorities, and intimacy.

When these more important differences come up, couples do best when they learn to listen and talk to each other without being judgmental. Simply putting your differences on the table may be enough to start a process of negotiation and compromise. For example, when two people disagree about rules for children, it’s time to listen, talk, compromise.

Remember that part of compromise means gathering information ... and staying open to that information. You or your partner may find that some long-held and cherished belief just doesn’t add up any more. When this happens, you have an opportunity to grow. Your partner has an opportunity to praise your flexibility and willingness to learn.
Honor Feelings Even While Making Judgments

There’s an enormous difference between “making judgments” and “being judgmental.” Your partner may feel strongly about something that you believe is wrong. Can you honor your partner’s feelings without giving up what you believe?

Yes, you can express empathy – understanding – of your partner’s feelings. You may even grasp why your partner feels this way, without having to agree. Making a judgment means you decide for yourself, given the information you have (and have gathered), and what your experience tells you.

When you and your partner have made different judgments about an issue, it’s time for you both to be respectful about each others feelings.

Respect

Having respect for your partner has a lot to do with your opinion about their worth as a person. People respect other people for their intelligence, skills, talents, character, and qualities. Respect ends up being an attitude about your partner that determines how you behave in the relationship. Of all the things a great relationship can’t do without, respect is key!

Some characteristics of respect in a relationship include:

- Maintaining good manners even when upset, stressed, sad, or angry
- Considering your partner’s comfort and well being
- Giving your partner space to grow and learn
- Recognizing your partner’s achievements through compliments and celebration
- Refraining from gossip about your partner and the relationship
- Noticing and appreciating what your partner does for you

Respect also means that you and your partner accept each other as you both are today. If you find yourself demanding that your partner change on a regular basis, take stock of your level of respect for him or her. If you’ve lost respect, take steps to rebuild it.

Handle the Emotional Side of Problems to Maintain Respect

Problems are a fact of life – there’s no escaping them. The dishes have been in the sink for three days, the refrigerator breaks down, your two-year old gets sick, your teen got a D in algebra, you need a new car and a new roof – these everyday problems often are compounded by how you and your partner handled how you feel about past problems.
Every problem carries with it an emotional load. For example, one woman blamed her partner for not telling her that the roof needed repairs. A man felt a good deal of anger at his partner for taking a laid-back attitude toward their child’s homework.

Unless you discuss the feelings that come with problems, you may end up solving the problem but not the annoyance or irritation that went with it. When you have these “left-over” feelings – what psychologists sometimes call “unresolved issues” – you end up feeling resentful. Resentment can lower respect and this can poison a relationship.

Every relationship should put aside some amount of time to discuss problems in addition to the actual problem solving. Think of it as a “debriefing.” You debrief – check each others’ impressions and clear the air – at work. Why not do this in your most important relationship?
Journal Exercise

This is a little like answering the “why do you love me” question. What is it about your partner that you respect? Use the space below to write your answer.

Research Note

An article published in the Journal of Family Psychology (2007) indicates that “working” at marriage, or what the researchers call relationship self-regulation, tended to enhance relationship satisfaction, although life events also had an impact on satisfaction.


Take Away

Attitude counts in your relationship! Take time to make an attitude check every so often to see if an adjustment is needed!
Section 3 - Trust

My wife just admitted that she’s been having lunch every day – or about every day – with a man she works with. She insists that she loves me and that she has never done anything to betray my trust. But it’s harder and harder to trust her! I’ve asked her to stop going to lunch with this guy, or at least go in a group. She says there’s nothing to it and that I’m being ridiculous. I don’t feel ridiculous. What should I do?

Marriage means that two people depend on each other, and a dependable person is trustworthy.

How can you learn to be trustworthy yourself? Think before you agree to do anything and learn to say no when you can’t or won’t follow-through. You want people to make promises only if they deliver. Trust is built on action, not on sound.

