

7 SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

Research in psychology and sociology continues to affirm the Church's timeless teaching. Thus, we offer the following suggestions based on scientific data and clinical wisdom:

Avoid cohabitation prior to marriage. Although about 50-80% of couples do it, research says they are 40-85% more likely to get divorced than those who don't (Bumpas & Sweet, 1995; Hall & Zhao, 1995; Bracher, Santow, Morgan & Russell, 1993; DeMaris & Rao, 1992, and Glen, 1990).

Practice pre-marital and marital chastity. Couples who wait until after marriage to have sex are 29-47% more likely to enjoy sex during marriage, according to a study by Hering (1994). After the wedding, be faithful to your spouse. Major hurt and disruption to relationships is often caused by extramarital affairs, viewing of pornography, and "emotional affairs" (in which one spouse invests him/herself emotionally in someone else, rationalizing the relationship because it is not a sexual one). While marriages in which these things happen usually are troubled prior to the affair, unfaithfulness can push the relationship to the breaking point, causing lasting wounds that may not heal.

Keep the faith! According to University of Wisconsin researcher Larry Bumpass, couples who attend church weekly are 35% less likely to divorce. In addition, according to a 1999 study by the Barna Research group, the divorce rate for Catholics is only 21% -- tied with Lutherans for the lowest rate among all Christian groups, and far lower than the national average.

Spend time together in prayer. Pope John Paul II, in his *Letter to Families*, writes, "Prayer increases the strength and spiritual unity of the family, helping the family to partake of God's own 'strength'" (4). Sociologist Andrew Greeley, in a 1991 study, found that only 1% of married couples who pray together regularly and report a high quality sexual relationship think that divorce is even possible for them.

Practice Natural Family Planning. A Michigan State University study (Tortorici, 1979) showed higher levels of marital satisfaction among couples who use NFP versus other methods of family planning, and some studies (e.g., Aquilar, 1980) have indicated that the rate of divorce for couples who practice NFP may be as low as 0.6%.

When you have a conflict, talk about it! A healthy marriage is not one that is free of conflict. In fact, researchers have found no relationship between the number or frequency of disagreements and marital dissatisfaction. Some happy couples have lots of conflicts, and some unhappy ones have very few. What makes the difference between happy and unhappy couples is how conflicts are resolved once they occur. By using sensitive, healthy communication skills, a couple can work through conflicts and make their marriage stronger.

Practice empathy and forgiveness. When you are angry or dismayed by what your spouse is doing or saying, try to imagine yourself in his or her shoes. Work towards forgiveness and trust when hurts occur. Grudges can devastate a marriage, but choosing to let go of angry feelings gives us the freedom to go on.

References

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