

What Matters Most For A Happy and Successful Marriage

Advice for Newly Weds



Compiled by Rev. Katherine S. Blackburn, M.Div

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Acknowledgments

I am deeply humbled at the bounty that has flowed into my life since the writing of this booklet and the Master of Divinity thesis. First of all, I want to thank the twenty couples who graciously granted me an interview. The honest and intimate sharing of your marital experience for twenty years or more touched my heart and soul.

With the couples who agreed to pre-marital counseling, I am grateful. Your interest and willingness to practice the techniques gave me perseverance as I realized this work is important and significant for newly weds.

The booklet would not have been created without the group of grad school advisors and teachers. Their genuine support and caring in addition to continuous nudges to finish kept me returning to the task. I appreciate the authors, therapists, and friends who shared their professional skills and writings for the project.

Most important, I feel fortunate to have the nurturing and dependable love of my husband Regi who agreed to try new ideas for a better marriage. In fact, on our first date, to resolve our first disagreement, he said, “Meet me half-way.” Thus began a foundation built on cooperation and trust. It is the basis for this booklet.



Dear Readers,

Congratulations! You are married and on your way to a happy and fulfilling life as committed partners. Now is the time to practice how to keep that special love you have for one another, while building your own history, little by little, as a married couple. Use this booklet, my wedding gift to you, as a guide to creating new patterns and skill-sets that can bring you both joy and a more intimate connection throughout the years to come.

Part I, “Points to Ponder,” introduces time-tested advice compiled from twenty interviews by long-term married couples. Discuss the helpful tips with each other and find the ones that you both agree would enhance your own marriage. In time, you may desire to add your own.

Use the **“Practice Techniques”** presented in **Part II** as a reminder of the six skills I introduced in our marriage preparation meetings. View them as a variety of tools to help you both build a deeper relationship and resolve issues in a peaceful, non-defensive way. Choose the technique you think would work best in a particular situation, or, like learning how to play a sport, practice one repeatedly, and when you both master the skill together, try another. In whatever way is your style, you are continuing to apply new techniques to seek the common ground.

To gain more knowledge of how to build a conscious marriage, I encourage you to read the resources listed on the **Suggested Reading List**. I found these materials to be the best to use for my own marriage and with you in pre-marital counseling.

My hope is that you get to a place where conflict is welcomed, and you discover that successfully navigating through the differences actually enriches the relationship. After all, the person you married is an extraordinary human being. May you continually be amazed at the discoveries you make about each other as your love grows and matures.

With the blending of proven and tested solid values and new technology, I offer you the opportunity I did not have: to start off prepared, with suggested ways to realistically create a marriage that works for you both.

Don't hesitate to drop me an email from time to time. I want to know how you are doing and am delighted to offer help where needed. I always want you to be, as I am, happily and successfully married!

Love and blessings,
Rev. Katherine Blackburn



PART I - POINTS TO PONDER

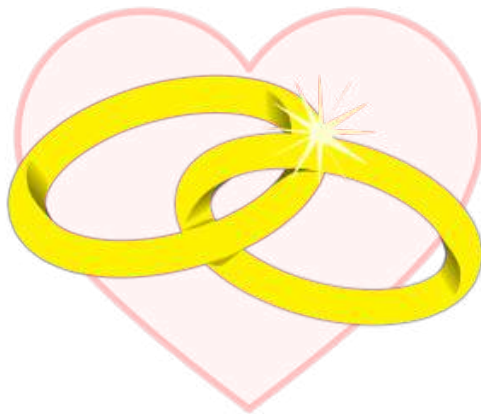
The statements written on the following pages are different points taken from 20 interviews by “real people” who have been married anywhere from 24 to 51 years.

The long term married couples willingly offered their advice which is 98 tips found to be useful in creating successful and happy marriages.

I encourage you to think about the various points and discuss them with your spouse. You will more deeply understand what marriage is and how to make yours better.

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Grow the Common Ground



Building Us

The wife said that something new happens as the relationship grows. It is not just about “her” but “us.”

Develop a “We” Consciousness: The Center

The husband and wife agreed that they do not take away from the center by being for themselves only. They think in terms of “we,” not “me.” The wife shared that she says, “This happened. What will “we” do about it?” instead of “I told you so.”

Keep the Relationship Alive

Both people said they do their part to make their spouse feel part of the union. Daily the husband tells his wife he loves her and that she looks nice. The wife said when she supports her husband, he can deal with problems and take on the world.

The Foundation Stone for Building Relationship

The wife suggests finding the deeper place to relate. Everyone has reasons not to be together; celebrate the good that is there. Through companionship and support, you are building a level of trust.

Finding the Balance

The wife said that both she and her husband come from different standards and backgrounds. She grew up on a farm and had chores to do before school while her husband, a big city kid, played sports and helped little around the house. They find the balance.

Building the Space that Lies Between Us

The husband said he and his wife put energy into the space that lies between them. As long as they keep juicing that space, they can then also live in two separate realities, planes, or perceptions. It is a continual engagement of both people. They hold the space by listening to each other.

