



Family Vitality

building a strong marriage

By Michael Rupured, former Graduate Student, UK Department of Family Studies, and Sam Quick, Human Development and Family Relations Specialist.

A happy marriage is a joy as well as a tremendous challenge. It demands a lot of commitment, patience and effort. Sharing your life with another person presents you with endless opportunities for growth, both individually and as a couple. Don't feel discouraged when problems crop up; disagreements are normal. Accept these challenges as opportunities for learning and for growing.

When a difficulty arises, handle it in the most skillful way possible. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from this situation that will help me become a better and more loving person?" and "How can we as a couple use this as an opportunity to strengthen our marriage?"

Remember:

- Building a strong marriage takes commitment and time.
- A healthy marriage is the foundation of a strong family.
- Conflict in marriage can be good and always is an opportunity for growth.
- Focus primarily on changing yourself, not your spouse.
- It's OK to ask for change in your partner and to talk about it.

marriage strength assessment

Carefully read the following Marriage Strength Assessment. Using the scale provided, rate yourself on each item, then evaluate your spouse. Ask your spouse to do the same. You may want to make another copy of the Marriage Strength Assessment for your spouse. Or, you can read each item out loud so that you and your spouse privately can record your individual ratings on separate sheets of paper.

Don't feel discouraged if some of your ratings are not high, or that your spouse may rate you as weak. These items help to pinpoint differences in perception. Few couples, even happy ones, will rate high on every item. The purpose of the scale is to spark discussion and to suggest areas where more growth can occur.

After you and your spouse complete your assessments, discuss each item in a calm and kind way. Pay particular attention to areas where you perceive each other differently. Don't be too hard on yourself or on your spouse. Acceptance is an important step toward making positive changes. Focus on some specific, small changes you each want to make to enrich and to strengthen your marriage. Write these down and put the list in a place where you both will see it frequently. Set up a time in a week or so to encourage and compliment one another on your progress.

marriage enrichment

If you would like to strengthen your marriage, a variety of marriage enrichment groups are available. Group leaders are trained and experienced in building strong marriages. Marriage enrichment is for

Marriage Strength Assessment

“Not At All”										“Very Much”	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
									SELF	SPOUSE	
1. Committed to the marriage and to its health and growth.											
2. Expresses appreciation to spouse.											
3. Accepts and enjoys spouse's unique traits and habits.											
4. Listens carefully and respects the feelings of spouse and self.											
5. Warmly gives and receives physical affection and intimacy.											
6. Takes good care of self in terms of nutrition, exercise and rest; avoids substance abuse.											
7. Uses money, space and time fairly and wisely.											
8. Accepts responsibility for one's thoughts, words and actions; does not blame.											
9. Willing to try to see things from spouse's viewpoint.											
10. Has good conflict management skills.											
11. Appropriately attentive to the spiritual needs of self and spouse.											
12. Focuses on the positive; sees opportunities even in the midst of difficulties.											
13. Able to forgive spouse and self for mistakes and hurts.											
14. Does fair share of home and family related chores.											
15. Spends regular quality time with spouse.											
16. Even in challenging situations, stays calm and attuned to inner sense of what is best.											
17. Shares and supports interests and goals of spouse.											
18. Appropriately involved in interests, activities and friendships separate from spouse.											
19. Willing to reach out to friends and professionals when help is needed.											
20. Enjoys life; likes to play and have fun; smiles and laughs easily.											

couples who get along OK, but would like their marriage to be much healthier and happier. It’s also a way to make good marriages even better.

Find out what’s available in your area by checking with local churches, colleges, mental health professionals and family service agencies. Increasing numbers of couples are taking advantage of these opportunities. One of the best known marriage enrichment organizations is Associated Couples for Marriage Enrichment, ACME. ACME also offers an excellent enrichment program for newlyweds. For information on ACME groups in Kentucky and elsewhere in the nation, contact ACME, 459 S. Church Street, P.O. Box 10596, Winston-Salem, NC 27108; call toll-free 1-800-634-8325.

When marital difficulties are serious in nature, consider marriage counseling conducted by a trained and certified professional. Ask someone you trust to recommend a good counselor, or look in the yellow pages for a therapist certified by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, or call your local Comprehensive Care Center.

We all need a helping hand at times. A willingness to reach out for help is a sign of intelligence and strength.

This fact sheet is one in a series of six on the topic of Family Vitality. Others in the series include:

- *Characteristics of Strong Families* (FCS7-138)
- *Appreciation and Encouragement* (FCS7-139)
- *Time Together* (FCS7-140)
- *Family Council Meetings* (FCS7-142)
- *What You Can Do* (FCS7-143)