

Anxiously Engaged

Supplemental Lesson

Friendship in Marriage

Thank you to Megan Austin for her original work on this lesson

Introduction

Your husband or wife is your companion, your lover, your soulmate, your confidante, and the mother/father of your children. Shouldn't he or she also be your best friend?

Friendship in Marriage

Fostering friendship is important for any relationship but it is even more important in marriage. Research has shown that couples who report having a great friendship also report having higher marital satisfaction.¹

Elder Marlin K. Jensen taught:

*"Friendship is also a vital and wonderful part of courtship and marriage. A relationship between a man and a woman that begins with friendship and then ripens into romance and eventually marriage will usually become an enduring, eternal friendship. Nothing is more inspiring in today's world of easily dissolved marriages than to observe a husband and wife quietly appreciating and enjoying each other's friendship year in and year out as they experience together the blessings and trials of mortality."*²

Definitions of Friendship

- The American Psychological Association defines friendship as, "a voluntary relationship between two or more people that is relatively long-lasting and in which those involved tend to be concerned with meeting the others' needs and interests as well as satisfying their own desires."³
- In addition, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that friends respect each other, care about each other, remain true to each other, and overlook and forgive each other's faults.⁴

To accurately understand what friendship looks like in a marriage, couples need to be aware of both these definitions. Friendship is more than just knowing someone; it's genuinely caring for that person and wanting what's best for them. Friends love and help each other. Based on these definitions of friendship it is important to remember these three points:

1. Friendship is a voluntary relationship.
2. Friendship is long-lasting. Dependable and genuine friendships are meant to last forever.
3. Friendship includes love and mutual respect.



Activity # 1:

As a couple discuss the following questions:

1. Do you feel that we are friends?
2. How important is friendship in our relationship?
3. How could I be a better friend to you?

John Gottman Research

John Gottman is a world-renowned psychologist who is best known for his work on marital stability and divorce prediction. Dr. Gottman has done extensive research on the importance of friendship in marriage. Based on his research findings he suggests three simple principles to improve friendship in relationships.

Principle 1: Build love maps

“Love maps – my term for the part of your brain where you store all the relevant information about your partner’s life... couples have made plenty of cognitive room for their marriage. They remember the major events in each other’s history, and they keep updating that information as the facts and the feelings of their spouse change.”



Activity #2

Discuss the following together:

1. What is some info on the “love map” you have for me?
2. How well do we really know each other?
3. For example: What is my favorite movie? Favorite treat? What is my love language? How can you tell when I’m stressed?
4. Do you have “love map” info that I need to make more room for?

Principle 2: Share fondness and admiration

“Fondness and admiration are two of the most crucial elements in a rewarding and long-lasting romance. Although happily married couples may feel driven to distraction at times... they still feel that the person they married is worthy of honor and respect... If fondness and admiration are completely missing, reviving the relationship is impossible.”

Activity #3

Individually, answer a few questions from Dr. Gottman's "Fondness and Admiration Quiz" and then compare your answers.

Dr. Gottman's Fondness and Admiration Quiz

1. I can easily list the three things I most admire about my partner. T or F
2. I feel loved and cared for in this relationship. T or F
3. Romance is definitely still a part of our relationship. T or F
4. I am really proud of my partner. T or F
5. We rarely part from each other without showing some sign of love and affection. T or F
6. When I come into a room, my partner is glad to see me. T or F
7. My partner appreciates the things I do in this relationship. T or F

Scoring: Do our scores reflect our friendship? Where can we improve?

(You can take Dr. Gottman's entire ["Fondness and Admiration Quiz"](#) by clicking on the link.)

Principle 3: Turn towards instead of away

"[In my Love Lab], I find deep drama in the little moments. Will they read or listen to the news together or silently alone? Will they chat while they eat lunch? I watch filled with suspense because I know: couples who engage in lots of such brief exchanges tend to remain happy. What's really occurring in these brief exchanges is that the husband and wife are connecting – they are attuning by turning towards each other. Couples who do so are building mutual trust."

"The first step in turning towards each other more is simply to be aware how crucial these mini moments are, not only to your marriage's trust level, but to its ongoing sense of romance."⁵



Activity #4

Discuss the following questions together:

1. What are some of the “mini moments” we’ve shared together the last couple of days?
2. How can we more intentionally create these “mini moments?”



THE BOTTOM LINE

“Best friends who marry are likely to find joy and fulfillment together through all seasons of life.”

-John D. Claybaugh⁶

Endnotes

- 1 [How's life at home? New Evidence on Marriage and the Set Point for Happiness](#)
- 2 [“Friendship: A Gospel Principle” Marlin K. Jensen](#)
- 3 [APA Dictionary of Psychology: Friendship](#)
- 4 [Church of Jesus Christ: Friendship](#)
- 5 [The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work](#)
- 6 [Dating: A Time to Become Best Friends](#)