

# The Key Ingredient For a Successful, Happy Married Life

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What is the magic button that makes a marriage work? Many articles have been written on things necessary for a good marriage. Most suggest the importance of communication, self-actualization, respect, trust, mutual responsibility, freedom to be yourself, etc. Many people contemplating marriage are troubled over how to determine if these things will characterize his/her future relationship with the intended.

Perhaps the best way to find out is to ask "Is the person I am about to marry my best friend? Is he/she the first person I instinctively turn to when I'm troubled, afraid, or full of doubts? Do I really like this person I'm about to marry? Would I want to be friends with this person even if we had never become romantically involved?"

These are not naive questions with obvious answers. If one cannot trust another human being enough to confide in them before marriage, then that situation is not likely to change after marriage or because of marriage. A crucial question is "do I have trouble accepting this person's fundamental personality - the way he/she views life and the people around them, the personal habits of neatness or disorder, honesty or shading the truth, meticulousness or laid back/easy going, etc?" Marriage will not make



## A Chance to Communicate

Father Joseph Protano prays with a couple during an Engaged Encounter at the St. Dominic Center in Peace Dale, R.I. During the weekend the priest and a married couple guide engaged couples through a series of communications exercises. (NC News photo)

such personal differences more palatable.

Marriage is a sacrament of the most intimate friendship. And like any other friendship, marriage is first and foremost a relationship between two people who value and cherish each other as persons. This evolves into a lifetime of building up and enriching each other. Marriage should be two friends looking at each other with clear, unclouded eyes and saying

"You may be a crazy mixed-up kid, but I like you just the way you are. I like not only what you do and who you are, but also I like what you try to do, even if you don't always succeed. And more importantly, I like the you you want to be and try to be."

This kind of friendship is the magic button that makes it work. "Happily ever after" seldom happens without it.

## A Marriage Restored

By Monica Clark  
NC News Service

Late one night five years ago, 34-year-old Mario lay beside his sleeping wife Denise, dreading the dark room as an extension of the vacuum of emptiness he felt inside. He wanted to reach out and draw her to himself for comfort, but could not. The chasm between them had grown too wide.

"We were living together, but we were spiritually divorced," he said recently. "After 11 years of marriage all the vitality had gone from our relationship. I felt dead. That night the horror of what had happened between us just enveloped me. I felt there was no way out and I couldn't even begin to talk with Denise about it."

Denise too knew the distance and kept it to herself. She'd even taken on a third part-time job to gain enough self-sufficiency to survive the divorce she feared was inevitable.

Not that they hadn't tried to prevent the disintegration of their marriage. They'd taken a vacation cruise without the children; bought and furnished a new home; increased efforts to please each other - he worked harder at household chores and she baked his favorite foods.

"We wanted the spark of

our early love to return but we didn't know how to get it back. We tried to change our life by changing the things around and it didn't work," said Denise.

Occasional moments of closeness during lovemaking or social gatherings restored a hope they were unable to hold or build from later. Negative criticism of each other grew. Mario began drinking heavily and staying out late after work. Denise sought out a counselor.

Unaware of their difficulties, a friend invited them to participate in a Marriage Encounter - a weekend retreat for happily married couples wanting to improve their marriages. They accepted and found themselves immersed in what they call a 48-hour miracle.

Here they found what they needed - tools for communicating their inner selves. "No one before had taught us how to share our feelings, to open up and be vulnerable so we could really love and be loved," they explained.

The breakthrough came midway into the retreat when Mario shared his anguish with Denise and she with him. "We talked honestly about how we were feeling," Denise said. "This time, however, we were learning some techniques to support

our desire for intimacy," said Denise.

They left the weekend knowing "We wanted to stay together forever." They also knew that working at marriage would mean much more than earning the family paycheck and being a good housekeeper. "We couldn't believe we could share so deeply," added Mario.

Immediately they made changes, carving out time regularly to be alone for "feeling talk." They joined a marriage support group which meets biweekly to help couples continue building trust. They withdrew from friends who "nurtured our indifference," replacing them with couples eager to uphold marital love. They worked at forgiving the hurts of the past and accepting the limitations each brings to their marriage. They returned to Mass.


Now married for 16 years, neither Denise nor Mario idealizes their relationship as "living happily ever after."

They say: "We have to work hard at our marriage. We still experience difficulties and failures, but they don't devastate us now. Before we used to talk a lot - about the kids, the house, our next party. But now we're communicating who we are and that makes all the difference."

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