Grow the Common Ground

Being Conscious

Both spouses shared that being in a relationship is a practice. There is an “it” that we feel or don’t. If we choose to be stagnant, “it” is gone. The relationship is always moving.

What Impacts Your Marriage?

The wife said she sees things in relationship. She realizes that if she is impulsive, it affects their unit in the long run. She is aware of how her reaction impacts the marriage.

Friendship

The wife shared that it is hard for the relationship to withstand an affair. She places value on the friendship she is building within the union.

A Healthy Mix

The wife states she is an ally in encouraging her husband with what he wants to do. They are satisfied when they do things together and apart. When they are happy doing things separately, it spills over into the relationship.

For the Benefit of Us

Both the husband and wife said the act of holding hands and touching in public shows couple strength and suggests a mutual self-confidence. Don’t be embarrassed about displaying physical affection in front of others, including your family.

Laughter Heals

The wife shared when she disagrees with her husband, she discusses the issue a lot. They debate and argue. The next day they laugh over how trivial it was, knowing that a year from now neither one will be able to remember what it was all about.

The Attraction

You Are Attracted to What the Other Has. It Is Where You Need to Grow.

The wife said she is attracted to his desire to have fun, and his “love for life.” She comes out of a family that values being “duty-bound.”

What You Are Attracted to, You Become

The husband said he hid in a shell. After he married a woman who enjoys greeting and talking to others, he learned how to engage with people. He proudly shares, “I won the Chamber of Commerce award for hospitality.”

The Ying Yang

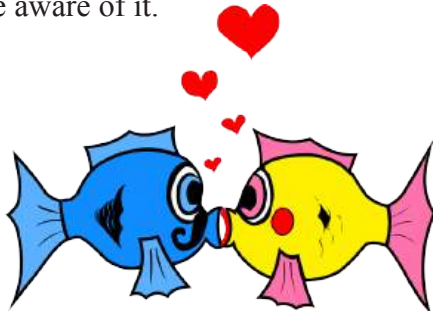
Marriage is the “ying yang.” The wife said she is not serious, and her husband is too serious. He gives her a reality check, and she helps him stay laughing through life.

We Become the Beauty of Each Other

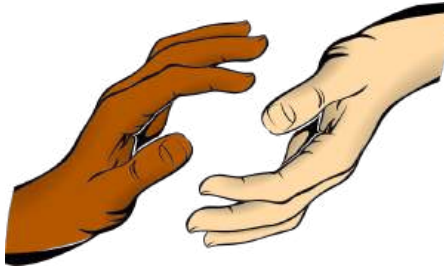
The wife shared she is a peace marcher. Her husband re-enlisted as a Marine, returning to combat, and said, “I am ready to fight, any time, any where. War is necessary.” She said, “It is not all black and white,” and added, “he is a lawyer who represents veterans for peace.”

Be Surprised Over

The wife revealed her husband can do anything he sets out to do and has building projects around the house. He has a good sense about people and tells it like it is. Yet, it was not until years later that she became aware of it.



The Give and Take



Have Faith It Will Work Out

The wife explained when she thinks she is doing 80% of the work for the relationship, she is not attached to the thought it must be equal, or she is doing everything and her husband isn't. Even if it does not feel right, she has faith it will work out. The responsibility for maintaining the relationship will turn the other way because at different times, both her husband and herself have different needs. Her spouse will begin doing 70% and be there for her, when she is in need.

Nothing Is Ever 50-50.

The husband said that the relationship is not a true "give and take" because nothing is ever 50-50. He may think giving 50-50 works best, but it is better to give 90%. Can things really be 50-50? If he mows the grass and his wife does the laundry, how can they measure who is giving the greater amount? If he expects 50-50, he will always argue. If they both give 90%, each will feel appreciated and loved.

Balance

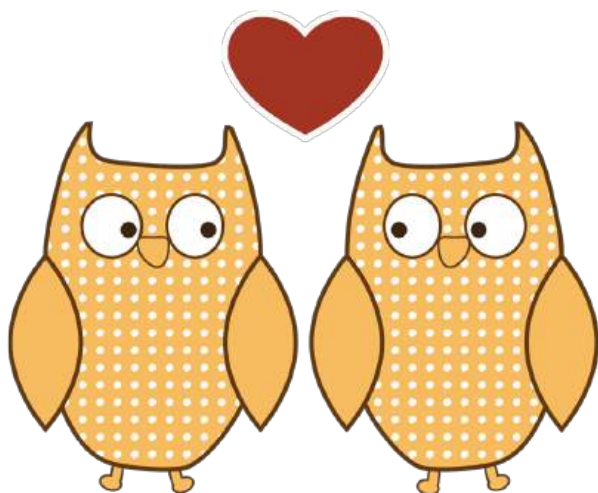
The wife shared that her husband cooks dinner Monday thru Thursday, and she cleans the dishes. Friday is date night out. On Saturday and Sunday, she cooks. "It balances out," she said.

