



IS YOUR MARRIAGE WORKING?

The concept of marriage as a permanent, blissful state is a romantic notion that many of us would like to believe in but realize is unattainable. More than one in three marriages end in divorce and even successful, long-lasting marriages have their ups and downs. Yet the desire to have someone with whom we can share our hopes and dreams, someone who will love and support us, someone to grow old with, is a desire that we all share. No one looks forward to the emptiness and isolation of living their lives alone.

Most couples want their marriage to work but do not always have the necessary tools to maintain a good, healthy relationship. They may have grown up in a family wrought with conflict, with parents who separated or divorced, or may be carrying the wounds of past relationships hurt and disappointments. Researchers agree that successful relationships are hard work; they don't just happen; they must be developed and nurtured. However, basic consensus among family experts does exist regarding the essential ingredients that make up a good marriage. Following is a description of the key elements of a healthy and satisfactory relationship.

- **COMMITMENT.** It's easy to be with someone when things are going well – when there is a good family income, when both partners are living comfortably and in good health, when the kids are a joy, or when sex is great. But the true test of a relationship commitment is sticking through the hard times such as a significant illness or disability, job loss, or some other personal family crisis. Being there for your partner physically and emotionally when the chips are down and not allowing adversity to alienate you from one another affirms your commitment to the relationship and your marriage.
- **MUTUAL RESPECT AND APPRECIATION.** It's important in any relationship not only to feel loved but also respected and valued. In a good marriage, partners respect each other as individuals and treat each other as equals who may bring different but equally valued strengths, talents, and skills to the relationship.
- **COMMUNICATION.** Talking things out is the best vehicle of easing tension, clarifying confusion, and putting aside unspoken insecurities in the relationship. Too often individuals think their partners should “know” what they feel or need without verbalizing feelings and needs to their partner openly and honestly. The ability and willingness to share one's thoughts and feelings, as well as to be receptive and responsive to those shared by one's partner are critical to successful communication.



- **COMPROMISE.** A relationship involves give and take. At times this may mean personal sacrifice for the betterment of the relationship. These sacrifices can involve small things like giving up one night at the gym to have more couple time or more significant things like postponing the purchase of that sports car to invest in a family home. Compromise should not be a one-sided affair. In a good relationship, partners must at times accommodate and yield to the other. You will find that when you are able to give in this way, you will also *get* more from your spouse.
- **FEELING COMFORTABLE WITH YOURSELF.** Liking yourself and feeling secure in your own skills and abilities will enhance your marriage. People who feel personally inadequate or unhappy with themselves tend to blame their partner or relationship for their discontent. This suggests that when you are feeling unhappy with your marriage it is first important to take a close look at how you are feeling about yourself before concluding that the relationship is the problem.

When you are feeling that your marriage is out of sorts, the following quick relationship inventory may help you identify the problem areas:

1. Are you giving your relationship top priority in your life?
2. Can you talk to your partner about things that are troubling you?
3. Are you and your partner affectionate and expressive with each other?
4. Do you have “quality” time to spend with your partner?

When Professional Help Is Needed

A couple can fix some relationship problems by talking them out and together coming up with a plan of action to make things better. There are other problems that require professional help. These problems include quarreling and tension without resolution, a sense of prolonged distance and/or indifference in the relationship, lack of communication, physical fighting, and extramarital affairs. If any of these problems exist in your relationship, or if you are troubled about your marriage but unable to identify the source of your worries, a professional counselor can help. You may call for an appointment for yourself and your spouse, or start with an individual appointment.

Family Service Counseling and Community Resource Center is only a call away. Fees are based upon an adjusted scale according to income and family size.