

## Marital Tips List

### *Marriage is a package deal:*

Marriage is a coming together of not only two persons, but also their respective personalities, histories, families, at times children, good traits and bad traits. Like a coin, each person will bring two sides in all these elements. You cannot have just one side of a coin and pretend the other side doesn't exist. If you are unhappy or unsatisfied with some elements, they are best addressed before marriage or as soon as possible after marriage. You will live with your in-laws and partner's faults for the duration of life together.

### *Culture matters:*

In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in cross-cultural marriages. Some cultures are more similar than others whilst some are remarkably dissimilar. Couples must determine how they intend to fuse their respective cultures. Where this is left to chance, there is a greater likelihood of conflict. Even well-intentioned couples realize after the marriage how important their respective beliefs and customs are to them. These issues are best sorted out before the kids come along.

### *Boundaries need to be determined:*

Marital couples need to define themselves as a couple to extended family and friends. To do so, the couple must determine what their rules are for themselves with regard to defining their relationship to others. In other words, will friends take priority over the couple? Will the in-laws determine a couple's choices and decisions or will the couple do so? Have you determined how to spend holidays and religious events with regard to extended family? Imagine a submarine with a screen door; it submerges and takes on water, never to rise again. Submarines require doors that can be open and shut tight according to the skipper. Marriages similarly need boundaries that can be secured at the discretion of the couple.

### *Resolving conflict is crucial:*

There is an old adage, "Never go to bed angry at your spouse." Please note this does not mean the conflict has been resolved. Not all conflict can be resolved before the lights go out. What must be appreciated though is that even in view of unresolved conflict, the couple does not seek to hold grudges or seek retribution the result of unresolved issues. Rather, there must be a commitment that if matters cannot be resolved between the couple, rather than resorting to harmful behaviors, they seek help as necessary.

### *Pull your weight:*

In a marriage, couples must be able to rely on each other to address tasks and responsibilities. Many couples early on enter the marriage with the belief that the other will automatically know what is expected. Trouble is, both likely hold different opinions as to the expectations of the other. It is difficult for couples to pull their weight, in mind of the other person's expectations if the expectations are not discussed. This is like starting a new job without a job description. So whether it is

who cleans around the house, how finances are handled or how the groceries are obtained, discuss forthrightly.

### *Use reasonable words, not behaviour to address conflict:*

When upset, some people do not discuss the upset, but rather act in a way so as to retaliate for the upsetting behaviour. As such, upsetting behaviour begets upsetting behaviour causing increasing distress in the marriage. This tit-for-tat is marital cancer. Instead of using behaviour to speak on your behalf, talk with your partner about the upset with reasonable words (no name-calling or belittling). If there is going to be a tit-for-tat, let it be that reasonable words beget reasonable behaviour.

### *In trouble, seek help!*

Men are notorious for not asking for directions and believing they can fix anything. As such, far more women than men run off to individual counseling to address their marital issues. It is important for couples to know that attending individual counseling for a marital issue actually increases the likelihood of a marital separation. The therapist will naturally align with the one spouse on the basis of the one-sided account. Even if the other spouse follows into counseling later on, because of the pre-alignment between the partner who attended first and the counselor, this process is at risk of failure. If your marriage is in trouble and one partner is refusing to attend counseling, you just found out the problem may be bigger than you imagined and the help you need may just be from a divorce attorney. Share this information with your spouse to open their mind.

Screaming, yelling, name-calling, belittling, throwing things, pushing, shoving, hitting, abusing alcohol and/or drug, having an affair (emotional or physical), holding a spouse financially hostage, are never acceptable. These are very serious problems, any of which can be a deal breaker.

A good marriage is marked by compassion and understanding. While partners may be tolerant of differences, that would not include tolerating abuse of self or others.

Some persons speak of compromise in a marriage. Rather than "compromise" think in terms of "priority". If your marriage and partner are the priority, there is little to compromise. For example, choosing one's spouse over a night with the friends is not a compromise. It is an investment in a good marriage.

In the end, if you want a loving marriage and partner, first act lovingly yourself.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.