

Strategies to Enhance Your Marriage

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COUPLES OFTEN ENTER MARRIAGE with great, but conflicting, expectations. The old joke is that men marry hoping that their wives will never change, while women marry hoping their husbands will change. But often they are both disappointed. Expectations about roles, responsibilities, and how the perfect wife (or husband) should behave stem from our individual, family, and cultural histories. Differences and conflicts are inevitable. But how you handle the gap between your expectations and reality will determine whether your marriage becomes a battlefield or a source of great fulfillment.

Terrence Real, founder of Relational Life Therapy and author of *The New Rules of Marriage*, identifies five losing relationship strategies that result in dysfunctional patterns of relating. These strategies, along with their negative consequences, include: Needing to be Right (leads to objectivity battles and self-righteous indignation); Controlling Your Partner (leads to manipulation, coercion, and inevitable payback); Unbridled Self-Expression (leads to only one voice being heard); Retaliation (leads to explicit or passive-aggressive offending from the victim position); and Withdrawal (leads to resignation and puts a stranglehold on the relationship).

To counteract these losing strategies, Mr. Real describes five winning relationship strategies that honor both partners and move them past their knee-jerk reactivity. According to Real, this enlightened view of relationship empowerment

addresses the basic question, "What do you need from me so that I can help you give me what I want?"

1. Shifting from Complaint to Request: You ask, not criticize, by moving from a negative/past to a positive/future focus. Rather than assassinating the character

can without debating the facts. They remember that their partner is sharing their perspective. This is followed by giving whatever they can.

4. Empowering Each Other: In this final phase of the repair process, you ask your partner, in addition to expressing appreciation for what

they are willing to give, what you can do to help them follow through on their commitment. This is where the golden rule of relationships applies: It is in our best interest to assist each other, knowing that neither of us will be happy if one of us is unhappy.

5. Cherishing: You express appreciation for the abundance in your relationship and cultivate your capacity to enjoy and savor it. You cherish your partner by expressing appreciation for their efforts and the gifts they bring to the relationship as well as showing an increased desire

to be pleasing in return. Cherishing helps you and your partner remain lovers when the children and other family obligations leave little time or energy for romance.

Of the five winning strategies, cherishing stands alone as the most powerful by amplifying what you want to experience in your marriage. ■

Jeffrey L. Santee, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist with advanced training in cognitive psychology and behavioral medicine. In addition to his work in men's and marital issues, he specializes in the treatment of depression, anxiety disorders, and stress-related health problems. Treatment modalities include individual, marital, and group therapy.



of your partner, you make specific, behavioral requests that are reasonable.

2. Speaking Out with Love and Savvy: You initiate making repairs in the relationship by first remembering the love you have for your partner and reflecting on how their behavior impacted you and what you want. You give feedback by describing what you saw and heard, how you interpreted it, how you felt, and what you would like in the future.

3. Responding with Generosity: The responding partner listens to understand their partner's perspective without interrupting and acknowledges whatever they



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SUMMIT Welcomes a New Psychiatrist



SUMMIT CLINICAL SERVICES is delighted to announce the addition of Sameen Ahmad, M.D., to its staff. Dr. Ahmad completed her residency in psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center and her medical school education at the Aga Khan University Medical College in Pakistan. She is certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and neurology. Having practiced in Illinois for several years, she comes to us with high recommendations.

Dr. Ahmad loves to practice general psychiatry in the adult population. Her clinical interests include anxiety, psychosis, depression, and bipolar disorder. She sees psychiatry as being in an exciting phase, with a progressively expanding spectrum of pharmacological interventions as well as therapeutic modalities. She finds it particularly rewarding to see people overcome adversity and restore their quality of life despite their initial limitations. ■

For more information, or to schedule an appointment with Dr. Ahmad, call Summit Clinical Services at (630)260-0606.

Connecting with Your Kids

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN newborn pictures and college graduation, parenting becomes much more difficult than we ever could have imagined. As we navigate these experiences, it is easy to feel lost in our relationships with our children. Below are some ideas that could help you feel a bit more in control of your family's journey.

1. KEEPING THE PEACE

Harvey Karp, author of *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, wrote about an important family rule: whoever is most upset, talks first. As parents, we often feel the need and even the right to talk first. However, we can improve our communication and overall relationship with our kids if we step back and allow our child to speak first. By acknowledging our children's emotions, we can validate them and provide support. Once they have had time to speak, parents may step in, explain their reactions and even address consequences, if needed.

2. MONITOR SCREEN USE

I do believe in monitoring screen use for children; however, in this case, I am referring to being aware of your own technology time. A recent study indicated young children physically look to their parents for feedback an average of 1-2 times per minute. Imagine you are checking your email for five minutes while your child plays nearby. That is potentially 10 times that you did not appear available to your child. Being a parent is one of the busiest jobs in the world; add expectations for work, extended family, and school, and there is a seemingly impossible amount to be done. However, if you are more aware of your time on screens, you may find that your children are more open and responsive to family interactions.



3. STAY POSITIVE

Take time to observe your children doing something good. Within the hectic week, it is normal to check-in on homework, chores, or activities. But we sometimes forget to tell our kids about all of the kind, smart, and funny things that they do every day. A simple "Thanks for doing the dishes" or "So nice of you to help your brother" can prove that all of those great things are important and appreciated.

Hopefully, your family can use these ideas to make your ride a little smoother! ■

Dr. Danielle Romano-Cihak is a licensed clinical psychologist, who is dedicated to working with children, young adults, and families to help support healthy, happy relationships.

Mindfulness and Relationships

LATELY, IT SEEMS THAT mindfulness is a trendy topic. What is mindfulness, exactly? According to Wikipedia, mindfulness is "the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment..." Being mindful in a relationship means taking interactions at face value and not assuming. It means seeing things as they are, not as they were or as they could be. In my work with clients, I have realized that applying the idea of mindfulness to relationships can help people develop and maintain healthy connections with others. I have noticed that when people are future or past oriented, relationships can become problematic.

Being future oriented, you might focus on a partner's behavior and assume it will never change or will even worsen. You tend to think in terms of "What if?" For example, you might have a partner who failed to do a chore he promised he would do. If you are future oriented, you might think, "If he can't keep his word, what if he is untrustworthy in everything? How can I depend on him?" Being future oriented can produce anxiety and worry.

On the other hand, you might be oriented more in the past. This type of thinking in a relationship can often foster hurts and resentment. If you are past oriented with the above partner who failed to do a chore, you might think, "Here we go again.

I'm the only one who follows through." Your hurt and anger are based on history rather than the present situation. Ironically, that history may not even have been with your partner but with another person in your life.

How can you incorporate mindfulness in your relationships? First, ask yourself what you actually know. Focus on the current situation. It can help to check with your partner about facts vs. assumptions. Finally, realize that both you and your partner have baggage that you bring to the relationship. When you can filter out that baggage and deal with the present, your communication will improve, and your relationship will improve. ■

Lisa Hopkins, N.C.C., L.C.P.C., C.A.D.C., P.C.G.C., enjoys working with couples and individuals to help them improve the quality of their relationships.