If you need to work all night, don’t promise to be home by nine just because it’s “easier” at the time. If you promise not to go shopping again until next month, don’t go to the mall “just to look.” Learning to be true to your word means giving up doing it all your way.

As one newly married man put it, “Marriage is more dynamic than I thought it would be. She wants me to do what I say I’ll do.”

But what if your partner betrays your trust? Let the other person know how much disappointment you feel. Point out that trust grows when behavior follows words.

Lying

Do you believe that some lying is necessary? What about lying to loved ones?

People lie to avoid consequences, to avoid hurting someone else, or to look good. Whatever the reason, lying to a loved one is risky. What if you get found out? What if the other person gets hurt because of what you’ve said?

A trusting relationship means you tell each other the truth. Remember that a trusting relationship can survive both embarrassment and hurt feelings.
Journal Exercise

A dependable person is trustworthy. To be trustworthy, think before you agree to do anything and learn to say no when you can’t or won’t follow-through. It may seem easier at the time to “just say yes,” but in the long run, that approach hurts a relationship. You want people to make promises only if they deliver. Trust is built on action, not on sound.

List some things you can do to make yourself more trustworthy. Discuss these with your partner.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 
11. 
12. 

Take-Away

Do what you say you’ll do. It takes two trustworthy people to create a relationship to depend on.
Section 4 - Communicating

My husband will listen to our kids, his mother, his boss, and just about everyone I can think of. But when I talk to him, he tunes me out. It’s his problem, right? Shouldn’t he listen to me too?

Learn to Listen

How easy is it to “tune out” your partner? Many people tend to listen with half ear to what another person says, especially when it’s a topic we’ve heard before. Do you want to hear about problems at work for the umpteenth time? Don’t you wish that your partner would simply figure out a way to fix the problem ... or take your advice?

Or in the middle of a familiar argument, people tend to start imagining their counterarguments instead of listening to their partners.

Honed listening skills help make a good relationship great. This means putting yourself in your partner’s shoes ... what’s known as empathy. When your partner is talking, super listening means you strive to understand your partner’s point of view.

This type of listening takes some effort and “relearning” of an important communication skill. Ask yourself: do you know your partner well enough to imagine his or her reactions, feelings, and thoughts in any given situation? If not, take time to get to know your partner better.

Take note! The way your partner feels and thinks today is probably different from the way it was a year ago. Keeping up with how your partner grows and changes is one aspect of your relationship that can keep it fresh and interesting.

Learn to Talk

Once you’ve learned to listen, it’s time to check your talking skills. Ask yourself some questions about how you tend to communicate.

- Do you repeat yourself a lot?
- Do you change your voice depending on your mood? For example, do you yell to show that you’re angry or use a wheedling tone when you want something?
- Do you tell the truth, the whole truth, without exaggerating, minimizing, or hiding?
- Do you take a “bossy” tone when speaking to your partner?
- Do you insist on talking for hours to “get things resolved right now?”
These are just a few of the ‘talking mistakes’ that it’s possible to make. To avoid these and other errors in communicating, learn to use an assertive style.

Assertiveness means that you talk about your own thoughts and feelings, without giving way to aggressive displays of anger. An assertive person will say “I feel angry about this situation” rather than shouting, slamming doors, throwing things, or giving the “silent treatment.”

This puts the pressure on you to understand your own thoughts and feelings. After all, how can you communicate them to another person if you don’t know them yourself?

**Telepathy**

*My husband can show that he loves me by knowing what I need ... even before I know it. I try and anticipate his every need, and I do a pretty good job. Of course, he likes to watch sports on TV when he’s home, so meeting his needs involves drinks and snacks! All joking aside, why doesn’t he take me to the movies sometime or out to dinner.*

If this sounds familiar, watch out! No matter how close you get to another person, you really can’t read each other’s minds. Couples who appear to know each other well do so because they talk about what they need and want.

If you want your partner to do something, say so. If the answer is “no,” then you have the opportunity for discussion and compromise.

