

Building Rock Solid Marriages That Last

Marriage can have its challenges. Like anything else, changes come with time; shifts within the individual, relationship movement and external life events. As the honeymoon phase of a relationship gets further away in the rear-view mirror, it's important for the long term stabilizing factors like respect, friendship, commitment and common goals to kick in. When work, family and other obligations stress the system, it's crucial to remember to prioritize the relationship itself in the form of date nights, quality time spent together, intimacy and physical connection (even small but consistent micro-doses can be like glue that keeps the marriage connected).

For many, the most critical aspect of having a rock solid marriage (or long term relationship), is emotional safety within the relationship. Both must feel they can fully emotionally rely on each other and have a collaborative spirit in how they approach things. A marriage is in trouble if it has become adversarial and emotional safety must be re-established. If too much time has passed in the emotionally unsafe zone, it can be really challenging for the couple to trust each other or be open at all to change.

According to Judith S. Wallerstein, PhD, co-author of the book "The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts," there are a number of psychological "tasks" a rock solid marriage needs to work on. Here are some of them:

- * Build togetherness based on a shared intimacy and identity, while at the same time set boundaries to protect each partner's autonomy.
- * Establish a rich and pleasurable sexual relationship and protect it from the intrusions of the workplace and family obligations.
- * For couples with children, embrace the daunting roles of parenthood and absorb the impact of a baby's entrance into the marriage. Learn to continue the work of protecting the privacy of you and your spouse as a couple.
- * Maintain the strength of the marital bond in the face of adversity. The marriage should be a safe haven in which partners are able to express their differences, anger and conflict.
- * Nurture and comfort each other, satisfying each partner's needs for dependency and offering continuing encouragement and support.

It's also important for each person to identify their attachment styles to build a stronger relationship. This is particularly important for those who have a history of not being able to depend on important people in their lives as the adult intimate relationship can bring up the fears and coping strategies adopted around those earlier situations. Learning how these patterns interact with each other, without judgment of either, leads to greater understanding of how to grow and heal within the relationship.

- * Be a detective and find out what works and doesn't work for your partner.
- * Make agreements to repair when the other is triggered to relieve distress.
- * Establish a "couple bubble" which is like a safe place for your marriage.

John Gottman, PhD, is also another researcher and advocate of rock solid relationships. His work studying couples in a lab setting and slew of published books has contributed much to what we know about satisfying and successful relationships. A few of Dr. Gottman's most notable nuggets

are his "7 principles" of successful married couples:

- * They manage conflict.
- * They accept each other's influence.
- * They express fondness and admiration for each other.
- * They stay aware of each other's worlds.
- * They turn towards each other instead of away from each other.
- * They solve problems that are solvable.
- * They create shared meaning.

If you'd like a rock solid marriage, the above concepts; including emotional safety, creating a couple bubble and principles of the most successful couples can point you in the right track.

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