Giving

The husband suggested that instead of expecting to receive, give more, and the other does too.

“Tried and True”: Golden Nuggets of Advice

- Look inside yourself for what can give you satisfaction. See that maybe the other person is not the cause of your unhappiness.
- Your Mother’s positive attitude toward your spouse can help you out.
- The relationship gets better the longer you are married. You mellow. My spouse and I do not disagree much anymore.
- Maintain and find new interests as well as your own interests. We both like to travel and visit old book stores, but we are interested in different kinds of books.
- Private jokes build something special between the two of you; don’t leak them out to others.
- Don’t make a big deal over little things such as forgetting to turn the light off, spilling a drink at dinner, or being in a car accident where no one was hurt. In the overall scheme of things they are either not important or things we cannot control.



“Tried and True”: Golden Nuggets of Advice

- Never criticize a spouse or correct them in front of others.
- Do not take each other for granted. Marriage is not like a relationship with a brother or sister.
- Good marriages don't just happen. They take work.
- Take a vacation. Every life decision was made lying on the beach someplace. It is downtime for just the two of you where there is no pressure “to do.” Our perspective on things changed.
- For mixed religions, acknowledge each other's belief. As a couple, we are involved in both churches as organist of one and secretary of the Sunday School in the other.
- We built a log cabin together. The teamwork brought us together.
- Be willing to change a pattern of behavior. Remember each day: “Marriage is a choice.”
- We support each other rather than “being tied at the hip.”
- Long-term married couples learn to compromise and not take things personally. I think to myself, “Oh, my husband did not mean what he said.”
- Choose marriage counseling when it is needed; it is like taking your car to the body shop for maintenance.
- Even if you knock heads, be willing to stand up for what you believe in. Be strong enough to express your thoughts until both of you reach a mutually agreed upon decision.
- Always keep some mystery in the relationship. Continue doing things you have in common, staying interested in each other. Don't be too easy to figure out. Keep it alive by putting extra effort into it.
- Cultivate married friends as support. Set an example as to how to work out things for couples going through similar experiences as you and your spouse.

Beware of These Misleading Beliefs

“Couples should do everything together.”

Each spouse needs their own space. Balance being together with being apart.

“Brides honor and obey their husbands.”

This is not even possible. There will be certain times the man cannot carry everything; he will not be capable.

“I’ll change him. He’ll change to my way of thinking.”

Both partners will change over time and adapt to each other.

“I did not marry my soulmate. There is greener grass.”

Beware of buying into romantic myths.

“Alcohol and drugs make marriage fun.”

If you indulge over the long run, it affects the relationship. Alcoholism is a progressive kind of disease that gets worse.

“My spouse will fulfill all my needs.”

It is impossible to get all your needs met through your partner.

“My work or what my parents want is more important than our marriage.”

Change your priorities.

“This is the way you do it. We will follow the way my parents did it. It should be ...”

Instead ask, “What do you want?” and learn to compromise.

“Having a baby will fix the problem.”

Parenting brings new challenges to be worked out.

Beware of These Misleading Beliefs



“We will live happily ever after.”

Marriage is learning how to work through your differences with what life brings.

“I am telling you how to do it. Stop doing it that way.”

Don't let your marriage be “dead in the water before it ever gets going.” If you care and love someone, you can come to a compromise.

“Women defer to a man” or “Wives are an extension of their husbands.”

Each partner needs to be strong enough to express what they believe in, even if they disagree. Use tools and techniques to find a common ground.

“You are a whim if you can't manage your own life.”

Get help from a third party such as a mediator, therapist, or life coach to see things for what they are. Make a pact to go to counseling together to identify why you are having problems.

“Compromise is weak.”

Compromising is one of the most recommended ways to reach a resolution.

Beware of These Misleading Beliefs

“Tell the other what to do.”

Offer options. Be loving and supportive. Listen. Help your spouse figure out how to fix it themselves.

“Getting married is a childhood dream come true.”

Let the dream go. Marriage is not a party or instant gratification, but it's worth it.

“You must agree on politics.”

Agree not to discuss politics. You do not have to think the same way as your spouse.

“My way or the highway.”

Learn to compromise and negotiate.

“My family can do no wrong.”

See your family from your spouse's point of view and say “You are right. I agree.”

“When having an argument, it is okay to slam doors, say ‘forget it,’ or run away.”

When angry and feeling distant, try to work through it. Give it time and tell your spouse you will return at a certain hour. You need to go through your own growth experience. To maintain the connection, come back and talk about it. Be ready for a new experience and go forward.

