

elevate your RELATIONSHIP

Goal Setting in Marriage

What are your marital goals? How similar are your and your spouse's goals for the marriage? How do you support each other in the achievement of individual and marital goals? How similar are you in setting priorities based on goals and values? Is your behavior consistent with your goals? Setting goals in a marriage is as important as setting personal and professional goals. Begin setting goals for your marriage by asking yourself, "What do I want out of my marriage?" and "What do I want my marriage to look like in the future?" It's important to establish with your partner immediate goals (one month to one year), short-term goals (one to three years), and long-term goals (three to five years). How can you establish and achieve your marital goals?

Realize. Realize that both partners in the relationship have desires and expectations for themselves and the marriage. According to Dr. David Olson, co-author of *Empowering Couples: Building on Your Strengths*, oftentimes partners are not aware of each other's goals. For example, if one partner would like to have dinner out together (without the children) at least once a month, but it is an unstated desire, it can become an unmet expectation. This can result in resentment and frustration over time, which can give way to anger and bitterness. Sitting down together to talk about your goals brings the desires in someone's thoughts to the other person's ears.

Evaluate. Evaluate your personal, professional, and marital goals to see if they are actually in your and the marriages best interest. When evaluating goals ask:

- Why is this important to me/us?
- What will happen to me/us if this goal is met?
- How will this improve the marriage?

Discussing these questions can help you work together to prioritize your goals. You may find that some goals need to be modified, or you may find the need to come up with new goals.

State. Formally state the goals of the marriage. Write them down and post them where they can be seen and evaluated continuously. Goals should be stated in clear measurable sentences. One of the goals in a marriage may be to communicate with each other. Instead of stating, "Our goal is to communicate with each other," (which is too general) state "We will spend at least 20 minutes each night alone talking about our day." The second goal is very specific about

how communication is going to be improved and it is also a realistic expectation. Setting a goal of two hours of talking may not be a realistic expectation for many marriages, but 20 minutes is a more achievable goal.

When establishing your goals remember the "S.M.A.R.T." technique:

- S- Specific:** Goals must be specific in detail. If someone else were to read it, would they understand it?
- M- Measurable:** Goals must be measurable in quantity, time, or cost. How would you know if you met it?
- A- Achievable:** Goals must be achievable within a realistic time scale. Can you both do what is needed to meet the goal?
- R- Relevant:** Goals must be relevant. Does the goal matter to you both?
- T- Timescales:** Goals must have a timeline to be finished. When will you know that you are done?

Defining and achieving goals is not always easy. Expect to come across obstacles, delays, and disappointments as you work towards fulfilling your marital goals. Set aside time on a regular basis (e.g., once a year during your anniversary) to re-evaluate your goals. Remember, setting goals in a marriage allows partners to work together for the betterment of their marriage. It allows each partner to know what the other wants, so the couple knows the direction that their marriage is heading towards.

Activity

Having shared goals is important, and it is also important to support your spouse's individual goals. Share what each of your own goals are? What would help you reach your goals? Discuss how you can support each other in reaching those goals. Are there responsibilities that you may need to pick-up for a while so your partner can have time to work towards his or her goal? Are there sacrifices that need to be made to support each other? Talk to your partner about your needs, but also be willing to help your spouse reach his or her goals.

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

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