

COUPLE TALK *Communicating with Your Partner*

Commitment to Look for the Positive

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How do you feel when you are around people who look for and talk about the negative things in life? When it's sunny, they complain about the heat. When it's raining, they complain about the dampness. When things are going well, they could always be better! If you find yourself avoiding these "negative thinking" people, then you are not alone. People generally like to be around people who think and act in a positive way.

A positive or negative point of view or perspective can also affect how you view and get along with your spouse. Based on 20 years of research, John Gottman, psychologist and author of *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (1999, Three Rivers Press), has found that couples in stable marriages maintain at least five times as many positive moments together than negative moments on a daily basis. According to Gottman, "once your marriage gets 'set' at a certain degree of positivity, it will take far more negativity to harm your relationship than if your 'set point' were lower. And if your relationship becomes overwhelmingly negative, it will be more difficult to repair it" (p. 21).

Looking for and building upon the "positive" or good in your relationship with your partner requires a commitment—a commitment to using positive thinking and communication skills—in order to build a base for appreciation and respect. This commitment to building a positive relationship can be demonstrated in several ways:

- Promoting your and your partner's welfare
- Experiencing happiness together
- Having high regard for yourself and your partner
- Being able to count on each other in times of need
- Understanding each other's needs
- Sharing yourself and your things with your partner
- Providing and receiving emotional support from your partner

- Communicating intimately with each other
 - Valuing your partner in your own life
- Realizing that acts of kindness and time spent together sharing happy events contribute to couple satisfaction, you can be more aware of these occurrences and let your partner know of your appreciation. How often do you forget to acknowledge these positive actions and words? Below are some of the helpful strategies shared in the Ohio State University Extension Family Life Month Fact Sheet, "Building Successful Marriages" written by Joan Garrett (<http://ohioline.osu.edu/flm99/index.html>). Show your commitment to a positive relationship by:

- **Showing interest**—Be attentive, listen to your partner.
- **Being affectionate**—Touch, hold hands, be tender.
- **Showing you care**—Do something special or out-of-the-ordinary.
- **Being appreciative**—Let your partner know that he or she has done something that pleases you.
- **Having tolerance**—Focus on the strengths of your relationship.

A commitment to emphasize the positive aspects of your relationship can lead to new traditions and memories that you and your partner build together. These are important investments in your relationship that will help see you through the changes and challenges of life.

ADDED NOTE

Other strategies for increasing your commitment to look for the positive in your relationship are shared in "Keeping the Romance Alive" written by Melinda Hill (<http://ohioline.osu.edu/lines/fami.html#homeaway>). Discuss the following thoughts of your relationship with your partner: "Things I really appreciate about you ..."; "Things that are really romantic for you ..."; "What I really miss about you when you are gone ..."; "What I look forward to most when coming home ..."