



Living Well

Marriage: Friendship vs. Coexistence



Ed Edwards
President

Donna Edwards
Executive Director

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For more detailed information about the ministry - www.livingwelloc.org
Photos and writings about the ministry - www.livingwelloc.blogspot.com
Encouragement/culture on marriage - www.livingwellinmarriage.blogspot.com
Wisdom Community School - www.wisdomcommunityschool.com

Friendship

It is when we do things together that friendship springs up.... Friends look in the same direction.
C.S. Lewis

When we married over 40 years ago, we could both say without hesitation that **we were close friends**. Yes, there was a romantic interest that sparked between us, but first came several common interests.

During the early child-rearing years, we neglected our friendship at times, while trying to juggle kids, home, and career. It soon became apparent that **our marriage needed our friendship to thrive**.

Based on thousands of assessments, Prepare-Enrich research reveals that the **#1 strength of happy**

couples is that they feel very close to each other.

*In any other relationship, how would we **define friendship?***

A friend is someone with whom I can be myself - the good, the bad, and the ugly - and the person will still love and accept me. We **share common interests** and **speak honestly from the heart** without fear of criticism or retribution.

FRIENDS

To be friends, you have to **spend time together** and **get to know each other more personally**. You **care about the well-being** of the other person. You see **the best in him** and **want the best for him**.

To develop friendship in marriage, the same principles apply. You and your spouse won't be alike but **you should be like-minded**. You **share common interests and values**.

Being friends with your spouse doesn't mean that your spouse is your only friend. **Healthy friendships are not exclusive or based on neediness**.

Developing friendship with your spouse must be intentional and takes

time. [see suggestions below]

Neglecting the friendship factor in your marriage relationship grows animosity (see the reverse side) and isolation. **Friendship** can be renewed and strengthened!

Nurturing Friendship

Marriage is work but marriage should be fun too!

Nurturing friendship in marriage starts with the heart. Having a caring and compassionate heart for another person (most of all your spouse) is Biblical and is a choice we make.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
Ephesians 4:32

These ideas can strengthen a marriage even if only one person is implementing them.

Suggestions:

- **Take time every day** to connect, even it's only 15 minutes. Share your day.
- **Respond** to each other **gently and kindly**.
- Find at least **one activity that you can enjoy** doing together - without your children - and **engage in it**.

- **Take time to learn about an interest** of your spouse, whether you share that interest or not. (For example - if your husband is a hunter, learn enough about it to talk to him. If your wife likes crafting, learn about her crafts.)
- **Accept your spouse's differences and affirm their strengths**.
- **Be open with each other**.

On the reverse side:

Animosity

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Antidotes

PO Box 720828
Oklahoma City OK 73172
www.livingwellokc.org
Phone: 405.792.2586
E-mail: info@livingwellokc.org



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Animosity or

Contempt, disgust, hostility, resentment, and disrespect

A thriving friendship and animosity (contempt) cannot exist at the same time. **Lack of attention to the friendship factor of marriage often grows into animosity.**

After years of marriage research, John Gottman has found that **contempt is the #1 predictor of divorce.**

When we communicate **contempt**, we exhibit **disrespect and disgust**. We may use hostile humor, sarcasm, mockery, name-calling, eye-rolling, or sneering to convey our disgust for the other person.

Contempt leads to more conflict, not towards reconciliation. **It's impossible to resolve anything** when one person is sending the message that the other person is **disgusting** to them.

How does that happen?

One of two factors loom largely in the mind of a person where animosity and contempt breed.

1. If I struggle with my own sense of self-worth, then I will receive remarks made by my spouse as **criticism**. Since I already doubt my own value, questions or comments are heard as **attacks**. I see any communication that is not overtly

positive as being negative.

2. The other factor can be an intolerance of differences in another person. I view my abilities and strengths as exceeding those of my spouse. Or I can't fathom how that trait can exist in another person.

As a married couple, we are certain to have many differences in our personalities. Those differences can become **wedges between us** or **magnets drawing us closer**.

As I **focus on the distasteful habits** of the other person, I build more disgust and contempt for that person.

BUT we don't have to live in that way. See antidotes below.

Antidotes

The antidotes to animosity are available to all!

Being willing to take a small step in the direction of my spouse can douse the flame of contempt and nurture friendship in our marriage.

1. If the resentment has grown from hearing critical words, I can step back and evaluate what I hear. *Are they the words that are actually spoken or is my perception of the motive behind the words? Am I wanting something from my spouse that I am not*

saying but am expecting? Am I expecting my spouse to give me a sense of self-worth and value that only God can instill in me?

I can assume **good will when they hear something that sounds hurtful**. Instead of assuming a negative connotation, I can ask for clarification. Friends believe the best in each other. In lieu of affirmation, I can **forgive my spouse for the hurt**.

Friendship flourishes at the fountain of forgiveness.

William Arthur Ward

2. In our differences, I can choose to focus on the **habits of my spouse that I don't like** or I can accept them and focus on the **positive aspects**. **The choice is up to me.** *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.* (Romans 15:7)

Building a culture of fondness and appreciation is an antidote to animosity. Looking at my spouse with **caring, compassion, and admiration** leads to **fondness**. **Offering thanks and gratitude** demonstrates appreciation.