



Kindness Builds Strong Marriages

What do you think is **the most important ingredient in a good marriage**? Many people would probably say that communication is most important. If communication is defined as talking about problems in the marriage then that idea is surely mistaken. Today many scholars would say that the most important element in a successful marriage is kindness!

Kindness includes **looking for the good** in all the ordinary dealings with a partner. Rather than thinking about problems and annoyances, we can dwell on the good times and good qualities. In the gallery of our minds we can choose to hang memories of unhappiness and gloom or we can hang pictures of peaceful, caring times. Choosing to remember and cherish the good makes a big difference in the quality of the relationship.

Kindness includes **actively building positive experiences** into the relationship. People with strong relationships have learned that it is important to continue building the relationship over the years. John Gottman's research on marriage shows that healthy marriages have five positives for each negative. Think about it! Something kind is said or done five times as often as something negative or corrective. Emphasizing the positive builds strong relationships.

Some people believe that it is important to tell your partner everything that you feel but kindness means that **some things simply don't need to be said**. Daniel Wile, a marriage counselor, has observed that there are some differences, even annoying differences, in all relationships - even the very best. Some differences and disappointments can be quietly accepted as part of a relationship.

We can also **appreciate and acknowledge kindness** from our partner. When we notice and express gratitude for the kindnesses shown us, it strengthens the relationship - and makes additional kindness likely to happen.

Kindness also involves **helping each other out**. For example, in some relationships one partner finds decision-making to be easier than the other. When the less decisive person is wrestling with a decision and asks for help, the partner who is more decisive may be tempted to be angry and impatient. (When we are mad we tend to forget our own areas of weakness!) If we are wise we will patiently help examine the factors and help our partner make a decision.

It is easier to be kind if we are feeling good and if we manage conflict well. There are additional units in this series about those topics.

No one is kind all the time; but when we work to bring more kindness to our relationship it can make a big difference - in the relationship and in our own peace of mind.

Applications:

Look for the good

Be on the lookout for small acts of kindness and service by your partner. Notice them. Maybe even write them down.

What things has your partner done for you lately that you appreciate?

How does your partner prefer to be appreciated? Your partner may prefer a comment, a little note, or a phone call during the day. Design and deliver an expression of gratitude for your partner's good deeds.

Actively build positive experiences into your relationship

What are some of the activities and traditions that you and your partner enjoy together? Sitting and talking for a few minutes every day? Taking walks? Watching a favorite program together? A certain hobby? Discuss together the things that build your relationship and make them a regular part of your life together.

Some things simply don't need to be said

Each of us has limitations and weaknesses. It is not helpful to think about our partner's weaknesses a lot or to talk about them. Most of us are motivated by being loved and supported. When you have unkind thoughts about your partner, have a good memory ready to replace it. What are some of your best memories together? How can you have them ready to replace judgment and nagging?

When you are tempted to say unkind things, you might make a practice of saying instead, "Right now I am frustrated. I want to wait until I'm feeling better to make any requests and suggestions."

Appreciate and acknowledge kindness.

Think of some ways that your partner has tried to show you kindness. Thank him or her.

Help out your partner.

What are some things that are especially difficult for your partner? How can you help in those areas?

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