



Communication

What is the one indispensable ingredient for making marriages work? Family life educators usually answer: communication. This is good news, because effective communication can be learned. Skills such as active listening, using “I” statements, paying attention to my feelings and those of my spouse, and learning tips for “fighting fair” make marriage easier. Some couples use these skills intuitively because they saw them modeled in their own upbringing. Others can learn them through classes, workshops and reading.

Of course, the hardest part of communicating usually comes when there is disagreement between the two of you.

Commitment and Common Values

Some ingredients, if missing, can doom a relationship from the start. Two primary ones are commitment and common values.

Commitment bonds a couple together when you are tired, annoyed, or angry with each other. Sometimes, remembering your vows can prompt you to push past these problems and try to forgive and start again.

Common values are important. If you aren’t together on basic values such as children, honesty, fidelity, and putting family before work, no amount of learning or effort of the will can resolve the conflict. For example, constant tension will result if one spouse wants to live simply while the other wants life’s luxuries.

Spirituality/Faith

You might not consider yourself a spiritual person; however, anyone who seeks the deeper meaning of life, and not a life focused on personal pleasure, operates out of a spiritual sense. For many this desire is expressed in commitment to a specific faith tradition. Here one joins with others to worship God and work for the common good.

Although being a person of faith is not essential to making your marriage work, it’s a bonus. Certainly good people throughout the ages have had happy marriages and not all of them have been religious. But it helps to have faith principles to guide you and a faith community to encourage your commitment.