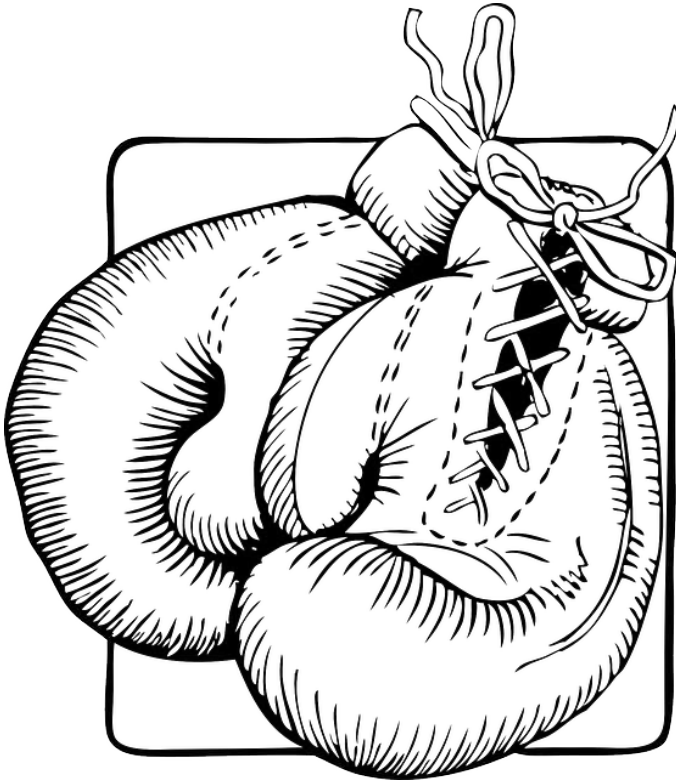
When in Conflict

Dealing with the Rough Spots

Both spouses agreed that there are always rough spots because each individual has their own thoughts as to how things should be. To deal with conflict, they said they make their own rules such as “no name-calling” and “no swearing.”

Disagree without Being Disagreeable

Both people said disagreements are not necessarily a bad thing, but can be a good thing, as long as there are no personal attacks or name calling. Different points of view can enrich a relationship.



When in Conflict

Words Hurt

The wife explained that it is very difficult to take words back because words can destroy. She uses wisdom to choose when a specific reaction is appropriate. For example, if she had rushed home and told her husband she did not love him anymore, she knew she would regret it.

The Don'ts

Both spouses said they talk and share their feelings and desires, yet they don't take it personally. The couple shared they don't take on their spouse's pain because they are living their own separate lives.

Watch Yourself

The wife revealed she watches how she says things to her partner and says them the way she would like to be told something. She does not criticize or correct her spouse in front of other people.

A Different Lens

The husband shared he remembers to see his wife's point of view. He tries not to be pointing the finger, for he knows there is a reason why his spouse sees it in a different way.

Time Limit

The husband asks his wife to agree to a time limit on this question. Then he said he really listens to what she is asking and tries to respond.

Pointers

Both spouses agreed they control their actions. They choose the best time to work on a conflict. Timing is an important factor, as is vocabulary. They are honest with how they feel. Feelings are valid for the person feeling them. The husband and wife realize they can want it to go a certain way, but they cannot control the outcome.

When in Conflict

Immovable Issues

The wife said do not make a conflict “Your Life Tragedy.” She agrees to disagree, rather than have it become a sore that they both keep picking at. With an on-going disagreement, she shared they use a third party to move it in some direction.

Choose Your Battles

The husband said some battles are more important than others. For example, it is easier to help vacuum than to have a fight.

When Needing a Shove

Both spouses agreed that when going through a difficult time in their marriage, they found help through a friend. He said to them, “When you met, you were attracted to each other. Find it. It is there.”

We Are Wired Differently

The wife revealed they used a mediator when they were stuck. The counselor helped her husband hear his wife. By translating, he reworded what she was saying. “We didn’t understand each other,” she said.

Go for Success, Not Failure

The wife stated they communicate to reach a compromise. The expectation to communicate to change the other does not work. “To alienate my husband is not worth it,” she said.

Possible Challenges to Expect:
Finances • In-Laws • Children • Sex • Health
Household Tasks • Time

“Don’t Pull a Fast One”

The wife said if she or her spouse want to make a major purchase, they talk about it ahead of time. They agree to the rule “No Surprises.” Having the view it is “Our Money” builds a trust level between them. What is left over after paying the bills is for fun and other priorities.

Handling Money

The couple agrees to the rules that the cheapest purchase wins and when in doubt about making a purchase, they don’t.

Like the In-Laws

The wife shared she goes to see her mother-in-law for her spouse. “After all, I married her son, and my Mother treats him the same as her own children.”



Possible Challenges to Expect:

A United Front

The wife said they have learned not to put their parents or their own children above the marriage. Being on the same page, they make their own decisions together about both.

Children Upset the Apple Cart

The husband advised “Hang in there; it’s worth it” despite difficulties such as two of the three children choosing not to follow their parents’ traditional religious beliefs. Now the couple attend a different church that has a more liberal view.

Sex Is Important

The wife shared that, as a couple, they have many differences that are difficult to resolve. She found having sex often helps their marriage.

Make Sex Fun

The wife said that instead of feeling performance anxiety, they break down laughing during sex. This shows a humorous side that keeps them from getting competitive.

