Tips for a Happy and Healthy Marriage

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There’s a lot of general advice out there about how to make a marriage fairy-tale perfect, but what about the specific, day-to-day behaviors that make a relationship work?  Here are ten suggestions about behaviors and habits that can make life and your marriage happy, healthy, and fulfilling for years to come!

1. **Take the time to ask questions.**Be proactive about asking your spouse if there’s anything you can do to help them on a given day — even if you’re worried they’ll say “yes” and add another five items to your to-do list. Similarly, if you’re picking up signals that your spouse isn’t totally on their game, make sure they know that you notice their behavior and that their happiness (or unhappiness) matters to you. If you’re about to sit down and watch your favorite show and you notice that your spouse is sad or preoccupied, stop and ask him/her what’s up, even if you’re dreading that what they might say may take an hour to discuss. The question can go a long way!
2. **Don’t go to bed angry.**You’ve probably heard this one about a million times, but experts say that it’s actually important to a healthy relationship. Science has actually proven that heart waves (like brain waves) can travel as far as fifteen feet. How close do you sleep together? If your heart is distressed, angry, sad, etc., you’re not only influencing your own night’s sleep, but your spouse’s as well, setting up your next day for disaster. It’s better to stay up much of the night sorting it out than doing that to yourself…and/or your spouse.
3. **Know when it’s time to end an argument.**We all know how good it feels to be the one who’s “right” in a fight, but let’s be honest — it’s way more important that the fight ends with the relationship intact. Marriage counselors agree that arguments should be wrapped up within thity to forty-five minutes whenever possible. By drawing out apologies and the opening of communication, you’re also drawing out the resentment, stress, and anger. Even if both sides have to give a little bit and stop being stubborn, communicating and resolving an argument in a reasonable time is ideal.
4. **Set healthy boundaries with your other loved ones.**You love your parents, in-laws, siblings, and kids, but for the health of your marriage, it’s crucial that these other special people in your life aren’t too involved in your relationship with your spouse. For example, fights and sex within your marriage are two topics that should not be discussed with others.
5. **Keep compliments specific.**It’s nice to get any kind of compliment, but the truth is that all kind words aren’t quite created equal. The more specific you can get with your spouse, the more special he/she will feel. Saying, “You look pretty” is good… saying, “That dress brings out your gorgeous eyes” is better. Likewise, saying “Thanks for staining the deck” is good, but saying “The deck looks fabulous. Thank you for working so hard in the sun all day” is better. It’s also important to learn how to gracefully accept the compliments that your spouse gives you (hint: A smile and a ‘thank you’ is all it takes).
6. **Hold a weekly meeting.**A critical piece of advice is to make a weekly meeting part of your weekly routine. Set aside a regular time for these meetings so that you and your spouse can both prioritize it among your other commitments, and prepare for each discussion by creating a list of positives (“gratefuls”) and negatives (or challenges) from the week before. Share your lists, and start the meeting by addressing the challenges, as well as how to overcome them. End the meeting on a positive note by talking about your “gratefuls,” and close the meeting with physical touch and “I love you”. Doing this each week forces you together to look at the marriage and hear the other person’s point of view in a non-accusatory way. This approach can quickly create a loving and collaborative relationship.
7. **Stop trying to read minds.**“If you are worried or unsure about something in the relationship, don’t try to read into the situation, but rather ask your spouse about it. Their reality is often much different than what you may be imagining. So, give them the chance to share it with you. Stop testing your mind-reading powers and address conversations in your marriage head-on.
8. **Do what your spouse wants to do.**This may sound pretty straightforward, but many of us don’t do it nearly enough. If your partner enjoys something that isn’t necessarily your favorite, do it anyway. What are you losing by doing something that makes your spouse genuinely happy?
9. **Be more emotionally present.**What does it mean to be totally emotionally available? Don’t check your phone, make good eye contact, and be focused and present during a conversation. This type of connection results in your spouse feeling loved, accepted, and respected by you. Set your phone aside and get ready to see what happens when your spouse really feels like a priority.
10. **Go to bed at the same time.**You may be a night owl, while your spouse prefers an earlier bedtime, but for the sake of your marriage, it’s best to get under the covers at the same time. Work schedules and other commitments may get in the way, but do what you can to align your routines whenever possible. Knock off social media, TV, or catching up on paperwork so you can go to bed together — and don’t wait until you’re exhausted to get into bed. This nurtures communication and can help your sex life.