

How to Keep Serenity in Your Marriage

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.” – Serenity Prayer, attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr.

Stress is at the root of many health issues in America. Heart disease, depression, and hypertension are just a few of the many stress-related maladies. Physical health isn't the only casualty of a stressful lifestyle. In marriages, stress is a leading cause of interpersonal tension and dysfunctional relationships.

There is good news. A lot of the stress in marriage is avoidable when both parties are aware of stressful triggers. Here are 10 things to do for reducing stress in your marriage:

- 1. Always put your spouse first.** This is a huge principle and key to reducing relationship stress. Ideally, a husband and wife will put the other first, but you only have control over your behavior.
- 2. Have fun together.** Movies, walks, picnics, games, trips ... not just fun but hilarity. Laughing together is great relationship medicine.
- 3. Build together time into your schedule.** Time with your spouse shouldn't be relegated to the status of leftovers. Your relationship with your spouse trumps all other priorities and schedules. If that means scrawling “Relax together” on the calendar in indelible marker, then so be it.
- 4. Don't sweat the small stuff.** When you feel the first inklings of stress, ask yourself, “Is this a moral issue?” If not (nine times out of ten it isn't), then let it go. Make

your mutual priorities a recurring topic of conversation. Remind yourselves what really counts. Simplify your lifestyle. Celebrate what you have in each other.

5. Give back, and do it together. Work at the soup kitchen; volunteer with a faith-based community; hook up with a group that helps the less fortunate or restores the environment. Throw yourselves into charitable causes together, and watch things fall into perspective.

6. Communicate clearly and respectfully. Like sit-com fodder, misunderstandings are the source of a lot of tension. Always keep your spouse in the loop, and always communicate with love and good manners.

7. Tell the truth. Remember the old adage, “When you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember what you said the last time.” People who don’t keep secrets experience less stress in relationships.

8. Hold hands, hug and make out. Physical contact is a proven stress reliever. Squeeze into the same chair to watch TV; just hang all over one another. Reach out and take your spouse’s hand while walking, driving, or at an event. Be deliberate about demonstrating affection via physical contact.

9. Play to your strengths and hers. Effective teachers know that playing to a student’s strengths works better than focusing on any weaknesses. Pay attention to your spouse’s strengths: build up, affirm, and encourage. Criticism always leads to more stress.

10. Live within your means. Money problems are the leading cause of stress in American marriages. Take preventative measures to work this one out. Remember No. 4, “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” Most of the stuff we get into debt over is simply not worth the stress.

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