

## The building blocks of a happy marriage

Like a sturdy house, a good marriage is built on solid ground, of the strongest materials - healthy communication skills and these ingredients:

1. Leave home. The most basic and difficult step is for each individual to create a new set of roles, expectations, and communication channels with their parents as married adults. Couples appreciate each other for this help in maturing.

Nowadays, this often includes the task of leaving the experience of a divorce behind, and working to incorporate one's children into a new, blended family.

2. Create an identity and a shared sense of pride as a couple. Work toward a feeling of "togetherness", which includes both intimacy and individuality.

Establishing togetherness means learning to cooperate. This challenging but rewarding task involves

- clearing up angry feelings through direct communication,
- committing yourself to spending definite times on your relationship, and
- setting boundaries between your relationship and the world.

3. Protect your relationship. Both of you must work hard together to protect your privacy, intimacy, and sexual life. Discuss openly whether and when children are wanted. Work pressures also often threaten intimacy and you need to establish together the right balance.

4. Teamwork. Think of yourselves and operate as a team, particularly in life crises. Negotiate tasks such as finances, goals, power arrangements, and household responsibilities regularly.

Learn and practice good communication skills such as using "I" messages, active listening, learning to compromise without giving up one's self, etc. Although happy couples often have much conflict in their relationship, they never resort to hurting each other.

5. A happy sexual life is essential to an enduring marriage. Couples are often surprised to find that this building block requires much work - time, effort, and patience - to maintain.

6. Humor. Develop your own private world of jokes, and laughing together at life. Learn to satisfy each others needs for understanding and nurturing. Practice offering each other continuing comfort through life's ups and downs.

7. Romance. Keep alive the romantic images of your partner as the years change things. Establish special rituals and events for this purpose and continue to look for new adventures to share.