



Valentine's Day Tips from *Divorce Magazine*

Just in time for Valentine's Day, the editors at Divorce Magazine offer some of their best tips for saving your relationship.

By Diana Shepherd

Although some relationships are toxic and should be ended, there are others that can – and should – be saved. “A marriage that is not based on love, mutual respect, equality, accommodation to each other's needs, friendship, caring, empathy, forgiveness, and relevant communication not only cannot be saved, but should not be saved,” states Mel Krantzler in *Divorcing* (St. Martin's Press). “A loveless marriage that makes you feel less than human is not worth saving. If you are feeling this way, however, make certain, for your own subsequent peace of mind, that you are not misinterpreting your situation.”

For people who are wondering if their marriage can be saved, here are some tips to help them improve their relationships and renew their interest in working out their differences. If your relationship has passed the point of no return, however, these tips might help to make your future relationships happy and fulfilling.

1. Make time to connect lovingly with your partner every day. A couple can significantly improve their chances of marital success by devoting as little as 15 minutes a day exclusively to each other. For instance, choose to go to bed a little earlier and wake up a little earlier, and spend the extra time in bed cuddling, making love, and reaffirming your love for each other. Take time every day to have meaningful conversations with each other; to listen with the same intensity as when you were dating; to touch, hug, and show affection; to tell each other how you feel about your marriage; and to talk about your goals for the marriage and your lives.

2. Compliment your partner regularly – both in private and in front of others. Even if your partner seems embarrassed or shrugs it off at first, the glow from sincere praise lasts a long time.

3. Love your partner in the way he/she wants to be loved. We often make the mistake of assuming that the things that touch our hearts the most deeply will affect our partner in the same way. For instance, you may think red roses are the perfect Valentine's Day gift, but to your spouse, they represent a waste of money and an allergy attack. If you don't already know, find out what your spouse yearns for, and then deliver it with love – and no comments about how “stupid” it is to want a cordless drill/a picnic on the living room floor/a tuna casserole/insert your partner's choice here. Remember: the best gift is something *your spouse wants* – not something you think he/she *should* want.

4. Learn how to offer an authentic apology. If something you've said or done has hurt your partner, apologize sincerely and whole-heartedly – even if you think he/she is “over-reacting” – without trying to shift some of the blame to your partner or justify your actions. An authentic apology is never followed by the word “but” – “I'm sorry, but you were wrong, too!” is *not* a true apology and will not soften your partner's heart. Instead, acknowledge what you did, recognize the repercussions of your actions, and ask for forgiveness (or offer to make it up to him/her if appropriate): “I'm sorry I was late for dinner. I know you worked really hard to prepare a delicious meal for us to share, and now everything is over-cooked. Can I take you out to your favorite restaurant to make up for being late tonight?”

5. Remain faithful. Dr. Finnegan Alford-Cooper studied 576 couples who had been married for 50 years or more; she released her findings in a book entitled *For Keeps: Marriages that Last a Lifetime* (M.E. Sharpe). In her study, she found that 95% of the spouses agreed that fidelity was essential to a successful marriage, and 94% agreed or strongly agreed that marriage is a long-term commitment to one person. And these “lifers” weren't making the best of a bad lot: a whopping 90% of the couples she surveyed said that they were happily married after 50+ years.

6. Do things together. Another common factor of long-term happy marriages is that the spouses regularly do things together that they find fun and exciting. Whether that's ballroom dancing, bowling, playing cards, SCUBA diving, or skiing, participate in at least one activity that you both enjoy every week. If you have kids, make sure at least half of these activities are for you and your spouse only.

7. Spend time apart. You take a pottery course while your spouse plays hockey; you play bridge and your partner collects stamps. You don't have to love everything your partner loves, but you do have to allow him/her the freedom to pursue cherished hobbies. An added bonus is that separate interests can generate interest between you.

8. Be friends with your partner. According to John Gottman – a psychology professor who claims his research will predict with 91% accuracy whether a couple will stay together – the key to marital happiness and success is friendship. Some of the most important aspects of this type of friendship are knowing each other intimately, demonstrating affection and respect for each other on a daily basis, and genuinely enjoying each other's company. Gottman based his findings on 25 years of marital research, which he presented in his book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (Crown).

9. Take care of your health – and your appearance. You already know why you should eat properly and exercise regularly. But if you're failing at your New Year's Resolutions already, maybe you need to look for a motivation that's “bigger” than you: like saving your marriage, being there for your children's weddings, or whatever will have you put down the chocolate bar and get off the couch. You should also try to look your best for each other more than just once a month/year. Lose the ratty sweat pants or frayed sweater he/she hates so much; you can find other articles of clothing that aren't a complete turn-off for your partner.

10. Say “I love you” every day. This is especially important when you're not feeling the sensation of love; at these times, you have to actively generate it. Saying those three little words, and performing loving gestures, will warm both your and your spouse's hearts.

To read more advice about how to make a marriage – or remarriage – work, visit the “Relationships” area of DivorceMagazine.com. [“Should you Stay or Go?”](#) and [“Make your Valentine last Forever”](#) both offer some great marriage-saving tips.

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