



Long Distance Relationships

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Remember how you felt on your first date with your spouse? The dimples, the smile, the special qualities that melted your heart? How do you feel today? Hopefully, there are characteristics that still warm your heart when you think of your spouse. How do you turn up the thermostat and continually build the fire?

It is important to remember that marriage is a process. Each individual will change, and in turn, so will the relationship. Through the years, growth will take place as you invest trust, commitment, skills, caring, reciprocity, and effort. The love between two people ideally creates the wish to give of yourself to your spouse. It becomes a way of communication or interaction that will be challenged throughout your life together. A strong marriage doesn't just happen, it takes time and energy to have a strong, healthy relationship.

Eight Qualities for a Successful Marriage

How can you foster growth in your marriage? By taking a look at what others have identified as traits that are desirable in a marriage, you can take steps to strengthen your own. The late David Mace, a well-known marriage counselor, identified eight qualities necessary for a successful marriage. These eight qualities are:

- The spouses respect each other.
- They meet crises successfully.
- They are loyal and faithful to each other.
- They reinforce and support each other.
- They are truthful and open with each other.
- They share the same basic values.
- They are mutually affectionate.
- They share the same goals.

Long Distance Relationships

Relationships are hard enough to foster when you have a regular schedule. However, when one person is gone for an extended period of time due to attending school, military service, or their job, then the time spent together becomes vital to strengthen their commitment to each other. In situations when the amount of time spent together is limited, it is easy to forget the building qualities of relationships and focus on the urgent items like, "Where do I get the car fixed?" and spending time with the children or figuring out how to pay the bills.

How Do You Enrich the Relationship With Your Limited Time Together?

There are many ways to show your love and affection. With each new stage, old and new skills will be needed to make the most of your relationship. Here is a list of ideas that were gathered from some research conducted with truck drivers and their spouses concerning their relationships. Many of these couples were separated for two to three weeks at a time. Read through their suggestions and see which ones might be of help to you in strengthening your relationship.

- Keep lines of communication open. Be specific, honest, and detailed in conversations. Talk about how you will communicate when you are apart.
- Be understanding and patient; your plans may not always work. Keep at it until you refine the process and it works for each of you.
- Trust each other unconditionally; don't submit to media fantasies and unfaithful attitudes. Express your love and respect to each other on a regular basis.

- When together, delegate chore time and expectations; don't criticize each other for the way situations were handled; make plans for how to deal with issues the next time they arise.
- If phone calls are not possible, record daily conversations and send them home. Send e-mails, but remember to be realistic about response time.
- Send cards, post cards, and letters home frequently. Send them to each member of the home, maybe in the same envelope, so everyone gets a letter or note that says you are remembering them.
- Be supportive in hard times. It's not so much that you say the right thing, but that you are willing to listen, hold your spouse, and be there.
- Show affection in appropriate situations and maintain a tender, loving connection.
- Show appreciation for each other for the jobs you do while apart.

How do you find ways to strengthen your marriage when there's so little time to invest? Make it a priority to think about the good things, the positive side, and ways to enhance your love. In *52 Tokens of Affection*, Lynn Gordon suggests simple ways to highlight your feelings. Read through them to get started thinking of ways to enrich your marriage. After reading them, make another list of things that you and your spouse can do to encourage your commitment to each other.

Idea Starters

- Make a relationship almanac. In a notebook jot down anything you enjoy together. Watch how it grows over the years. As one spouse travels, have them send information about places to return to together and particular interests you might enjoy.
- Leave messages, thoughts, quotes, or romantic poems in everyday places like jacket pockets, the book you are reading, or the glove box of the vehicle.
- Surprise your spouse by secretly doing a couple of things on the "honey-do" list. While it may not seem romantic, you're improving the quality of their life in a little way.

- Read a book together. You each have a copy and enjoy conversation on the other's progress and interpretation of the text.
- Make a list of things you both find romantic and write them on a sheet of paper. Cut the list apart and put them in a special basket or tin. Each time you are together, enjoy at least one romantic moment.
- When they arrive home, treat your spouse with breakfast in bed with a love note. Let them know how much you missed them.
- Write your spouse's name on a manila folder or envelope. As you come across interesting articles and enticing restaurant reviews, cut them out and tuck them inside for impromptu moments together.

Marriage is like life; it will have its ups and downs. During the times it doesn't feel so romantic, think about all the good times. Look at old pictures, listen to your favorite love songs, and remember the special reasons you made a commitment to one another. Working on the way you feel has the ability to transform not only yourself but your spouse too.

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