

MARITAL TUNE-UP & GUIDELINES FOR ENHANCING INTIMACY

The suggestions below are some methods and techniques that a couple can use to improve their marital interactions. These serve only as suggestions and may not apply to all couples or situations, but they can often be beneficial.

- Try to recognize and acknowledge the feelings and thoughts of your spouse. Let them know that you understand what they are saying. A simple way to do this is to repeat or paraphrase what you've heard; do not interpret, deny, or change what you heard them say. Simply reflect it back so your spouse knows you understand. Do not try to solve their problem; simply acknowledge that you heard them.
- When communicating negative feelings to your spouse, try to discuss the behavior that upset you. Do not bring up old stuff, past experiences, or a general assessment of their personality or character. Be specific and avoid generalizations.
- Do something pleasing for each other on a regular basis. A way to do this is for both partners to make lists of things they enjoy, and write these activities on slips of paper, then put the slips into jars – one for him and one for her. If you feel like doing something nice for your partner, simply reach in the jar and pull out a slip. Then do it – right away, so you don't forget. Remember that there will always be reasons to not do something nice for your partner. Try to do it anyway, even if "they don't deserve it" or "they haven't done anything for me first." You are investing in creating a "quality relationship."
- Remember that both partners contribute to marital problems. Arguments, fights, disagreements, and unhappiness tend to be mutually caused and maintained. No one is singly responsible. When a couple can openly acknowledge their mutual contribution to problems, they are well on their way to solving them.
- Take time alone away from the children and other "corporate" commitments on a regular basis. Often couples forget that their relationship needs nurturing and attention separate from children, jobs, and household responsibilities. It is important to reinforce the romance and friendship in a marriage on a regular basis. A marriage/relationship cannot grow without attention and focus.
- Recognize that marriage changes over time and that the changes need not be negative. Romantic love is not the only form of loving. The intimate friendship that can grow from romance can, in the long run, be even more rewarding than the excitement and newness of romantic love. Romance never fades completely; it simply changes over time, and ebbs and flows.
- Try to develop friendships and interests outside of the marriage. This provides stimulation that can benefit both the individual partners and the marriage. Bring new interests and ideas to share with your spouse. Your marriage can only be as interesting as "each" of you are to yourselves.
- A marriage is only as happy as the individual partners are. A marriage is made up of what you each bring into it for yourselves, and the more you give to each other, the more you'll get back.

- Though you may sometimes feel cheated because you "give" too much, or give more than your partner, it will balance out in the long run. You are investing in a relationship that you intend to last. Temporary sacrifices will result in long-term gains.

- Be aware that, over time, things you found most likeable about each other may fade. This is normal; the longer you are together, the more you get used to each other. New ideas, experiences, and behaviors are necessary to keep you interested in each other. Often things you found attractive can become annoying – try to examine those parts of yourself that you may not like and see if your spouse is reminding you of them.
 - Marriage is an ongoing process that requires attention, effort, and compromise. As you grow and change as individuals, so too must the marriage change. The marriage ceremony is the beginning of a work-in-progress.
 - When a conflict arises, be prepared to problem-solve and brainstorm some ideas to resolve the problem. Do not expect 100 percent satisfaction; you are dealing with the needs of another person, as well as your own. If you are both willing to give an inch, there will be far more room to strike a balance between each of your needs.
 - Remember the goal of fighting is to resolve conflict, not to win a "battle." Winners have to have losers, and winners ultimately "stand alone." You can agree to disagree and take a break from your conflict. If it's important, it will be there when you get back.
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- Try to remember that your goal in marriage is to grow while enhancing your partner's "self." Uplifting your spouse will ultimately expand you, as well.

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The rescue of your marriage from cyberspace requires the same skills as would be needed to face any challenge to your relationship. Recommit your attention and energy to focusing on the relationship, and begin to do something different than before. Simply making a commitment toward just spending more time together can make a huge difference. The point is to change some of the basic patterns that may be contributing to being stuck in the marriage and to remember that Internet addiction is a reminder that work has to be done!

The except above is from the book "**Virtual Addiction**" by Dr. David Greenfield