

Married Couples: Science Has Found 8 Strategies That May Instantly Improve Your Relationships

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I've been married 10 years now (my second marriage). And let me tell you, there's no magic pill or secret formula for a great marriage. It just takes a lot of hard work.

Having said that, busy professionals and entrepreneurs juggling careers, parenting, and other personal obligations can still have happy and successful marriages. And there's science to back that up.

As I've gathered evidence on the truth about enduring marriages, one thing has become clear: Partners must cultivate a growth mindset--a commitment to personal development that will be mutually beneficial in the relationship.

Having a growth mindset helps when you hit the bumps that come with every marriage. You'll see the challenges not so much as a setback but as an opportunity to learn about each other and to deepen the relationship.

Here are eight examples of how to take your marriage to the next level.

1. Try some love hacking.

In social psychology professor Eli Finkel's new book, *The All-or-Nothing Marriage: How the Best Marriages Work*, he offers a number of crisis-avoiding strategies for busy couples who don't

have the luxury of time. Here are a few that stood out:

- **Practice gratitude:** Saying "thank you" to your partner could increase your commitment to the relationship.
- **More physical touch:** In one study, partners being affectionately touched by their mates while watching a video felt more trusting and secure--even if they knew the touch was prescribed.
- **Double date:** One study found that couples who went on a double date boosted passionate feelings.
- **Celebrate positive events together:** Research suggests that sharing good news increases feelings of intimacy and satisfaction with the relationship. And both partners benefit from the celebration: "The positive effects emerge not only for the partner doing the disclosing, but also for the listener," says Finkel.
- **Be objective during a conflict:** Get perspective from a third party that sees things from the "outside" and bring this objectivity into a heated argument.

2. Play more.

Finkel also recommends playful activities as a great way to strengthen a relationship. In one study, 53 married couples were randomly assigned to engage in activities that were either exciting (i.e., dancing or theater) or just pleasant (i.e., going out to a movie or dinner) for 1.5 hours a week over 10 weeks . As you may have guessed, couples who engaged in the exciting and novel activities were happier with their relationship than couples who did the ho-hum "pleasant" activities with which they're familiar.

3. Change your sexual habits.

Let's face it, we're all creatures of habit, even with our sex lives. Maybe you like it at night, but he likes it in the morning. You may fantasize about being tied to a bedpost with a blindfold on; he wants to hang from the chandeliers and do a Tarzan yell. So you have differences and preferences, but don't stay there. One study found that "partners willing to make more frequent sexual changes for their partners "had partners who reported being more satisfied in their relationships."

4. Get help (counseling).

I fully admit I've been to marriage counseling. It wasn't because my marriage was falling apart; it was because I wanted to grow and understand myself better as a man, as well as my spouse. Michelle and Barack Obama would agree. In a recent interview with *Good Morning America's* Robin Roberts, Michelle said, "Marriage counseling for us was one of

those ways where we learned how to talk out our differences. What I learned about myself was that my happiness was up to me. And I started working out more. I started asking for help, not just from him, but from other people. I stopped feeling guilty."

5. Put your phone away.

I don't mince words when I say, "We're addicted to our phones." It's true. So if you're scrolling Facebook during dinner and ignoring your partner, it's time to unplug. One study published in *Computers in Human Behavior* investigated data from 1,160 married people and found a negative correlation between heavy social-media use and relationship happiness. Conversely, when arguments escalate to anger, rather than talking things over to work out a disagreement, couples are unintentionally creating distance by texting their mates instead. The research is clear: The biggest payoff when things go south comes from more direct, face-to-face conversations with your partner, not texting how you feel.

6. Get enough sleep.

In *The Happy Couple*, author Barton Goldsmith cites a study from the University of California, Berkeley that looked at the sleep habits of more than 100 couples. Those who reported poor sleep were much more likely to argue with their significant other.

7. Practice random acts of kindness for each other.

Something as simple as a shoulder rub after an exhausting day of work or making a cup of coffee for your partner before he wakes up is a relationship booster. Terri Orbuch, a marriage researcher and author of *5 Simple Steps to Take Your Marriage From Good to Great*, studied 373 couples for more than 28 years and found that frequent small acts of kindness are a predictor of happiness in a relationship.

8. Laugh about the past.

Ever sat and reminisced about an event that made you and your partner laugh uncontrollably? You should do it more often. One study published in *Motivation and Emotion* found that couples that remembered laughing together--what researchers call "laughter reminiscence"--reported greater relationship satisfaction. One of the study's authors, psychologist Doris Bazzini, said, "Laughter reminiscence packs an additional punch because people relive the moment by laughing again."