

the 7 principles for making marriage work

The 7 Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Guide to Lasting Love

The 7 principles for making marriage work offer a robust framework for couples seeking to cultivate a strong, resilient, and deeply satisfying partnership. In a world where marital challenges are common, understanding and actively applying these core tenets can be transformative, shifting the dynamic from one of struggle to one of sustained connection and mutual growth. This article delves into each of these foundational principles, exploring their nuances and practical applications. We will examine the importance of building love maps, fostering fondness and admiration, turning toward each other, and the crucial role of conflict management. Furthermore, we will uncover how to create shared meaning, uphold your dreams, and build a life together that honors both individual aspirations and the collective journey of your marriage. By mastering these principles, couples can navigate life's inevitable ups and downs with grace and strengthen the bond that holds them together.

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Principle 1: Build Love Maps

The first of **the 7 principles for making marriage work** emphasizes the creation and maintenance of detailed "love maps." These maps are not literal

geographical representations but rather an intimate understanding of your partner's inner world. This involves knowing their hopes, fears, dreams, values, friends, and major life experiences – both past and present. A strong love map allows you to deeply understand your spouse's perspective, making you a more empathetic and supportive partner. Couples who actively cultivate these maps are better equipped to navigate conflicts and connect on a deeper emotional level. It's an ongoing process, requiring consistent curiosity and genuine interest in your partner's evolving life.

Understanding Your Partner's Inner World

To build effective love maps, couples must dedicate time to truly listen and learn about each other. This isn't a one-time task but a continuous endeavor. Ask open-ended questions about their day, their childhood, their aspirations, and their worries. The goal is to create a mental database of their life, allowing you to respond supportively and with genuine understanding when they share their experiences.

The Importance of Ongoing Learning

As individuals, we are constantly changing. New experiences shape our perspectives, and our goals may shift over time. Therefore, regularly updating your love maps is crucial. Make it a habit to check in with your partner, asking them about new developments in their lives or changes in their feelings. This demonstrates that you are invested in their growth and that your knowledge of them is current and relevant.

Principle 2: Foster Fondness and Admiration

Fostering fondness and admiration is about nurturing a positive view of your partner and the relationship. It involves actively seeking out and appreciating your spouse's good qualities and contributions. When couples regularly express appreciation and admiration, they build a reservoir of positive sentiment that can help them weather difficult times. This principle is about remembering why you fell in love and continuing to cherish those qualities.

Expressing Appreciation Regularly

Simple acts of saying "thank you" or acknowledging something your partner has done well can have a profound impact. It's not just about grand gestures; it's the consistent recognition of your partner's efforts and positive attributes that strengthens the bond. Make it a point to express your appreciation verbally, through notes, or small acts of kindness.

Reframing Negative Perceptions

Even in the most stable marriages, negative feelings can arise. The principle of fondness and admiration encourages couples to actively reframe negative thoughts about their partner and focus on their positive aspects. Instead of dwelling on a partner's flaws, consciously bring to mind their strengths and the reasons you admire them. This shift in perspective can significantly reduce conflict and promote a more harmonious relationship.

Principle 3: Turn Toward Each Other, Not Away

This principle, often referred to as making "bids for connection," is about responding positively to your partner's attempts to engage with you emotionally. When one partner expresses a need for attention, support, or simply wants to share something, the other partner's response is critical. Turning toward your partner means acknowledging their bid and engaging with them, even if it's in a small way. Turning away, on the other hand, can lead to feelings of rejection and emotional distance, eroding the marital bond over time.

Recognizing and Responding to Bids for Connection

Bids for connection can be subtle. They might be a shared glance, a comment about the weather, or a request for help. Learning to recognize these bids and responding with engagement, even a simple smile or nod, reinforces the connection. Conversely, ignoring bids or responding negatively can create a pattern of emotional withdrawal.

Building Emotional Reserves

Each positive interaction, each time a couple turns toward each other, builds emotional reserves. These reserves are like a bank account of goodwill that can be drawn upon during times of conflict or stress. The more positive interactions a couple has, the more resilient their relationship will be when challenges arise.

Principle 4: Let Your Partner Influence You

Healthy marriages are characterized by a willingness of both partners to be influenced by each other. This means being open to your partner's opinions, ideas, and perspectives, even when they differ from your own. It involves compromise and a recognition that your partner's input can enrich your life and decision-making processes. When one partner consistently disregards the

other's influence, it can lead to feelings of powerlessness and resentment.

