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Release Date: Immediate

Enhancing Midlife Marriage

Because marriage is a constantly evolving process, couples need to learn new skills as well as sharpen existing ones to navigate the changes of midlife marriage. A vital and satisfying marriage requires marital maintenance.

Working together to select goals, make decisions, develop strategies and cope with multiple responsibilities will likely result in a stronger relationship. Here are a few ways to maintain that marriage potential.

1. Spend Time together - Scheduling time with your spouse may reduce the chance of it being “leftover time.” Make this time together fun by enjoying simple things together like a walk, a sunset, or a cup of coffee.

2. Common Goals and Teamwork - Revisit and revise your goals periodically to adapt to changing life events. Use these goals and values to set priorities and make decisions as a team.

3. Communication and Expectations - Try not to assume that you know your spouse’s preferences and opinions. Ask questions to clarify each other’s position on issues before decisions are made. Each partner has an obligation to verbalize his or her own expectations to avoid misunderstandings.

4. Appreciation and Affection - Sometimes partners who have been married a long time may unknowingly take each other for granted and expressions of appreciation can be forgotten. Showing appreciation and affection are powerful methods of strengthening a marriage. Love must be shown in words and actions.

5. Sexual Fulfillment - Normal physical and emotional changes at midlife reduce desire, however there are many ways to compensate and adjust. It is important to communicate with your spouse how you feel.

6. Agreement on Roles - Even if a couple has worked out their roles on who does what for the early years of their marriage, midlife may be a time when partners want to revise their role assignments. Reduced work schedules, increased work duties, retirement, or caring for aging parents, for example may require renegotiating roles and responsibilities.

7. Commitment to Growth - Examine your dedication to each other and make a commitment to grow together for the second half of your marriage. Let go of disappointments in each other and look forward to the second half of married life, making it the best it can be!

Most couples have a great deal of unrealized potential in their relationship, but it takes a lifetime of sharing and caring to achieve it. The goal of marital maintenance is to develop, through a process of growth and behavior change, the potential for a mutually satisfying and creative relationship.

The potential for a stronger relationship is realized as spouses develop a realistic appreciation of their partner as a person and value each other's contributions to the marriage. Through communication and mutual sharing, couples are well on their way to enriching and strengthening their marriages.

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