

THE TRUTH ABOUT MARRIAGE AND NO BULL: Will It Make You Happy?

The way some people rush into the marriage chapel, you'd think marriage was a guarantee of happiness. One out of two marriages will fail, so the odds aren't very good that marriage will make you happy. Let's find out the truth about marriage.

What Does the Research Say?

Here's the upside.

In general, there is a positive relationship between marriage and happiness in the literature. Married individuals report greater happiness than unmarried persons, and greater than those who have never been married, or who are divorced, widowed or separated.

But it's not the marriage contract that makes the difference, since studies also show that *people who live with a partner are happier than those who live alone*. Maybe it's the friendship and companionship that improves happiness.

For whatever reasons, marriage tends to produce consistent levels of happiness, and helps partners to experience positive emotions and find deep levels of life satisfaction.

Marriage seems to shield people against life's hardships. The spouse can provide support, encouragement and friendship, and serve as a friend and confidant. He/she can help with decisions and bring hope in times of struggle whereas who live alone may have to face life's hardships by themselves.

A spouse can offer career support, help with social problems and offer constructive criticism when needed.

When a person experiences high marital satisfaction his/her immune system is stronger and there is often a more positive outlook on life. A healthy marriage can add six or seven years to your life. That's if you have a happy, fulfilled marriage.

But, what about an unhappy marriage? Could it make you less healthy? It's something to think about. Although more research needs to be done.

What About the Downside of Marriage?

Well, no marriage will automatically guarantee personal happiness. And a lousy marriage can make you more miserable. So it all depends on the QUALITY of your relationship . . .

. . . and the skills you bring to the marriage or learn after you are married.

In essence, the stronger and healthier the individuals are, the stronger and healthier the marriage will be. If each spouse is constantly striving to be the best person they can be, the marriage will only benefit. If each spouse is growing and becoming a better partner, the marriage will flourish.

In marriages where the spouses are pointing their fingers at each other, projecting blame or finding fault, there will be unhappiness and frustration. Marriages don't do well in a climate of criticism and contempt.

In Review

Is marriage worth it? You bet . . . that is, if you and your spouse are committed to building a great relationship, or one that will serve you for many years to come, or possibly even the rest of your lives. The happiness research shows that marriage can make a big difference in your quality of life and lifespan. So fighting for your marriage may well be worth it.

Now let's take a look at some special techniques you can use to strengthen and improve your marriage.

Five Ways To Improve Your Marriage

There is an art to building a happy marriage. Here is my short list for simple but effective steps you can take to improve your marriage or any relationship right now.

1. Avoid negative criticism. Offer only constructive criticism that is supportive and helpful. Criticizing your spouse is akin to blaming him/her and amounts to nothing more than finding fault.

Criticism puts your spouse on the defensive and sets you up as the superior one . . . which will naturally backfire in the long run.

2. Repair your tiffs or fights quickly. The longer you wait to turn toward your partner with an apology or an gesture of forgiveness the more time you and your partner will waste being unhappy and feeling sad.

3. Never punish your spouse for making a mistake, or letting you down. Learn to be comfortable with disappointment. Life happens. It's not all a bed of roses. Accept your spouse's weakness and offer your empathy and support.

4. When you have a disagreement or misunderstanding, and someone's feelings get hurt, keep the communication lines open. Just like you would do with your best friend. In fact, your life partner should be your best friend. If your friendship has suffered, then build it up and make it right again.

Everything is built upon the strong foundation of friendship!

Avoid stonewalling, or banishing your partner to proverbial Siberia because they did the wrong thing or made you mad. Get over it. Move on. You can still find joy in life by making a conscious decision to move past the problem. Talk about it when you are both relaxed and cool, and get past it. Start enjoying life again!

5. Bury the anger dragon. An “anger control problem” can lead to abuse. It creates fear and poisons the relationship. If you have anger problems, take responsibility for your actions and get help. Anger can drown an otherwise healthy relationship. Take anger problems seriously and do it now. Anger issues can be as destructive to a relationship as alcohol or drug problems.

Never Underestimate the Power of A Positive Attitude

Here's a bonus tip for you . . . If you and your spouse will strive to become more optimistic in the way you think, you'll have a more satisfying relationship. No one likes to be around a Grinch or a certified grouch. Look on the bright side. And, when you're thinking about your relationship, focus on your strengths and assets, rather than your weaknesses.

Avoid dwelling on the negatives, or you'll fall into certain quicksand.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy is a wonderful type of therapy that can help you to improve your thought process and learn to re-frame the negative and find the silver lining in every cloud. Try it, if your relationship starts to sink into the throws of depression, and you cannot seem to turn it around.

Remember this one fact, and it could save your marriage someday: **the number one way a good relationship goes bad is neglect.** I've seen so many clients begin with a perfectly good relationship, then, over the years, watch it slip away. Pay attention to your spouse and your relationships at all times . . .

and work at you relationship on a constant basis.

Never neglect your spouse or your relationship. Even during a crisis in some other area of your life. Keep that relationship strong. Find ways to keep giving to your relationship even when you are preoccupied.

Make your marriage your priority and give, give, give . . . to get, get, get. Remember, the efforts you make for your spouse and your relationship will come back to you, ten-fold.

Yes, marriage can make you happy and enable you to live longer -- so get to work building the relationship of your dreams. You'll be glad you did.