

HOW TO UPGRADE YOUR MARRIAGE WHEN YOU AREN'T IN COUNSELING

1. Emphasize your desire for a good relationship. Tell your partner that you're willing to make changes to improve your marriage. Ask your partner, "Will you join me in this process?" Ask, "Are you willing to make changes too?" If your partner is willing, proceed with the following steps.
2. Write down three changes you're willing to make in order to become an ideal partner. We all know what changes we need to make. Often we are so focused on improving our partner that we forget to make our own improvements. If you're both willing to grow, there's hope. Schedule a quiet hour together to share your change lists. At the end of the hour, hug warmly, smile and thank each other.
3. Pledge to keep growing. Pledge to become the best person you can be. Pledge to focus on your relationship for the next six months. Commit to follow through. At first, the changes you're making may seem awkward or silly; eventually they'll be natural.
4. Do not criticize yourself or your partner. Happy couples hand out five positive statements to every negative one. Say five or more positive appreciations to your partner every single day. Criticism is toxic; encouragement and appreciation, like vitamins, keep love thriving.
5. Share your life story. Couples make lots of assumptions about their mates. They stop asking and listening to each other as if they already know the answers. As a process, have each partner share their personal life story. Tell your life story out loud and include both the positive events and the traumatic ones. This process will bring you closer as even long-term couples will hear details they hadn't heard before.
6. Make reasonable requests. Couples often are stuck in the habit of blaming each other. Blaming is hurtful. When you turn blaming into reasonable requests, you leap forward. Instead of saying, "You never make the bed," ask, "Would you be willing to make the bed?"
7. Replace defensiveness with curiosity. Instead of saying, "No, I didn't do that," replace that defensive posture with "Help me understand" or "Let me think about that" or "I see what you mean."
8. Tear down stonewalls. Refusing to talk about issues is deadly to your relationship. Ignoring your partner is deadly. A stonewall in the middle of a conversation is a killer to connection. Instead of shutting down, say "I'm glad we can talk this over." You will get closer.
9. Watch your body language. Rolling eyes and sighing, staring into the distance, crossed arms locked firmly, tapping feet, all send messages that shut connection down. Facial expressions and body language set the tone for either open dialogue and touching or close it down. Look at your partner with soft eyes, speak kindly, touch gently. Hug warmly. Hug six or more times every single day. Say, "Good morning sweetheart."
10. Keep at it. Even if your partner is unwilling to participate to keep the marriage strong, don't let that stop you from making your own improvements.