Just as assertiveness requires that you know what you want to say before you say it, getting your needs met in a relationship means you need to understand your own needs and what will meet them. If you don’t know, your partner certainly can’t know.
**Journal Exercise**

Spend time thinking about your wants and needs, and take time to put your thoughts into words. Once you’re clear, talk to your partner. It’s the only way to be sure that you will get at least some of what you need.

The space below is provided for you to write.

---

**Take Away**

Make talking together a habit.
Use positive words to talk about the future.
Talk more about solutions than about problems.
Research Note

According to a study published in the Journal of Family Psychology (2007), it turns out that men do tend to tune out when women talk more than the other way around. But it also depends on who picks the topic for discussion, the amount of tension, and how long you’ve been married.

Section 5 - Kindness

My wife grew up in a super critical home. She doesn’t seem to be able to say anything unless it’s to complain. I’m getting tired of being nagged and criticized all the time. Can she learn to stop?

Research shows it’s true – the best relationships, the longest lasting marriages, and the happiest singles all have common factors. One of them is kindness. You can combine several different words to mean “kindness,” including generosity, charity, sympathy, empathy, compassion, and tenderness.

All this takes a bit of effort. To keep kindness in your marriage, you need to start noticing how you react to your partner ... and how he or she reacts to you.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you say nice things to each other? Research shows that people who use compliments, praise and encouragement are more likely to be satisfied with their relationships. No one likes to be around someone who is negative and critical.

- Do you expect your partner to take care of all your needs? Over-dependence in a relationship shows a lack of empathy. Use other family and friends to help balance your relationship. Supporting and getting support from others add layers of emotional support for you and your relationship.

- Do you use the language of resiliency? This means that despite the problems, conflicts and disappointments of life, you focus on surviving and thriving. Problems crop up in every relationship, and kindness means that you show your resilience. When you avoid irritability, you move closer to each other.

- Do you hold onto your commitment to the relationship? Remember that commitment is a decision -- not a feeling. Don’t let your commitment depend on "that loving feeling" for your partner. You won’t always feel loving ... but you can always act with kindness.
**Journal Exercise**

Keep a log for a couple of days this week and jot down every kind thing you say to your partner.

At the end of the week, read it over. Are you surprised by how often you make positive remarks? Are you surprised by the number of compliments you give?

If you find that you’ve focused more on problems to solve than positive statements, or on criticisms rather than compliments, take ten below!

**Take Ten**

It takes just a minute to say a kind word to those you love. The benefits can last all day – and sometimes all week! Try this sampling of ten kind statements:

1. You look nice today!
2. Just seeing you makes me happy!
3. I’m really proud of you for ...
4. I’m so glad we have time together today!
5. I really admire the way you pitched in and ...
6. Thank you for taking care of ...
7. Let me help you with that.
8. I know things are tough – how can I encourage you?
9. I love being with you!
10. I love you!

**Take-away**

Send the message that your partner is the most important person in your life.
Section 6 - Fair Fights - Four Tips

*Is it possible for a fight between two people who really love each other to get out of hand? I’ve been married for six months and lately I feel as though my husband is going to hit something when we have an argument. I think that he needs to learn to calm down and discuss problems without all the upset. Last week, we had a fight about the bills. We talked for hours and couldn’t decide who to pay and who not to pay. But instead of sticking with it and making a decision, he just left. Can you help?*

**Set Limits**

Limit your time. Arguing can be exhausting. Decide ahead of time how much time to devote to the argument.

Also, limit the content - one concern per discussion. Don’t bring another issue into this argument. You’ll only muddy the waters.

Finally, limit the fight format. Take time out, just like boxers. Maybe it takes half an hour to get differences on the table and listen to one another. Take a break. Giving yourself time out to think in between discussions can help you arrive at a solution faster.

