

Relationship Resilience: Building a Stronger Marriage

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S O U T H E A S T

P S Y C H O L O G I C A L

S E R V I C E S

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Resilience is...

- ◆ “bouncing back after adversity...problems don’t predict how people will do, something else does.”
(Steven Wolin, *The Resilient Self*, 1993)

Resilience is...

- ◆ “the ability to recover quickly from any misfortune or challenge.” (Kahn, MacArthur foundation on Successful Aging, 1991)

Resilience is...

- more than stoicism, self-reliance and determination...
- not just inborn strengths, fierce independence, or rugged individualism

Resilience is...

- an interactive and systemic phenomenon
- the product of a complex relationship of inner strengths and outer help
- developed over a lifetime

(Butler, Family Therapy Networker, Mar/April 1997)

Faith & Resilience

- Walk & not be weary – Isaiah 40:31
- External/internal resource – Philippians 4
- Unchanging – Psalm 100

Marriage & Faith

- God-ordained institution
- Parable for Kingdom of Heaven
- Intimacy – God given gift
- Specific instruction given

Submit – Ephesians 5:21-33

Love – I Corinthians 13

Intimacy – Song of Solomon

Resilience Applied to Marriage

- “Risk factors”

What determinants contribute to dissatisfaction and breakup of a marital union?

- “Protective factors”

What factors play a role in moderating the effects of risk and promoting marital satisfaction and stability?

Risk Factors for Divorce

The CDC reports that overall, 43 percent of all marriages end in divorce (2002). Other recent studies indicate divorce rates between 40 and 50 percent.

Do Christians fare any better?

Why Marriages Fail...

Most frequently reported:

Poor communication

Financial problems

A lack of commitment to the marriage

A dramatic change in priorities

Infidelity

Other frequent reasons given:

Failed expectations or unmet needs

Addictions and substance abuse

Physical, sexual or emotional abuse

Lack of conflict resolution skills

The “Seven Year Itch” Study

- Quality of marriage starts to sink rapidly just after the "I do"
- Continues downward through the first four years
- Quality of marriage plateaus after that first dip
- Declines again during years 8, 9, & 10 (the "seven-year itch" part)

Kurdak, Developmental Psychology, 1999

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What Did They Expect?

Problem of illusions versus reality

Building relationships with kids and careers,
without support systems

Happiness expected, but life is grinding, and
marriage is hard work.

Marriage not static

No obvious course to follow

Dramatic changes during a marriage

Patterns Predict Divorce

Greater negativity than positivity during conflict discussion.

The “four horsemen of the apocalypse” (criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling).

Recasting the oral history of the marriage in negative terms.

Reduced positive affect during conflict.

(Gottman & Levenson, 1992, and Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992)

"Should We Stay Together?"

- Jeffry H. Larson, chairman of the Family and Marriage Therapy Program, Brigham Young University (2000)
- Offers prospective couples scientifically proven methods for evaluating relationships and improving chances for long-term success

“Should We Stay Together?”

Larson’s model contains 25 predictors that are arranged in personal and relationship ***contexts***, ***individual traits***, and ***couple traits***.

The factors are categorized as:

liabilities (predicting marital dissatisfaction) or
assets (predicting marital satisfaction).

Liabilities

Context

1. Marriage at younger age
2. Unhealthy family-of-origin experiences
3. Parental divorce or chronic marital conflict
4. Parental or friends' disapproval
5. Pressure to marry
6. Little education or career preparation

Liabilities

Individual traits

1. High neurotic traits
2. Anxiety
3. Depression
4. Impulsiveness
5. Self-consciousness
6. Vulnerability to stress
7. Anger/hostility
8. Dysfunctional beliefs

Liabilities

Couple traits

1. Dissimilarity
2. Short acquaintanceship
3. Premarital sex
(especially with multiple partners)
4. Premarital pregnancy
5. Cohabitation
6. Poor communication and
conflict-resolution skills

Assets

Context

1. Older age
2. Healthy family-of-origin experiences
3. Happy parental marriage
4. Parental and friends' approval
5. Significant education and career preparation

Assets

Individual traits

1. High self-esteem
2. Flexibility
3. Assertiveness
4. Sociability

Assets

Couple traits

1. Similarity
2. Long acquaintanceship
3. Good communication skills
4. Good conflict resolution skills/style

So What?

- Be proactive
- Increase protective factors by focusing on ways to strengthen marital relationship
- The sooner, the better

Strength Exercises

- Work on Communication
- Learn to Resolve Conflicts
- Consider Relationship Strengths & Weaknesses
- Explore Families-of-Origin Issues
- Create “Together” Time
- Develop Individual, Couple & Family Goals

Communication

- We can't...don't...won't...?
Communication Happens!
- What is Being Communicated & How?
- Sharing Styles:
 - ◆ Passive
 - ◆ Assertive
 - ◆ Aggressive
 - ◆ Passive-Aggressive

Communication

- Language of Love (Chapman):
 - ◆ Quality Time
 - ◆ Words of Affirmation
 - ◆ Gifts
 - ◆ Acts of Service
 - ◆ Physical Touch

Communication Roles

- Sharing – assertive
 - ◆ Think before you speak
 - ◆ Is it a good time?
 - ◆ Describe your feelings, “I” statements
 - ◆ Give details (don’t overwhelm)
 - ◆ Make request & reinforce response
- Listening – active listening
 - ◆ Focus on other – set self aside
 - ◆ Reflect & restate (satellite dish)
 - ◆ Seek clarification
 - ◆ What must that feel like for him/her?
 - ◆ No defending, reacting, preparing

Conflict Resolution

- Set time & place
- Define problem
- How do each contribute to problem
- Brainstorm, list all possible solutions
- Discuss/evaluate solutions
- Agree on one solution to try
- Agree on how each will work on solution
- Set up follow-up meeting & discuss
- Reward contribution toward solution

Strengths & Weaknesses

- Natural for negatives rise to the top
- Be deliberate in identifying your relationship's strengths & areas in need of growth
- Discuss both strengths & weaknesses
- Benefit from your different perspectives
- Build on strengths to assist growth

Family-of-Origin Issues

- It's true that you marry your spouse **and** your spouse's family
- Styles of relating were modeled
- Frequently unknowingly recreated
- Closeness and flexibility differences most apparent in the early years of marriage
- Explore & discuss differences and choose what to adopt & what to change in your own family

Together Time

- Prioritize your relationship on your family agenda
- Partner before parent
- Balance personal, couple, and family times (all important)
- Schedule date nights, communication sessions, and leisure activity/exercise together

Develop Goals

- Have purpose in your life
- Provide a means to measure growth and progress
- Consider personal, couple, family, and financial goals
- Integrate short- and long-term goals
- Talking about hopes and dreams will often draw you closer

Intimacy

- God's Gift To Us
- Happens on multiple levels
 - ◆ Emotional
 - ◆ Physical
 - ◆ Spiritual
- Intimacy = Closeness
 - ◆ Vulnerability
 - ◆ Oneness - "one flesh"

Vive La Difference!

- Recognize and Appreciate Differences
- Feeling/Intuition vs. Fact/Analytic
- Verbal vs. Nonverbal
- Process vs. Fix
- Emotional/Closeness vs. Physical/Visual Trigger

Other Helpful Strategies

- Look for the good in spouse & compliment them
- Offer praise frequently
- Make positive comments outnumber negative or critical comments
- Prioritize your marriage like you were dating



Thank You!

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