

Marriage and Enjoying the Love of your Life

It has been said that marriage is an institution and that love is blind. Therefore it would be right to say that marriage is an institution for the blind i.e. blind to each other's faults, blind to each other's shortcomings and blind to all the little idiosyncrasies.

With marriage, it brings about two living and loving individuals coming together from two different systems. System of upbringing, lifestyle, habits, beliefs, values, etc. With a merger of the two systems, husband and wife do well to plan and work out a system that works best for their new set up in order to enjoy the marriage and each other. No doubt that marriage is hard work but what isn't? But with efforts put in, there are definitely pay-offs.

To start off, remember the commitment you gave to each other. The commitment of "I Do" that is supposed to be for your spouse and not for the kids. Spouses need to remind themselves to continually do for each other first and not just the career or the kids. What you did in your courtship days continue to do so in your marriage. Dating, whispering sweet nothings, taking time out for each other, pleasant surprises, going for walks, admiring, adoring one another and many more. Did these activities continue after marriage? If yes, good job! Keep it going!! If not, what is one thing you can do for your spouse today?

In his research, Dr. John Gottman renowned for his work on marriage stability and divorce prediction highlights in what he terms it as the four horsemen of the apocalypse that cause the marriage relationship to breakdown. The four horsemen are contempt, criticism, defensiveness and stonewalling.

1. Contempt – scorn, despise, dishonour, look down with disdain
2. Criticism – passing judgement, fault finding, nothing good to say
3. Defensiveness – always on guard against real or imagined threats and jumping to mostly irrational conclusion most times
4. Stonewalling – to block or resist intentionally, giving cold shoulder, cold war

Take a moment and think about it. Have you been showing any or all of the above? What have you been doing and how often have you been doing it? Think of those times that you have put your spouse down this week or last week. Can't think of any? Ask your spouse. Was it in front of the kids, your friends or other family members? Have you said something nasty or sarcastic when your expectations were not met? Did you jumped in to say something even before hearing your spouse out proper? Or have you been giving your spouse the rolling eyes, walking away and turning to the television/papers instead of facing him/her to resolve the issue?

The more you "practise" the four areas, the higher the chances of your marriage relationship being torn apart. Consider how you can start reducing, avoiding and eliminating the four horsemen in order to start enjoying your marriage and each other.

Consider the following:

Attend to each other when you get home from work – put aside electronic gadgets for awhile

Enquire about the day and how it went for each other – what was something nice or nasty that happened today

Learn to listen and show concern – “this is what you said; is that what you meant?”

Nurse the emotional wounds for each other - having fire fight throughout the whole day with the outside world, show understanding (feel the feel) without giving any advice first

Say something encouraging or praise your spouse for what he or she has to go through

Do something nice for your spouse – massage, buy flowers or bring home a favoured dessert

Put work woes outside the house – don’t allow external discord to destroy internal harmony

Attack the problems – not each other. Take the problems out and work together to attack the problem; seek help if at a loss

Come together and learn to enjoy each other. Take time out to communicate. No time? Make time. After all, if you can schedule your meetings with bosses, colleagues and clients, why not your spouse who is your most important business partner (marriage business)?

Communicate – The purpose of communication is to know and be made known. Get to know each other and make yourself known to each other. People change over time and events. Communication is helping you to know, understand, appreciate and manage each other’s expectations in challenging times and situations.

Finally, marriage should be a haven where the husband and wife can come home to. A place where love and respect is displayed, where esteem and regard for each other is continually practised and where the relationship with each other is a joy and something to look forward to coming home each day.

Written by: Ms Evelyn Khong
Principal Consultant
Family Central - a service by Fei Yue Community Services