**Say “Yes” Only if You Mean It**

Trusting each other to tell the truth is part of a healthy relationship. Saying “yes” when you mean “no” could add to your feelings of resentment later on.

The exception to this rule -- if an argument turns dangerous it’s okay to lie to get to safety.

**Stay Away from Button Pushing**

Who knows your partner’s weaknesses better than you? If you play on those weaknesses to win a fight, you’re losing the relationship.

**Give Your Partner Equal Time**

Can you run verbal circles around your partner? When it comes to an argument, which of you out-talks the other?

Not everyone can think on his or her feet. Some people need to take a break and think through what’s already been said. If your arguments turn into monologues, give your partner time to ponder – or ask for time for yourself. Using this process gives you both
an equal chance to get your point across.

**Compromise**
If you find yourself at polar opposites with your partner, what it will take to develop a compromise? Compromise starts by knowing what you want, what is important to you, and what you can give up. Remember, it’s impossible to get *everything* you want.

Life lived at the point of continuous impasse is uncomfortable. If you find that you can’t give up anything, spend time working through your priorities. If this doesn’t help, consider talking with a behavioral health professional such as your EAP.

**Take-Away**

Don’t bring old arguments or hurts into today’s disagreement!
Section 7 - Money!

My wife spends money like we’re rich, and we’re not. I really worry about the future. I think she’s trying to keep up with her family – they have everything. We’re not just starting out, but we can’t afford the big house and cars, designer clothes, vacations in Europe – all the things she wants. How can I help her understand that you can’t spend every penny you make?

Disagreements about finances too often lead to difficulty in a marriage. What you and your partner other do with your money is important to your future together.

If you’ve never talked with each other about money, or it you simply argue when this topic comes up, consider these steps:

- Discuss your basic attitude toward money – is it for spending or saving? Is it mine and yours, or our money?
- How do you feel about your financial situation right now – stick to feelings and use “I” statements
- Decide together on one financial goal – be specific about amounts, time period, and action steps

Remember to listen.

Don’t get so wrapped up in what you want to do that you don’t listen to your partner. This will help a lot when it comes to resolving disagreements. Make sure you check to see that what you hear is what your partner intended to say. Ask questions. Consider talking about “If we do this the way you suggest …” and focus on the positives

It’s time again to sit down and pay the bills. Take time to talk with your significant other before you sit down to pay them. Decide ahead of time how you will react if

- You have extra money
- You come up short
- You have only a little left over to last the month

So how to reduce the conflict? Take time to learn how to negotiate and compromise. Your first step? Think about coming up with a new solution rather than winning the argument.
Your Money Style
If money arguments loom large in your relationship, consider how you might handle money if you didn’t have to think about the other person.

Sometimes people take a stance about money because their partner takes the opposite stance. Would your attitude toward managing money change if your partner was out of the picture? If the answer is yes, ask yourself if you can stop money arguments by shifting to your true money style.

Consider whether you and your partner help to balance each other! Some people would rarely spend money except for the partner. Others would never save!

If money woes have you down, consider making a budget. Looking for information about budgeting? Go online to www.ndbh.com and log on to your EAP Member Section. Personal Directions offers you almost 300 resources on budgeting, including calculators, forms, and how-to articles. Or download our Guidebook, You and Your Money.

Take Away

Talking beforehand can save you an argument later.
When a Fight Just Keeps Going!

Every time my wife and I start to talk about money, she brings up the fact that I gambled with our rent money – 23 years ago! When she’s calm, she says she’s forgiven me. Now can I get her to forget?

Do you find yourself bickering with your partner? Whether you’re quarreling over many little things or a major issue -- stop.

Constant bickering argument can escalate into all-out war between two people. You say something to push my buttons, so I say something to push yours, and pretty soon, there’s a lot of yelling or no one’s communicating at all.

Constant bickering easily becomes spiral conflict – disagreements that cause lots of arguing but never get resolved. Constant bickering eats away at a relationship, eroding your respect for one another in time.

