

Top 10 Ways To Establish a Healthy Marriage

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | December 23, 2011



10) Have your prospective spouse meet your family and friends and get feedback from them:

During the dating process emotions generally are intense, deep and passionate. Oxytocin and dopamine are surging, which give us that giddy sense of pleasure, happiness and joy.

However, these same changes in brain chemistry can interfere with objective thinking and ability to accurately assess a prospective life partner. One way to guard against overly emotional decision making is to include the perspectives of people you know, love and trust, people who you know love you and have your best interest at heart. Hear their feedback, insights, concerns, or affirmations and then carefully evaluate their feedback in light of the evidence and act on the evidence.

9) Same Religion, Belief System or Philosophy of Life:

Our beliefs influence our habits, choices, and daily home routines. A committed Christian may want to go to church and raise their children with Bible stories and Christian education. Whereas, an agnostic, or non-committed Christian, may prefer to go to ball games, work around the house and not attend church on weekends, not have Bible stories in the home and not spend

money on Christian education or donate to church charities. Such differences can be a source of conflict and strife in a marriage. Choosing someone who shares the same philosophy increases the likelihood of harmony in the home.

8) Compatibility IQ:

Choose a life partner who has a compatible intelligence level, a person who can appreciate and comprehend what you think and the way you think. When a drastic disparity exists in intelligence, one risks becoming disinterested and slowly disengaging conversation, sharing ideas, and exploring insights because the other one “just doesn’t understand.” This often results in not feeling valued, appreciated or loved, which generates feelings of hurt and anger. Because we naturally seek to share our thoughts, insights, and ideas with others, when our spouse is incapable of understanding then another may be found with whom to talk, confide or share ideas, which can undermine the strength of the marriage and forge bonds with another.

7) Shared Lifestyle:

Relationships grow as we share life experiences together. If we choose a life partner with whom we share little in common, and thus during the course of the marriage each partner does activities either alone or with someone other than their spouse, the marriage risks fracturing as the two slowly grow apart. Conversely, as life experiences are shared, these shared experiences continue to bond the partners together and grow the relationship into deeper levels of connectedness. Additionally, choose a partner who shares your style in diet, exercise, dress and health habits. If you enjoy a glass of wine with dinner but your potential spouse is a teetotaler, or you don’t smoke but your future partner does, or you are vegetarian but your love interest enjoys meat, the future home life is at increased risk for long-term tension and conflict. This can be avoided by choosing a partner who shares your lifestyle.

6) Common Vision and Life Goals:

What is your vision for your life and family? Where do you want to live? Is your goal to become wealthy, raise a family, have pets, live on a farm, enjoy city living, be a missionary, own your own business, or be a church worker? If your life goals conflict with the life goals of your potential partner, then conflict could develop over whose life goals take priority. If both goals cannot be realized, then one partner will have to surrender their dreams/goals, which may generate disappointment, dissatisfaction, or resentment. A shared vision and goal allows spouses to work together as a team through life rather than, what can seem like, opposition to each other.

5) Agreement on Children and Child Rearing Principles:

I have had a number of couples come to see me who have experienced stress in their marriage because one spouse wanted children, while the other did not. Generally, if a person feels strongly one way or the other in regard to having children that attitude doesn’t change after marriage. If disagreement exists, then one partner will necessarily be dissatisfied. This can lead to a great sense of loss at not having children, or irritation, or loss of love of the spouse. Either way, such a relationship is set up for resentment and conflict. Additionally, children in such homes often suffer in atmospheres where the parents are at odds with each other, and the children may be blamed for the marital discord. Also, unity in parenting practices reduces points of conflict and contributes to greater team work within the marriage.

4) Create a List of Non-Negotiable Qualifications for Your Life Partner:

Before dating, first identify the non-negotiable qualifications a person *must* possess in order to be qualified to be your life partner. These are qualities that if the person doesn't possess, would cause you to be dissatisfied and result in you trying to invest them with those qualities. For instance, if you are a Christian dating a non-Christian would you try to "convert" them? If so, being a Christian is a non-negotiable quality that you require in a life partner in order for you to be satisfied with them. If they don't possess this quality you will begin trying to change your spouse to "fit" your parameters. This generally never works. People are who they are. It is wiser to understand what qualities you demand of a life partner and then, when dating, evaluate whether the person possesses those qualities or not, than to marry someone without those qualities and spend your energy trying to change them to fit your expected mold.

One non-negotiable qualification for everyone is - your life partner must genuinely like you for who you are. If they don't like you for who you are then they are not qualified to be your life partner.

3) Be Yourself:

The only way you will know if the person you are dating genuinely likes you for who you are, and therefore meets that qualification, is to be yourself. Never pretend to be someone or something you're not. Don't try and figure out what the other person wants and act in ways to please them, simply be yourself and evaluate whether the person you are dating likes you, or instead tries to change you. If they try and change you simply say, "Thanks for letting me know you are not qualified to be with me," and move on!

2) Be Honest:

Far too many people are so afraid of hurting someone's feelings that they fail to be honest. If your partner asks whether you like their new hairstyle, don't lie. If you don't like the hairstyle graciously, but honestly, let them know your preferences. If a certain meal is cooked and you don't particularly enjoy it, affirm them for the cooking, but be honest about your taste preferences. Why is this important? Because if you are graciously honest about the things you don't like, when you do tell your partner their hair looks great, or they're looking amazing in that suit, or that meal was wonderful they will know you really mean it. But, if you always say you like everything, even when you don't, your affirmations will become meaningless and your partner will lose confidence in your ability to be truthful. It will also send a message that you think so poorly of your partner that you either don't trust them enough to handle the truth, or don't respect them enough to be truthful with them. Learning to be honest may have moments of disappointment, but over the long haul will result in a much healthier marriage with enhanced respect and more meaningful affirmations.

1) Be Healthy:

Healthy relationships *require* healthy people! Therefore, the number one action you can take to ensure a healthy marriage is to do all in your power, through God's grace, to be emotionally and spiritually healthy. Being emotionally and spiritually healthy changes the filters that are used when evaluating others. What you find attractive changes as you get healthier and more mature. Becoming healthy not only allows you to interact in healthy ways, but changes who you find attractive enough to date. In other

words, a healthier person generally dates healthier people.

Marriage can be one of God's greatest blessings, or one of sins greatest cursings, depending upon whom one marries. By being thoughtful, patient, and intentional in your decisions, by including evidence and facts and not relying solely on feelings you can markedly increase the likelihood of establishing a healthy marriage.