The Power of Compromise and Respect

Allowing your partner to influence you doesn't mean sacrificing your own identity or values. It means finding a middle ground, engaging in respectful dialogue, and valuing their contributions. This mutual influence fosters a sense of partnership and equality within the marriage, strengthening the overall relationship.

Navigating Disagreements with Openness

During disagreements, it's vital to approach the conversation with an openness to being influenced. Instead of focusing solely on winning the argument, try to understand your partner's point of view and consider how their perspective might offer a valuable insight or alternative solution. This willingness to be influenced demonstrates respect and a commitment to finding solutions together.

Principle 5: Solve Your Solvable Problems

Not all marital issues are destined to be ongoing sources of conflict. **The 7 principles for making marriage work** clearly distinguish between solvable problems and perpetual ones. Solvable problems are those that can be addressed and resolved through effective communication and compromise. This principle focuses on developing the skills to identify these issues, discuss them constructively, and implement solutions that work for both partners.

Effective Communication Strategies

Successfully solving solvable problems requires clear and open communication. This includes active listening, expressing needs respectfully, and avoiding blame. Couples who can articulate their concerns without aggression and are willing to hear their partner's perspective are much more likely to find resolutions.

The Role of Compromise and Negotiation

Many solvable problems necessitate compromise. This means both partners may need to adjust their expectations or offer concessions. The goal is not for one person to "win" but for both individuals to feel heard and for a mutually agreeable solution to be found. Healthy negotiation skills are key to navigating these issues.

Principle 6: Overcome Gridlock

Gridlock occurs when couples are stuck in a perpetual conflict that they cannot resolve. These issues often stem from fundamental differences in personality, values, or life dreams. The principle of overcoming gridlock isn't about finding a magical solution but about learning to manage these perpetual conflicts without allowing them to damage the relationship. It involves understanding the underlying dreams and aspirations that fuel the conflict and finding ways to respect them, even if they cannot be fully reconciled.

Identifying Perpetual Problems

The first step in overcoming gridlock is to accurately identify which conflicts are perpetual. These are issues that have been discussed repeatedly without resolution and often involve deeply held beliefs or desires. Recognizing that these may not be solvable problems in the traditional sense is crucial.

Exploring Underlying Dreams and Aspirations

Instead of trying to force a solution, couples in gridlock are encouraged to explore the underlying dreams and aspirations that are at the heart of the conflict. For example, a conflict over finances might be rooted in one partner's dream of financial security and the other's dream of adventurous experiences. Understanding these deeper desires can foster empathy and allow for a more compassionate approach to managing the disagreement.

Principle 7: Create Shared Meaning

The final principle in **the 7 principles for making marriage work** focuses on creating a shared sense of purpose and meaning in life together. This involves developing shared rituals, traditions, goals, and values that bind the couple together and give their life together a deeper significance. Shared meaning provides a sense of unity and a common vision for the future, reinforcing the marital bond and contributing to a fulfilling partnership.

Developing Shared Rituals and Traditions

Rituals and traditions, whether they are simple weekly date nights or elaborate holiday celebrations, create a sense of continuity and connection. They provide opportunities for shared experiences, laughter, and the strengthening of the marital narrative. These shared moments become

cornerstones of the couple's life together.

Building a Shared Vision for the Future

Couples who create shared meaning often have a clear, unified vision for their future. This involves discussing and aligning on goals related to family, career, personal growth, and life experiences. Having a shared vision provides direction and purpose to the marriage, making the journey together more rewarding and intentional.

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the most impactful principle from 'The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work' for couples struggling with frequent arguments?

The most impactful principle for couples with frequent arguments is likely 'Mastering the Art of Repair Attempts.' Dr. Gottman's research shows that the ability to de-escalate conflict and reconnect after a disagreement is crucial. Learning to recognize and accept repair attempts, even small ones, can prevent arguments from spiraling out of control and damaging the relationship.

How can 'Turning Toward Instead of Away' from a partner be practically applied in a busy modern life?

In a busy life, 'Turning Toward' means actively noticing and responding to your partner's bids for connection, no matter how small. This could be a quick text during the day, a brief conversation before bed, or acknowledging their presence when they enter a room. It's about prioritizing moments of connection, even amidst the chaos, rather than letting them pass by unnoticed.

What does 'Nurturing Your Fondness and Admiration' truly mean beyond superficial compliments?

Nurturing fondness and admiration goes beyond surface-level compliments. It involves actively remembering and reflecting on your partner's positive qualities, the things you love about them, and your shared history. This might involve sharing positive memories, consciously looking for good in your partner, and expressing genuine appreciation for their character and efforts.

