

Building A Good Marriage Takes Constant Vigilance

By Marcie Baer
NC News Service

— A good self-image.
— An attitude of "You are great, I am great and together we are the greatest!"

— Honest communication that doesn't duck problem areas.

Those are some key ingredients of a good marriage, explained four members of a separated and divorced support and growth group in Manitowoc, Wis.

In an interview for the Compass, the Green Bay diocesan newspaper, the four members, John Cotter, Fay LeCoque, Sharon McConnell and Jim Rowntree, discussed problem areas in marriage and offered some practical suggestions from their own experience. All are self-supporting single parents; one is a college student.

All agreed on the importance of premarriage preparation in which the realities of marriage are discussed, whether through Engaged Encounters or through premarital inventories. Here are some of their suggestions for couples.

1. Communicate honestly.

Mrs. McConnell warned against keeping everything "surgery and spicy" while dating. There may be a lot of things that are irritating to one or both persons. She recommends getting these on the table before walking down the aisle.

Air the irritating molehills before they become mountains, Ms. LeCoque agreed, for problems have to be dealt with sooner or later.

Some people don't want to say anything about problems for fear of hurting the other's feelings or for fear they might lose the partner. But if it's real love, that won't happen, Cotter said.

Sometimes people keep silent about a problem because they want to keep the peace or don't want to rock the boat. They close their eyes, in effect, and figure if they don't talk about the situation, the problem will go away.

But problems don't so easily go away, the four agreed.

2. Be sure what the motivation for marriage is.

The four members of the group think that it is in the home, as children, that people first learn how to communicate their love. Sometimes, if love is not communicated well at home, young persons will rush into a marriage hoping to find a replacement for the love they missed as a child.

3. Discuss goals.

Mrs. McConnell considers this an important part of the premarriage preparation, and includes such goals as careers, raising a family and finances. She also thinks a couple needs to have a fair number of things they like to do in common.

4. Continue to work at a relationship after the wedding day.

One problem pointed to by Cotter is the tendency to become complacent. In his words, people figure: "Well, we're married now. We can sit back, take it easy and relax and everything will be hunky dory." But that's not true. A couple has to keep working at being married, he cautioned, "to watch for the little chinks in the armor."

5. Couples should become friends.

This means taking the time to get to know and respect each other. And take a careful look at the home situation, the four suggested. Some kids have problems with relationships while they are growing up, said Cotter, "and many times these problems carry over into adult life and can affect their relationship with other people."

Take a look at how the other person relates, not only to his or her family and friends, but also to acquaintances and strangers, he suggested.

6. Another troublesome area can be pinpointed when a relationship becomes too exclusive.

A healthy relationship allows room for friends, the four suggest.

7. And each partner should be helped by a marriage to continue growing.

For each partner has his or her own identity, even though there is one marriage.



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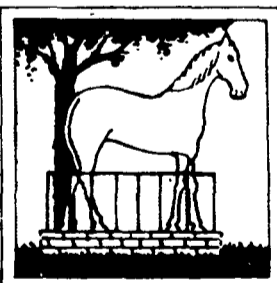
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