Sickness

The husband stated they have learned to live with his wife’s illness. “When one is struggling with sickness, remember the other is too,” he said.

“A Child Brought Them Together”

The wife said she was attracted to the father and his child. After they married, the boy became ill for many years. They were committed to taking care of him. “He is in our hearts,” she said.

“The Glue That Held the Relationship Together”

The husband shared that when he “hit bottom” with the problem of alcoholism, he worked through it, out of commitment to their child. “She made things have meaning and was the best we could have together.” he said.

Possible Challenges to Expect:

Two Different Perspectives

The husband revealed he wanted the children to make their own decisions and mistakes. His wife said they were not smart enough. Spouses have different beliefs about parenting.

Mismanagement of Finances

Through working in the banking business, the husband said he has seen many couples have money problems that led to marital disaster. “We manage our finances well,” he said.

The Team Approach

The wife shared that women define what a team looks like, but men see it differently. Women’s standards for dish-washing and cleanliness are not the same as men. Be a co-captain rather than “help out when needed” when sharing household chores.

Feeding the Marriage with Time

Both agreed that they provide a space to talk. With rare exception, Friday night has been their date night every week for 26 years.



Virtues: Powerful Qualities

Appreciation

The wife said she expresses appreciation for the thoughtful little things her husband does such as, before she gets in the car, he has it warm on chilly mornings. She doesn't let it go by, and in the mornings, she lays out clothes for him to wear to the office.

Empathy and Understanding

The husband shared that it is helpful to be attentive to what is going on when your spouse is different. "When my mother-in-law passed, I learned skills to express empathy and understanding with my wife as she changed," he said.

Respect

The wife explained she is interested in what her husband likes to do and asks about his projects. It gives them a lot to talk about. She respects his talent, which she does not have. On the other hand, she is better at handling finances. "We work together to find a mutual agreement on how to spend money," she said.

Adaptability

Both the husband and wife agreed that marriage is not like happy dating days. Understand it will not be an ideal situation. Realize there will be hard times and you will butt heads, but keep trying. You will be glad you did.

Acceptance

Learn who your partner is and accept them for who they are.

Service

The wife suggested finding some kind of service work to do together. They both grew up on a farm. Now they grow food and give it away to those in need. "For us, it has been a blessing beyond words," she said.

Virtues: Powerful Qualities

Forgiveness

The husband said his wife helps him to see the point when he is wrong. Instead of holding a grudge, he apologizes by saying, “You are right, sorry.”

Fidelity

The wife shared she did not feel any love, but she knew she could bring it back by being loving. She pretended she loved her husband. When she started being nicer to him, he began to be more loving. She learned she can choose to love or not. She said it is 100% about herself. She made the decision to love.

Commitment

The husband revealed when he married, he made a commitment. Like making a vow to learn how to swim, he chose to be in a marriage that has made him a bigger person than if he remained single.

Flexibility

The husband stated that as a couple, one carries the other with what life brings. My wife was strong when I had a drinking problem, and when her mother passed, I ran the show. “Ride with the tide,” he suggested.

Consideration

The wife said there is a way to speak to your husband. If you would not say this.....or in this way.....to your neighbor, do not say it to your spouse.

Helpfulness

The wife suggested each spouse be willing to share in ALL household tasks.



PART II - PRACTICE TECHNIQUES

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Compassionate Communication (Also known as Nonviolent Communication)

The First Form – Expressing Honesty

Basic Steps:

- (a) Express an observation of what a person said or did.
- (b) Say what you feel about what happened.
- (c) Say what the need, want, or value is that is associated with your feeling.
- (d) Express a request.

For example, (a) When I heard you speak up when I was speaking, (b) I felt disappointed (c) because I wanted to be heard. (d) Are you willing to wait until I finish speaking before offering your thoughts?

The Second Form – Expressing Empathy

Basic Steps:

- (a) When you spoke up when I was speaking (Express Observation)
- (b) Were you feeling excited (Guess Feeling)
- (c) Because you were wanting clarification (Guess Need)
- (d) Would you like for me to make space for you to check on the accuracy of your thoughts? (Express Request)

Other examples: “Are you feeling annoyed because.....” or “So you are furious and would appreciate.....”