How does 'Accepting Influence' from your partner differ from compromising, and why is it important?

'Accepting Influence' means genuinely considering your partner's perspective and feelings, and being willing to let them shape your decisions and your approach to life. It's not about always agreeing or simply compromising, but about valuing their input and allowing it to affect your own choices. This fosters a sense of respect and partnership, making both partners feel heard and valued.

In the context of 'Solving Problems,' what's the key difference between solvable and perpetual problems, and how should couples approach each?

Solvable problems are those that can be addressed and resolved with good communication and compromise. Perpetual problems, on the other hand, stem from fundamental differences in personality or life dreams and are unlikely to be fully 'solved.' The key is to approach solvable problems with effective communication skills (like those in Principle 1-4) and to learn to manage and dialogue constructively about perpetual problems without letting them create constant gridlock.

How can couples actively 'Creating Shared Meaning' even if their individual interests and goals diverge?

Creating shared meaning involves building a life together that reflects both partners' values and dreams. This can be achieved through shared rituals (like Sunday dinners or bedtime routines), developing shared goals, creating a shared vision for your future, and supporting each other's individual passions. It's about weaving your individual threads into a beautiful, shared tapestry of life.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to the 7 principles for making marriage work, with descriptions:

1. The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work

This is the foundational book by John Gottman and Nan Silver that introduces the core principles derived from decades of research on marital success. It outlines how to build and maintain a strong relationship by focusing on friendship, positive sentiment override, and constructive conflict management. The book offers practical exercises and insights to help couples navigate challenges and foster lasting love.

2. Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love

Sue Johnson's influential work presents a relationship-focused approach based on attachment theory. It guides couples through seven crucial conversations that address common emotional wounds and build deeper emotional bonds. The book aims to help partners feel more secure and connected, fostering a sense of being a safe haven for each other.

3. Attached: The New Science of Adult Attachment and How It Can Help You Find—and Keep—Love

While not exclusively about marriage, Amir Levine and Rachel S. F. Heller explore the science of adult attachment styles, which directly impacts how couples interact and bond. Understanding your and your partner's attachment needs (secure, anxious, avoidant) can illuminate relationship dynamics and help you build a more secure connection. This knowledge is crucial for fostering the friendship and emotional connection central to marital success.

4. Passionate Marriage: Sex, Love, and Intimacy in Committed Relationships

David Schnarch's groundbreaking book delves into the importance of emotional and sexual intimacy in long-term relationships. It emphasizes taking personal responsibility for one's own emotional life and how this can lead to a more passionate and resilient marriage. Schnarch argues that true intimacy arises from facing challenges and growing together.

5. Love Sense: The Revolutionary New Science of Romantic Relationships

Sue Johnson returns with another insightful book, this time exploring the biological and neurological underpinnings of love. She argues that love is a biological drive, not just a feeling, and that secure attachment is essential for well-being. The book provides a deeper understanding of why we need love and how to foster it in our partnerships, aligning with Gottman's emphasis on emotional connection.

6. After the Honeymoon: Dealing with Conflict, Stress, and Other Difficulties in Marriage

This book, often attributed to various relationship experts, tackles the inevitable challenges that arise in marriage. It offers practical strategies for addressing conflict constructively, managing stress, and overcoming life's hurdles as a team. The focus is on developing resilience and problem-solving skills, vital for the maintenance of a healthy marital bond.

7. The Relationship Cure: A 5-Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships

John Gottman, with Joan DeClaire, offers a step-by-step program to improve relationships, including marriage. It focuses on building and repairing emotional connections, understanding each other's "love maps," and managing conflict effectively. The book empowers individuals to take an active role in nurturing their most important relationships.

8. Eight Dates: Essential Conversations for a Lifetime of Love

John Gottman and Julie Schwartz Gottman propose a framework for couples to engage in meaningful conversations through a series of structured dates. These dates are designed to cover essential topics that build intimacy, understanding, and connection. By dedicating time to discuss key aspects of

their lives, couples can strengthen their friendship and navigate the complexities of marriage.

9. The Power of Vulnerability: Let Discover Your Worthy of Perfect Love
Brené Brown's work on vulnerability, shame, and courage is highly relevant to building a strong marriage. This book (or related works) highlights how embracing vulnerability fosters deeper connection and trust between partners. By being open and authentic, couples can create a more resilient and loving relationship, addressing the emotional underpinnings of marital success.

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