

elevate your RELATIONSHIP

Love for a Lifetime: Acting on Your Love for Your Spouse

If you're like most couples, you frequently say "I love you" to your spouse. But, have you ever paused to consider what those three little words really mean? Love can be a noun—as in any object of devotion, attachment, or admiration. Love can also be a verb—the actions or feelings associated with passion, desire, or devotion. Sometimes love is romantic and full of pleasure. At other times, it is simply unselfish loyalty and shared common interests.

Marital love then, ought to mean caring for your partner rather than taking care of or taking from your partner. So what can a couple do to ensure that their marriage has every opportunity to succeed?

- Take care of yourself. Partners shouldn't have to sacrifice their personal desires or needs for each other, but they should always consider the impact meeting their own needs will have on their spouse. Work to feel good about yourself and strong inside, so you can be caring and nurturing toward your partner. Remember that your partner is never responsible for your happiness, self-worth, or well-being. Be responsible for your own actions.
- Make time for your spouse to keep your marriage top priority. Do something you both enjoy on a regular basis. Children, work, other commitments, and social activities all take time and can become overly demanding. Be sure to keep a balance among them, not allowing any one to dominate and crowd out the relationship you have with your spouse. However, keep in mind that healthy marriages have a balance of time for self (me) and time together (we).
- Keep the channels of communication open. Intimacy cannot be achieved until both partners are willing to be open and honest. Let your spouse know your needs. The only way they can know is if you openly and honestly talk about them. Unspoken expectations are likely to go unmet.
- Do not avoid discussing differences. Most of us have heard that old saying, "Never go to bed angry"—the truth in it lies in the fact that conflict is best dealt with when it

occurs. Otherwise, all the small irritants build up over time and eventually come out in one gigantic eruption. Try to create an atmosphere in which each partner feels free to be open and disagreements can be worked out without fear of being attacked, punished, or lectured. And be willing to forgive. Holding on to angry feelings doesn't make people feel very loving.

- Play, laugh, and have fun. Be spontaneous. Marriages that are structured and ridged can become boring and dull. Don't do the same things in the same way every day. Vary your routines a little. Show affection openly and often. Send text messages or leave notes that remind your partner how you feel about him/her. It's true that actions speak louder than words, but we still like to hear the words, too. Say "I love you" out loud to your partner.

When caring, understanding, and consideration are evident in your marriage, it becomes easier for couples to be sources of support for each other, even when times get tough. Couples who regularly take time to nourish their partner are making an investment in securing the future of their marriage, enabling it to endure and prosper. What are you doing to keep your love strong for a lifetime?

Activity

Sit down with your partner and individually write down ways you like to receive love. As you share your list, brainstorm ways each of you can show love in the way you each desire. Discuss ways you each could improve individually and together in taking care of yourself, making couple time, communicating, dealing with conflict in a healthy way, and having fun together. Put your ideas in writing and check back with each other over time to see if things are going well. Be open to change over time, as needs evolve.

For more resources, visit healthyrelationships.uga.edu and ElevateCouplesGeorgia.com.

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