Compassionate Communication

Feelings When Our Needs ARE Being Met

Affectionate	Surprised
Grateful	Confident
Proud	Optimistic
Safe	Happy
Secure	Peaceful
Curious	Comfortable
Interested	Relaxed
Stimulated	Rested
Inspired	Satisfied
Excited	Ecstatic
Enthusiastic	

Feelings When Our Needs Are NOT Being Met

Afraid	Puzzled
Frightened	Bored
Worried	Distant
Annoyed	Uninterested
Impatient	Shocked
Angry	Troubled
Resentful	Uneasy
Contempt	Upset
Disgusted	Ashamed
Confused	Exhausted
Hesitant	Tired
Devastated	Irritable
Lonely	Nervous
Miserable	Overwhelmed
Sad	Vulnerable
Depressed	Insecure
Heavy hearted	Sensitive
Unhappy	Jealous
Anxious	

Compassionate Communication

Needs / Wants / Desires / Values / Hope / Longings

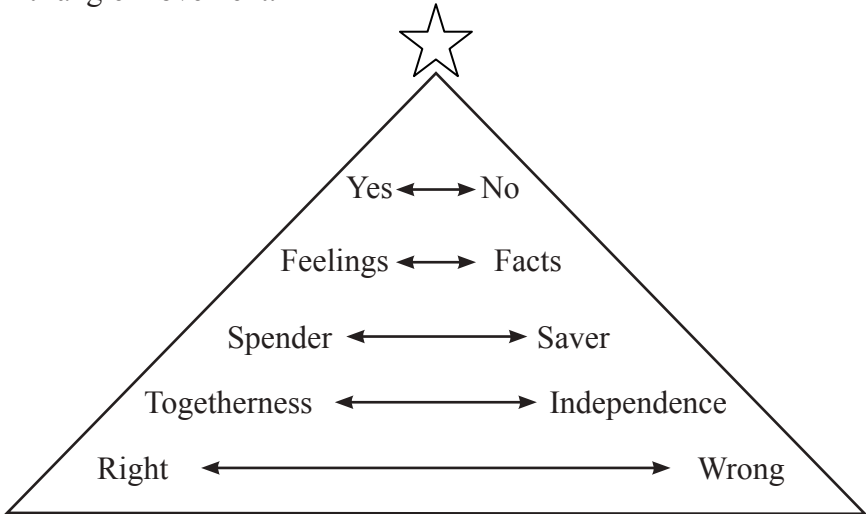
Connection	Fun
Acceptance	Laughter
Appreciation	Adventure
Communication	Beauty
Closeness	Ease
Community	Harmony
Companionship	Inspiration
Consideration	Rest/sleep
Empathy	Food
Honesty	Exercise
Intimacy	Sexual Expression
Love	Touch
Mutuality	Clarity
Respect/Self-respect	Creativity
Security	Growth
Support	Learning
To see and be seen	Participation
Freedom	Spontaneity
Trust	Independence
Authenticity	Space
Play	To understand and be understood

Adapted from Asheville Center for Compassionate Communication. www.ashevilleccc.com (See Suggested Reading)



Higher Third

- The Higher Third Principle is used as a way to settle conflict. It differs from compromise in that less loss is experienced.
- Reconciliation occurs when each partner lifts their perspective, moving higher and closer toward the opposite point, forming a triangle movement.



- Instead of being caught in the opposites, spouses find a unique solution through positive thought and unifying principles.
- The goals are respect for what the other offers and creative thinking.

Example: The wife asks her husband, “Would you like to go out to dinner tonight?” “No,” he says, thinking the discussion has ended. However, with an understanding the couple is a team where each cares about the needs of the other, the husband volunteers to offer another suggestion, “Would you like to take a walk after dinner?” “Yes,” says the wife. “Do you want to find a café or coffee shop to have dessert?” They continue the dialogue until a mutually-agreed upon decision is reached where both are satisfied with the outcome.

Adapted from Carol E. Parrish-Harris, Ph.D., *The New Dictionary of Spiritual Thought*. Tahlequah, Oklahoma: Sparrow Hawk Press, 2002, p. 120.

Processing Time: A Weekly Meeting for Repair or Preventive Work

Time (Hot Button Issue)

Maintenance Time – Daily, each person speaks for ten minutes. The other spouse listens and does not interrupt.

OUR Time – Two hours of fun and play once a week.

Processing Time - the ability to keep dialogue flowing through steps used within an hour of time set aside. Decide in advance on a topic you want to discuss.

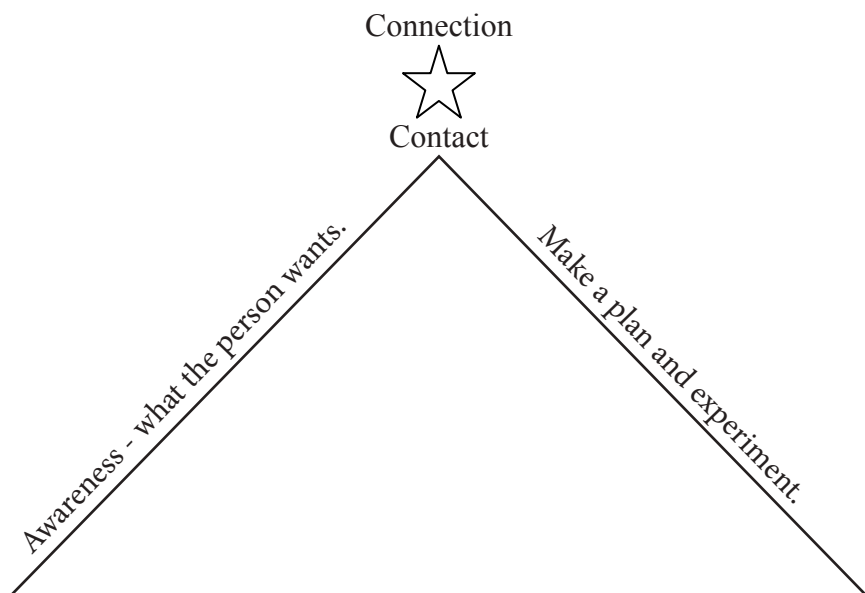
The Steps for a Business Meeting/Processing Time:

