

## Gottman's Marriage Tips 101

- Seek help early. The average couple waits six years before seeking help for marital problems (and keep in mind, half of all marriages that end do so in the first seven years). This means the average couple lives with unhappiness for far too long.
- Edit yourself. Couples who avoid saying every critical thought when discussing touchy topics are consistently the happiest.
- Soften your "start up." Arguments first "start up" because a spouse sometimes escalates the conflict from the get-go by making a critical or contemptuous remark in a confrontational tone. Bring up problems gently and without blame.
- Accept influence. A relationship succeeds to the extent that that each can accept influence from the other. If a spouse says, "Do you have to work Thursday night? My mother is coming that weekend, and I need your help getting ready," and the partner replies, "My plans are set, and I'm not changing them". This person is in a shaky relationship. (stonewalling)
- Have high standards. Happy couples have high standards for each other even as newlyweds. The most successful couples are those who, even as newlyweds, refused to accept hurtful behavior from one another. The lower the level of tolerance for bad behavior in the beginning of a relationship, the happier the couple is down the road.
- Learn to repair and exit the argument. Successful couples know how to exit an argument. Happy couples know how to repair the situation before an argument gets completely out of control. Successful repair attempts include: changing the topic to something completely unrelated; using humor; stroking your partner with a caring remark ("I understand that this is hard for you"); making it clear you're on common ground ("This is our problem"); backing down (in marriage, as in the martial art Aikido, you have to yield to win); and, in general, offering signs of appreciation for your partner and their feelings along the way ("I really appreciate and want to thank you for..."). If an argument gets too heated, take a break, and agree to approach the topic again when you are both calm.
- Focus on the bright side. In a happy relationship, while discussing problems, couples make at least five times as many positive statements to and about each other and their relationship as negative ones. For example, "We laugh a lot;" not, "We never have any fun". A good marriage thrives on a rich climate of positivity, so make deposits to your emotional bank account.