

elevate your RELATIONSHIP

Commitment to Look for the Positive

How do you feel when you are around people who look for and talk about the negative things in life? When it's sunny, they complain about the heat. When it's raining, they complain about the dampness. When things are going well, they could always be better! If you find yourself avoiding these negative thinking people, then you are not alone. People generally like to be around people who think and act in a positive way.

A positive or negative point of view or perspective can also affect how we view and get along with our spouse. Based on 20 years of research, Dr. John Gottman, psychologist and author of *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (2000, Three Rivers Press), has found that couples in stable marriages maintain at least five times as many positive moments together than negative moments on a daily basis. According to Dr. Gottman, "once your marriage gets 'set' at a certain degree of positivity, it will take far more negativity to harm your relationship than if your 'set point' was lower. And if your relationship becomes overwhelmingly negative, it will be more difficult to repair it" (p. 21).

Looking for and building upon the positive or good in our relationship with our partner requires a commitment—a commitment to using positive thinking and communication skills with our partner in order to build a base for appreciation and respect. This commitment to building a positive relationship can be demonstrated in several ways:

- Experience happiness together.
- Have high regard for yourself and your partner.
- Count on each other in times of need.
- Understand each other's needs.
- Share oneself and one's things with your partner.
- Provide and receive emotional support from your partner.
- Communicate openly with each other.
- Value your partner's thoughts, goals, and desires.

Realizing that acts of kindness and time spent together sharing happy events contribute to couple satisfaction, we can be more aware of these occurrences and let our partner know of our appreciation. How often do we forget to acknowledge these positive actions and words? Below are some of helpful strategies to show your commitment to a positive relationship:

- **Show interest.** Be attentive, listen to your partner.
- **Be affectionate.** Touch, hold hands, be tender.
- **Show you care.** Do something special or out of the ordinary.
- **Be appreciative.** Let your partner know that he or she has done something that pleases you.
- **Have tolerance.** Focus on the strengths of your relationship.

The commitment to emphasize the positive aspects of a relationship can lead to traditions and memories that you and your partner can build together. These are important investments in your relationship that will help see you through the changes and challenges of life events.

Activity

Discuss the following thoughts of your relationship with your partner:

- "Things I really appreciate about you..."
- "Things that are really romantic for you..."
- "What I really miss about you when you are gone..."
- "What I look forward to most when coming home..."

Then, write a thank-you note to your spouse thanking them for something specific that they have done recently. Showing appreciation for your spouse is a positive connection and shows not only thankfulness, but also respect and caring. Commit to showing your appreciation for the every-day things as well as the special things.

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

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