(30 Minutes for each person)

1. Decide who is the Presenter and who is the Listener.
2. Presenter: Take one topic at a time; explain what makes it an issue; say what you want. (You may desire to practice the NVC skills.)
3. Listener: Listen to what is being said and pay attention to how you feel. Say how you feel. Say what you think is being asked for and clarify this. Respond. (Offer to do or change as much as you think you can without resentment. This change will be on a trial basis. You can come back again and make adjustments, if necessary. If you are unable to offer a change, go to “Movement and Speech” on the next page. Using this technique is helpful to move forward. Then return to “Processing Time” and complete the remaining steps.)
4. Both Presenter and the Listener talk until an agreement is reached on a next step. (The Presenter tries to accept any offer that moves things in their direction. Make a plan for where and when the change will start.)
5. Presenter expresses appreciation. (Remember change is difficult for everyone.)

**Processing Time:
A Weekly Meeting for Repair or Preventive Work**

6. The Presenter and the Listener say what they think was just decided. Make sure each is saying the same thing.
7. Next, the Presenter becomes the Listener and the Listener becomes the Presenter, who brings up a new topic to be processed, using the six steps listed above.



Adapted from Anne Burns Harris, *When Two Souls...Find Each Other...Someone still needs to take out the trash.* pp. 70-71. (See Suggested Reading)

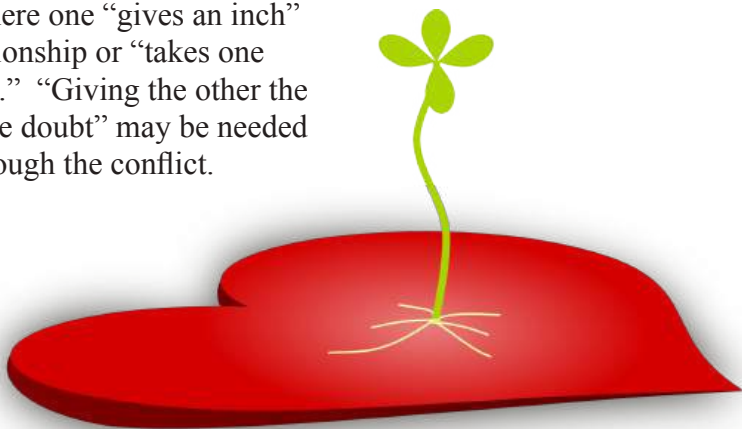
Movement and Speech

Taking the Other Person's Point of View

1. Switch chairs with one another.
2. Take a minute to imagine you are your partner. Reflect on what has been said from their point of view. Guess how they feel about this issue.
3. Say three sentences out loud, beginning with “My name is (partner’s name).”
4. Express the feelings of your partner in the sentences.
5. Next, the other person says three sentences from their partner’s point of view, beginning with “My name is (partner’s name).”
6. Both ask the other if they were correct with what they had said. Each tells their partner which parts were right and which were not.
7. Through the mini-dialogue you have achieved contact, but not agreement. You have connected enough to safely return to the steps in **Processing Time** to look again at the resentment introduced.

Anne Burns Harris, pp. 98-99. (See Suggested Reading)

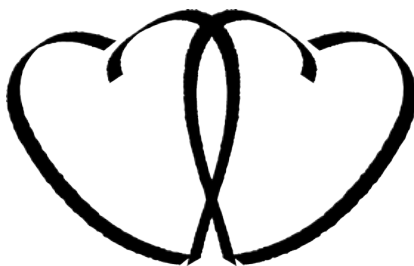
Author’s Note: Using this technique when in an impasse helps create the situation where one “gives an inch” for the relationship or “takes one for the team.” “Giving the other the benefit of the doubt” may be needed to move through the conflict.



HeartShare Appreciations

Sit in separate chairs, facing each other. A person talks for 10 minutes on one of the following incomplete statements, while the other listens. Then switch roles with the speaker becoming the listener. Remember: Do not interrupt the speaker. It is their time to talk and be listened to. Use “I” statements. Try to do this weekly at a mutually agreed upon time.

- I love how you...
- Thank you for...
- It's nice when you...
- I like when you say...
- I appreciate your passion about...
- I appreciate the way you've helped me grow by...
- One way in which you've grown that I appreciate is by...
- In your interactions with others, I really appreciate the way you...
- I appreciate how much you've taught me about...
- I appreciate your body, especially your...
- One unique quality you have that I appreciate is...
- I enjoy your laughter/smile/voice...
- I believe we can...
- It makes my day when you say/do...