These unresolved disagreements sometimes go on and on. Imagine arguing about the same issue twenty years from now!

One way to take care of this kind of spiral conflict is to make a mutual pact to put the issue to rest, once and for all. But sometimes, when an argument goes on and on, the couple may be getting some other need met rather than get to resolution. For some couples, arguing is a way, sometimes the only way, to get close to each other.

If you’ve tried “everything” and still end up with lots of conflict, you may need the help of a neutral, third-party to learn how to get issues resolved and how to feel close without arguing.

How to Stop Bickering

Instead of bickering, try one of these three steps:

• Make a list of positive things to say to your partner. The next time you find yourself in a bickering-match, say one of the things on your list.

• Remember that a marriage isn’t about winning and losing. If you can, look for a compromise.

• Let go of the little things. At work and at home, pick your quarrels carefully. Some things just aren’t worth the time it takes to argue.
Take Away

The key ingredient in fighting fair is commitment. Your commitment to the relationship will help get conflict resolved!
Compromise

You can’t compromise if you aren’t open to new ideas. People often think that compromise involves giving up a little to get some of what you want.

When you begin compromising with someone close to you – whether at home or work – make it a time of synthesis and synergy.

Synthesize or combine your ideas to come up with a synergy, an enhanced solution to the problem.

You want to buy a new car and your partner doesn’t. You want to start a healthy eating program and your partner wants to eat fast food every night. You want to watch Law and Order reruns but your partner is a Friends fanatic.

So how will compromise work in these situations? Use the 7 “T’s.”

1. Think of all possible solutions. Brainstorm any and all ideas you have.

2. Watch your temper. Anxiety, anger, and negativity will get in the way of coming up with a solution.

3. Consider timing – can a final decision be put off? Until when?

4. Check your need for togetherness -- can you go in different directions? For how long?

5. Make a trade. For example, you might put activities on a schedule – one day for you, one for me – will work.

6. Think it over. Give yourself time to think through all the options.

7. Remember that most decisions are temporary. Nothing has to be set in stone. You and your partner should have the freedom to evaluate a decision and modify it as time goes by.

Damned If You Do...

Also known as “Catch-22’s,” double binds can crop up in any relationship. Double binds lead to arguments and sometimes to spiral conflict.

Some typical double binds:
• No money and the washer just broke
• You can’t stay home with a sick child and go to work
• Your partner can’t find a job in this city and you can’t move because of your job

When you can’t do one thing and the other, you’re often forced to make a choice. This is a time to get help. Sometimes you can’t see a solution, but someone else can. Just talking about the problem can help change your thinking and take you to a solution.

**Take Away**

Sometimes a compromise becomes collaboration leading to a creative solution and a better outcome than either of you could have imagined.
Section 8 - How to Keep Your Marriage off the Rocks!

My fiancé and I are getting ready to be married in the spring, and we just learned that his parents are getting a divorce! They’ve been married almost 35 years! He’s devastated about it, and I don’t know what to think. Is there any way to “divorce proof” a marriage? We don’t want to end up alone 30 years from now!

Almost no one gets married with divorce in mind. If you’ve been through a divorce, then you know that it can be a painful and stressful process. If you are the adult child from a family of divorce, you probably made some early decisions about relationships and marriage based on that experience.

Marriage counselors will tell you that people come to them for two reasons. The first is to improve the marriage. The second is to end it. And it’s true! Marriage counseling can help you have a better divorce.

If you feel like your relationship is getting dangerously near the rocks, here are some steps to take to get back into safe waters.

First and foremost, you and your partner must commit to the relationship. If one person wants out of the relationship but keeps that desire secret, the other may find that “working” on the marriage is like treading water. You stay afloat but you never seem to get anywhere.

Honesty about the level of commitment to the marriage is essential.

Second, do a “growth” check. Everyone grows and develops through life, and sometimes, partners in a relationship don’t grow at the same rate. While this can happen at any time during a marriage, it often becomes painfully apparent when children first come into the family. One of the couple may be ready to “settle down,” while the other may want to continue to play and party.

