

MARRIAGE REPAIR KIT

By Harville Hendrix and Helen Lakelly Hunt

When we fall in love, we see life in Technicolor. We nibble each other's ears and tell each other everything; our limitations and rigidities melt away. We're sexier, smarter, funnier, more giving. We feel whole; we're connected.

But inevitably, things start to go wrong. The veil of illusion falls away, and it turns out your partner has qualities you can't bear. Even traits you once admired grate on you. Old hurts resurface as you realize your partner cannot or will not love and care for you as promised.

Since he no longer willingly gives you what you need, you try to coerce him into caring through criticism, intimidation, shame, withdrawal, crying, anger—whatever works. The power struggle has begun and may continue for many years, until you split, settle into an uneasy truce, or look for help, desperate to have your dream back.

The good news is that the power struggle is also supposed to end. The emotional bond created by romantic love evolves into a powerful organic bond through the process of resolving conflict. With self-awareness, we can correct what has gone wrong.

Four Steps to a Better Marriage

1. Make a list of the positive and negative traits of both of your parents. Then make a similar list describing your partner. What connections do you see?
2. List the traits you like least in your partner. Then make a list of the traits you like best in yourself. Compare the two and share with your partner.
3. Think about how you handle frustration. Do you tend to exaggerate your feelings or withdraw and keep them to yourself? If you do the first, you're a maximizer; if you do the second, you're a minimizer. In most partnerships, one person is a maximizer and the other a minimizer, and this is a source of conflict. The way to alter this is for each of you to become more like your partner.
4. Ask your partner to state his deepest frustration with you. Then ask what he needs most from you. Listen without reacting. Validate his point of view, and express empathy. Stretch to meet his deepest needs. Record your thoughts and progress in a journal and keep sharing with one another.

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