

10 Tips To Save Your Marriage At Midlife

“Be sure you choose someone you not only love but also will like after the first bloom has worn off,” advises Helen Tipton who married her husband Ross on September 25, 1937. In many long-term marriages today, the bloom has died. In fact, midlife and later divorce has become far more prevalent than ever before, especially among the middle-age population. According to a report by the National Center For Family and Marriage Research at Ohio's Bowling Green State University, the divorce rate doubled between 1990 and 2009 among adults 50 and older in the U.S.

What happened between “I do” and “I don’t anymore”?

Reasons for higher divorce rates at midlife and beyond include:

- Verbal, physical or emotional abuse as well as alcohol or drug abuse.
- Differences in values and lifestyle choices.
- Shift in social attitude toward marriage and divorce. Shedding one’s marriage has become easily accepted and easy.
- Increased longevity and attention to personal happiness. At 45, people are now facing another 40 years with their spouse rather than 20 or so a few generations ago. They don’t want to spend decades longer in an unloving relationship.
- Financial independence of women. More women today have careers and are therefore more economically affluent than in previous decades. Gain in financial security contributes to greater self-assurance and fewer fears about going it alone.
- Children have flown the coupe. Couples who “stayed together for the sake of the kids” now have the freedom they’ve been waiting for to split.
- Onset of “double menopause.” For both men and women, passage into midlife can stir an emotional rollercoaster. Spouses simultaneously struggling with aging may take out their inner turmoil on each other in the form of resentment, frustration, and rejection. Double menopause can wreak havoc on a relationship.

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Emotional & Economic Effects of Divorce

Healthwise, the stress of divorce diminishes effectiveness of the immune system, resulting in greater incidence of illness. Stress also provokes headaches, back pain, and arthritis. Entry back into the dating scene and pursuance of multiple sex partners heightens risk of sexually-transmitted diseases. The emotional devastation increases the likelihood of psychological disorders, such as depression, and drug and alcohol abuse.

Divorce, job loss, and illness top the list as the most common causes of personal bankruptcy; divorce is often the catalyst of the latter two crises.

From the standpoint of job performance, divorce can disrupt the productivity of an individual for years. Higher absenteeism and presenteeism (being physically there, but mentally checked out), poor morale and moodiness, and inability to focus contribute to work problems. Interruptions due to meetings with attorneys, court dates, relocation, and the like, also hamper functioning.

The financial bill is hefty, too. The average cost of divorce in the U.S. is estimated by Forbes to be \$15,000 to \$30,000. Court fees can add \$25,000 for a two-day trial. A study by Ohio State University's Center for Human Resource Research (<http://chrr.osu.edu/index.html>) found that divorce reduces a person's wealth by 77% compared to that of a single person. Matrimonial law work is currently a staggering \$28 billion a year industry.

Marriage Resuscitation

Today's mentality of "the couple next door got divorced, so it's perfectly fine" leads many others to conclude that ditching their union is the only choice. They think there's no way back and overlook what might be needed to sustain their marriages. Contrary to misconception, marriage resuscitation at midlife and later is a viable option. For a couple whose marriage has hit this juncture, the following 10 pointers will help get the process underway:

- 1** **Accept that neither of you are exactly the same person as when you married.** Experiences and events change us. Attempting to recapture what once was is futile. The relationship, much like a faltering business, has to be restructured to meet each other's needs today.
- 2** **Get to know each other again.** In the busyness of life, spouses forget to focus on each other. Jobs, professional commitments, community activities, and other obligations can pull a couple apart. Just as you schedule meetings for these responsibilities, make appointments to be together. Whether you sit on the patio in the cool evening breeze, go for a walk or bike ride, or share a latté at the coffee shop every Friday evening, make time to re-connect.

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- 3** **Accept that neither of you are exactly the same person as when you married.** Look in a mirror. Would you marry you? When a relationship hits the skids, natural inclination is to blame the other person. Instead, take a good, hard look at yourself. Do you still make an effort to look attractive (not to be confused with being skinny)? Are you proud of who you are? Do you have a healthy sense of self-worth? If you can't answer "yes" to these questions, there's work to be done.
- 4** **Re-learn the lessons of building a healthy marriage.** Jump start change by re-establishing relationship basics, such as communication, trust, respect, sharing, caring, humor and so forth. Count the worth of your mate, not his/her faults.
- 5** **Peel back arguments to identify their roots and modify interpretation.** When a dispute is stripped down to its core, it's often discovered that the squabble was precipitated due to one spouse possessing a "strength" where the other has a "weakness." The person with the strength was more knowledgeable, informed, experienced, skilled, talented or educated than his/her mate on the subject of the disagreement. A strength pit against a weakness turns into a fight. Rather than function in opposition, a couple must re-program and "blend" differences.
- 6** **Don't stick to the same old patterns, routines, and habits.** Predictability causes monotony. Sit down together and discuss the boring "stuff" and brainstorm new ways to do them. This gives you a plan of action to spice up the relationship.
- 7** **Plan leisure.** Going through the days, we come in contact with people and places that trigger "that would be so enjoyable for us to do together" ideas. But later, upon trying to recall them, the mind draws a blank. Capture these idea snippets by keying them into your phone's notepad or keep pen and paper handy in your car, briefcase, drawer of your nightstand, etc. Then, when you're trying to think of something different to do as a couple, you've got a ready list.
- 8** **Create a "couple" tradition.** Traditions add excitement to a relationship and help keep the two people connected. They also serve as an anchor and provide "glue" for the union to remain sturdy when the going gets rough. Establish one or more traditions that will make your relationship special year after year.
- 9** **Love the one you're with.** Observations at the office, gym, social outings, and elsewhere may lead you to believe that others are having all the fun. Don't be fooled. How many times have you seen the couple who seemed to "have it all" wind up in divorce court? Instead of wallowing or thinking the grass is greener or the other side, devote your mental energy to rekindling the romance between you and your mate.

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Seek professional help with a positive attitude. For marriage counseling or marriage education to have a chance of success, a couple must start with the proper outlook. Think “How can we revitalize our marriage?” not “Should we get a divorce?”

Taking action to transform a marriage that has fizzled into a renewed source of joy and pleasure requires time and patience. In the process, each spouse is likely to discover incredible strengths within themselves and the relationship. With steadfastness and perseverance, there’s high probability that a couple will come out of the journey amazed to have opened a new world of opportunities with their marriage not only intact, but better than ever.

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