8 WORDS THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR MARRIAGE

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Search Inward

- Research suggests about 50% of our happiness is inherited from our parents and 10% from our circumstances and environment, leaving a whopping 40% up to our thoughts and behaviors!
- The old model of work hard, be successful, be happy is outdated and broken. New research suggests happy marriages consist of happy, healthy, and flourishing individuals.
- Make time to discover your own and your partner’s signature strengths by completing the free survey found at www.VIAcharacter.org
- Find flow; those activities that use your strengths, often stretch you, bring you joy, and require all of your focus – meaningful activities where you often lose track of time.
- Move more, eat well, and sleep right. These basic activities in life are crucial for feeling optimistic, happy, and positive. We do better when we feel better!

Turn Outward

- Our brains are wired to focus more on the negatives – the stuff our partner does that bugs us. All of us tend to think of ourselves first, which isn’t good for marriages, and technoference continues to wreak havoc on many relationships, including marriages.
- Happy couples turn outward and intentionally find ways to draw closer to each other and strengthen the relationship. Research shows that 10 “actions for connection” are some of the most important ways to grow closer and stay connected (turn over to identify which ones are most important for you).
- Make Time for 9! Each day couples should make time for 9 meaningful touches, 9 minutes of conversation (alone), and make sure there are at least 3 minutes of connection in the morning, 3 minutes when you reconnect after work, and 3 minutes before you go to bed. Make these meaningful minutes count!
- Research has shown that “doing a kind act produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well-being” more than any exercise psychologists have tested! (Martin Seligman).

Look Upward

- Creating and maintaining a positive and optimistic attitude can help when things get tough.
- Remember the bigger “why” of your marriage – finding purpose, meaning, and hope.
- Mindfulness, smiling, and feeling grateful can give you a boost of happiness.
- Spirituality has been shown to be a strong source of support and meaning for many couples.

Press Forward

- All couples have rough times (the stock market effect). Hold on to your commitment and loyalty when you don’t feel “in love.”
- Be quick to forgive – remember people are more important than problems.
- Focus on the 80% you love about your partner, not the 20% you wish would change/bugs you.
- Sometimes pressing forward in an unhealthy/unsafe relationship means separating for a time or even ending the relationship.
Our research has shown that all of us have a longing for belonging and want to feel connected, close, and loved by our partner. This activity was designed as a way for couples to better understand what things are most important in their relationship for strengthening your relational connection.

Both partners should read through each of the 10 “Actions for Connection” and rate each one on a scale ranging from 1 (Not Very Important) to 5 (Extremely Important) as a way of feeling close, connected, and committed. Then share with your partner the actions that are most important to you. (Some people find that all 10 areas are a “5”, while others feel closer with certain actions – everyone is different!)

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<td>(Not Very Important)</td>
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- **Kindness.** You feel close and connected when your partner is especially kind to you. You feel special when you discover he/she has done random acts of kindness for you, or says things to you that are kind. When he/she is generous or kind, you feel like you belong, and feel loved and more committed.

- **Gratitude.** You feel close and connected when your partner expresses gratitude and appreciation for things you have done, whether it is around the house, with your children, or working hard at your job. You enjoy hearing expressions of thanks for even small things you do.

- **Affection.** You feel close and connected when your partner shows physical (but not necessarily sexual) affection, such as snuggling, hugs, kisses, a backrub, or even just holding hands. You feel close when there is romance in your relationship. You love to hear expressions of affection from words such as “I love you” to notes, texts, or other forms of non-verbal communication. Affection brings you closer together.

- **Awareness.** You feel close and connected when your partner is aware of what is happening in your life. You love when he/she asks about your day, your stresses, your joys, and your goals. You enjoy feeling his/her support in your activities, achievements, and accomplishments. You love when he/she is aware of and helps you with something that is important to you.

- **Humor.** You feel close and connected when you and your partner can laugh and have fun together. Smiling, joking, laughing, and being playful brings you together and makes you love your partner even more. Inside jokes are an important part of your relationship and you feel close when you enjoy humorous experiences together.

- **Sacrifice.** You feel close and connected when your partner serves and sacrifices for you. You feel loved and valued when he/she gives up something and puts you first in their life. When he/she shows their loyalty and commitment to you by serving or sacrificing for you, you feel special, and it strengthens your relationship.

- **Forgiveness.** You feel close and connected when your partner is quick to forgive you and doesn’t hold grudges. When he/she shows understanding, mercy, and compassion when you make mistakes, you feel closer, loved, and valued.

- **Time together.** You feel close and connected when you and your partner spend time together. You love it when your partner makes it a priority to spend time with you, and even makes the plan to spend time with you. Date nights, alone time, or finding time to focus on each other helps you to feel more committed and strengthens your friendship.

- **Meaningful conversation.** You feel close and connected when you and your partner spend time talking about important things, including hopes, dreams, goals, and your future together. You feel closer and feel comfortable sharing personal things or private feelings and feel loved because you can open up about anything and he/she is understanding. Talking about meaningful things makes you feel closer with your partner.

- **Sexual connection.** You feel close and connected when you and your partner engage in sexual activities. Sex brings you together in a special way and is viewed as a way of staying close, feeling loved and valued for you. You really enjoy the special bond that brings you closer together during sex.