If you believe that you and your partner are maturing at different rates, it may be time for a discussion of where you are and where you want to be in life. Hopefully, you’ve had these discussions all along, since the beginning of your relationship. If not, it’s time!

Building a life together means growing together. That doesn’t mean that you and your partner will find that the “romance” goes on for your entire married life or that you will fulfill each other completely. That’s not possible. Expect to have some differences!
To reignite a marriage that has started to feel bland, you and your partner may want to revisit the time when you first met. Find ways to do some of the activities you did when you first got together, whether that’s dinners out, movies, dancing, or concerts. If money is an issue, think back to those times. What would you have done if you had been cash poor?

Sometimes, just talking about the early days of a relationship can rekindle that spark. Just keep in mind that you may have outgrown some of the romance in favor of some other important relationship qualities – familiarity, comfortableness, and interdependence.

Sometimes, resentments can build up in a marriage because of “magical thinking” ideas that have nothing to do with reality. Here are some patterns of thought to delete from the way you think:

- My partner can show love by knowing what I want (sometimes before I know)
- We should spend all our spare time together
- We don’t need to worry about the future as long as we love each other
- My partner will always look good and always appeal to me
- We need to make all decisions together and we must always agree
- We can’t be truly in love if we have arguments
- Women should always behave in a certain way and men should behave in a certain (other) way

Finally, one way to keep a marriage moving forward and off the rocks of divorce: prepare for new adventures. Just as challenges keep individuals engaged give yourself new projects. You will enhance the “interesting-ness” of your relationship when you look forward to doing something together – whether a trip around the country or building a waterfall in your backyard.

**When Trust is Broken**

If you and your partner have had an experience that breaks the trust between you, it often helps to talk with a trusted third party. While this may be a friend or family elder, depending on the seriousness of the breach, you may also want to consider contacting the EAP for couples counseling. Rebuilding trust is possible, but it often takes some guidance to lay the foundation.

**Take-Away**

People grow together ... or they grow apart. Have both you and your partner committed to personal growth?
Research Note

An article published in Psychology and Aging (2007) indicates that couples with some personality traits in common experienced lower marital satisfaction than people who were less similar. You don’t have to be exactly alike to grow together!

Section 9 - Your Rights in a Relationship

*My wife acts like our marriage is all about her. What I want doesn’t seem very important, and it’s getting me down. When I don’t do exactly what she tells me, she punishes me in all sorts of little ways. Do I have any rights? What are they?*

Do you have rights in your relationship? What about responsibilities? You have both, and your relationship will be more satisfying if you know and practice them.

Assertiveness training lists rights and responsibilities that you have in a relationship and as an individual. The following list was adapted from *When I Say No I Feel Guilty* by Dr. Manuel Smith.

Your rights include:

- Judging your own behavior, thoughts, and emotions, and to take the responsibility for your actions and consequences on yourself.
- Refusing to offer reasons or excuses that justify your behavior.
- Judging if you are responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems.
- Changing change your mind.
- Making mistakes - and being responsible for them.
- Saying, “I don't know.”
- Being independent of the goodwill of others before coping with them.
- Being illogical - or emotional - in making decisions.
- Saying “I don't understand.”
- Saying “I don't care” or “I don’t have a preference.”
A Few More Rights

You may also think about your rights in these terms, adapted from The Assertive Option: Your Rights and Responsibilities Dr. Patricia Jakubowski and Dr. Arthur J. Lange.

Your rights include:

- Deciding how to lead your life.
- Having values, beliefs, opinions, and emotions
- Telling others how you wish to be treated.
- Taking time to formulate your ideas before expressing them.
- Asking for information or help.
- The right to like yourself even though you're not perfect.
- The right to have positive, satisfying relationships.