After you have expressed your appreciations to your partner, notice your improved feelings and be appreciative of the way you feel.

Pripo Teplitsky. www.heartsharecounseling.com (See Suggested Reading)

Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document

As a couple, write a personal document, preferably before you marry or as newlyweds when things are going smoothly and each can effortlessly describe what they cherish about their partner. Like a road map, the writing sets into place how you can recognize the relationship before it is broken and what to do to return to its original state. Each person writes separately five parts that are combined together, creating one document.

The Story of Us, the first element, includes what the partner loves most about the other and what attracted them to this particular person.

In the second part, *Interactive Styles and Warning Signs*, each describes how they like to be loved, hear criticism, and receive bad news. They also write how they react when upset and what they want their partner to do about it which are clues of dissatisfaction. For example, one may go silent and want the other to sit beside them, or a spouse may desire alone time for 24 hours and then for them to talk.

In *Expectations*, the third element, the couple mindfully custom-designs a list of non-negotiables that includes what they want to do and be together. They may write their preferences for cleanliness in the home, attending church together, or defining commitment.

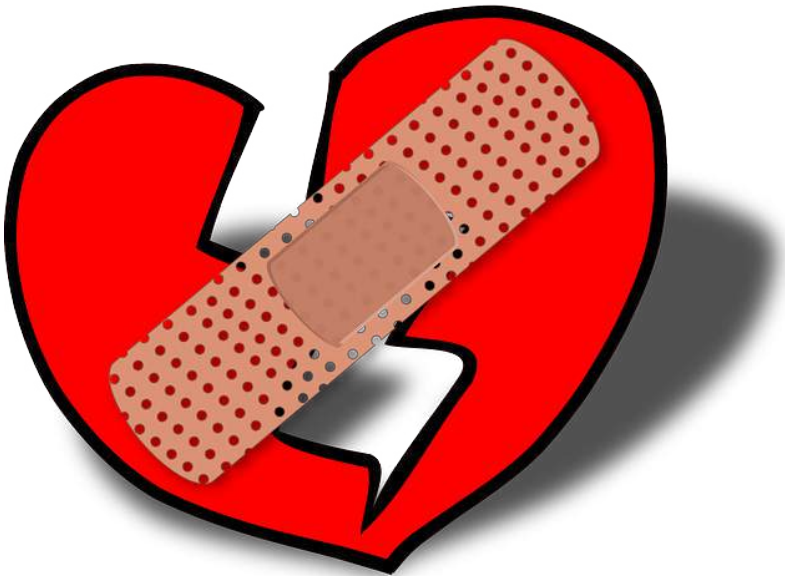
In *Questions to Return to Peace*, the fourth part, the couple commits to answering questions of their choice that will help them return to a state of harmony. Suggestions are “Why do I not feel safe?” or “Is this about money?” or “What truth do I want to say right now?” Written ahead of time, the questions create the bridge back to peace when needed.

Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document

The last component, *Short and Long-Term Agreements* is where each writes how much time they need before they want to use the blueprint to return to a good place. A short-term example could be two days or two hours. For a permanent ending, a couple may commit to five years before they can reconcile and find peace with the relationship. Within that time frame, the couple agrees to not speak negatively about or physically harm the other.


The couple reviews the contract as often as desired. As spouses grow and change or new learning occurs, they make changes to suit their unique relationship.

Adapted from Maureen K. McCarthy and Zelle Nelson. www.blueprintofwe.com (See Suggested Reading)



Suggested Reading

- Bloom, Linda and Charlie. *101 Things I Wish I Knew When I Got Married: Simple Lessons to Make Love Last*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2004.
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- Chapman, Gary. *The Five Love Languages*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2004.
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- Gilbert, Elizabeth. *Committed*. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.
- Harris, Anne Burns, Ph.D. *When Two Souls...Find Each Other... Someone still needs to take out the trash*. Asheville, NC: Grateful Steps, 2009.
- McCarthy, Maureen K. and Zelle Nelson. *Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document*, available from [Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document.com](http://BlueprintofWE.com).
- Piver, Sharon. *The Hard Questions*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2000.
- Providence Films. *Fireproof*. Albany, Ga.: Sherwood Baptist Church, 2009.
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- Teplitsky, Pripo, MA, LPC. *40 Starter Sentences Relationship Tips*, available from www.heartsharecounseling.com.
- Ward, Rebecca Fuller, MSW. *How to Stay Married Without Going Crazy*. Highland City, FL.: Rainbow Books, Inc. 2000.
- Zweig, Connie, Ph.D. and Steve Wolf, Ph.D. *Romancing the Shadow*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1997.

A photograph of two people holding hands over a body of water at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, shimmering reflection on the water's surface. The sky is a mix of soft orange and pale blue. The silhouettes of trees are visible in the background. The overall mood is romantic and peaceful.

*May your future together be filled
with joy and love,*

Katherine