

elevate your RELATIONSHIP

Enhancing Midlife Marriage

Marital satisfaction tends to decrease during the early years of marriage, and for some it reaches a low point during the middle years. This change in satisfaction is most often related to increased stresses during this life stage, such as increasing work demands, parenting adolescents, caring for aging parents, and planning for retirement. For most couples, it is a challenge to learn how to manage all the changes so that their marriage relationship can continue to grow.

But, there are also significant benefits for the relationship in the middle years of marriage. Most of today's midlifery enjoy relatively good health. Their children are in adolescence or young adulthood and are becoming less dependent on their parents. This can be an opportunity for couples to pursue their own interests and to spend more time together.

Because marriage is a constantly evolving process, couples need to learn new skills as well as sharpen existing ones to navigate the changes of a midlife marriage. Here are a few ways to maintain that marriage potential.

- **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 like a walk, a sunset, or a cup of coffee.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Sexual fulfillment.** Sexual difficulties at midlife are most

often the result of normal physical and emotional changes that reduce desire. There are many ways to compensate and adjust to these diminishing desires. For instance, exercise and good eating habits can enhance sexuality. It is important to talk with your spouse about how you feel and what you desire.

- **Agreement on gender roles.** Even if a couple has worked out their gender roles (e.g., who does what) for the early years of marriage, midlife may be a time when partners want to revise their role assignments. Reduced work schedules, new tasks added to the work load, retirement, or caring for aging parents, for example, may require renegotiating roles and responsibilities.
- **Commitment to growth.** Examine your commitment to each other and make a commitment to grow together for the second half of your marriage. Let go of past disappointments 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.

Activity

Ongoing communication will keep you in touch with your midlife partner's changing needs, goals, challenges, and perspectives. Periodically write down some of your thoughts and feelings about your relationship, family, needs, job, fears, and joys. Take time to share these thoughts with your spouse.

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

extension.uga.edu

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