For the full list of rights and more information about how to be assertive, we suggest reading the referenced books

Take-Away

A relationship doesn’t mean you give up your rights as a person. Instead, being one member of a couple is an opportunity to grow and learn.
Section 10 - Meeting Challenges Together

We’ve been married six months. In that time, my mother died suddenly of a heart attack and my husband found out that his brother has diabetes. We feel lost and we’ve stopped talking to one another about it. I don’t even want us to eat together because we don’t eat what I think are healthy foods, and I know we’ll start talking about heart disease and diabetes. Can you tell us what to do?

Every couple faces challenges. Sometimes, these difficulties can consume the life of a couple, making it difficult to focus on anything else.

Some problems – those that constitute an emergency - need immediate and all-consuming attention until a solution is found. While some problems fade away by themselves, many become bigger and more urgent when ignored.

How can you know which are which? How do you face them together?

As a first step, identify the challenge and come to some agreement about what to do:

- What’s the problem?
- Think of ideas to solve the problem
- Sort through the ideas and select the most practical
- Put together an action plan
- Decide who will do what
- Start taking care of the problem
- Take stock of how it’s going

Some problems don’t have a good solution, a quick solution or even a solution at all. Take the example of the couple laid off due to a downsizing in an economy with high unemployment. Jobs are scarce and money may be tight. The obvious solution - to find a new job - may not be possible. This leads to other difficulties, like not having enough money for rent or groceries. The problems that a couple faces in this type of situation may require focusing on basic survival concerns.

Whatever difficult life circumstances you and your partner face, you will improve your chances of moving through the difficulties if you work as a team. This means putting some of the following into practice:
• Listen to one another - always important, this is especially important now

• Give one another emotional support - something as simple as a hug or a statement about how tough it’s been can help

• Don’t be afraid to admit that this problem may not have a solution and that trying to find one isn’t helping

• Look for solutions to everyday problems that come up while you deal with larger issues - getting from one day to the next may be an important achievement

• Anticipate possible future difficulties together - looking ahead can help you avoid or reduce additional problems

Humor Helps
Susan Milstrey Wells, author of *A Delicate Balance: Living Successfully with a Chronic Illness*, says:

“Various studies have shown that laughter lessens depression, induces relaxation, strengthens our immune system, and stimulates the release of endorphins, the brain’s natural painkillers. People who laugh feel less alienated and more in control of their lives.”

Take the time to laugh with each other, even in the midst of difficult circumstances.
Resources

- Bushong, Carolyn N., The Seven Dumbest Relationship Mistakes Smart People Make, 1999
- Patcher, Barbara, The Power of Positive Confrontation: The Skills You Need to Know to Handle Conflicts at Work, at Home and in Life, 2001
- Paterson, Randy J., The Assertiveness Workbook: How to Express Your Ideas and Stand Up for Yourself at Work and in Relationships, 2000
Wondering how to make marriage successful? Go old school with your romance. Romantic acts can be many—try giving her a flower someday or place a love note in his briefcase or backpack. Most of the time this is done inadvertently, as expectations may grow over time. What makes a marriage successful are communication, independent time, and healthy indulgences that will keep any couple on track. If you sense you are being controlled or are the controller, get a handle on it or make an appointment for a family counselor. 15. Never use the D-word. Presuming you don’t really want to get a divorce, don’t threaten to. Couples that use the D-word or talk about separation during fights use this as a control mechanism. Start by marking 43 Ways to Make a Good Marriage Great as Want to Read: Want to Read saving… Want to Read. No psychobabble or complicated philosophy here—just 43 straight-forward practical easy-to-implement marriage activities guaranteed to energize your relationship. A dazzling array of fascinating stories, intriguing studies, brilliant insights, and personal reflections that will first make you laugh, cry, or pause; and then you’ll roll up your sleeves and do something surpr No psychobabble or complicated philosophy here—just 43 straight-forward practical easy-to-implement marriage activities guaranteed to energize your relationship.