



Secrets from The Therapists Chair



Every couple will have their unique challenges. However there are also a number of suggestions, strategies and techniques that help improve almost everyone's relationship. Here are some of these secrets from the therapist's chair:

Number 1

The Production vs. Connection Distinction:

As couples mature, often there are increasing demands on their time and resources. Career development, the care and feeding of children, home projects, health needs of aging parents, etc. all conspire to erode the time a couple has for each other. In therapy we describe this as life having become about production rather than connection. Knowing about "production-creep" is the most useful step in doing something about it. Although it's a cliché that we need to attend to our relationship, actually identifying these competing demands and putting a plan in place to ensure "couple time" works to ensure the relationship stays vital.

Number 2

Fifty Percent of good communication is NOT listening:

The idea that listening is just as important as talking is one of these pieces of relationship and communication folklore that do little or nothing to improve the exchange of important information within a marriage. Fifty percent of good communication is NOT listening. Listening is 10% of good communication. Ninety percent of communication is GOOD COMMUNICATION, which is getting the message right in the first place. It is never the responsibility of the listener to figure out what we are saying; rather it is the job of the communicator to figure out what it is they want to say and say it clearly and well as soon as they open their mouths.

Number 3

The Permission vs. Consultation Distinction:

In successful long-term adult relationships there has to be a balance between looking after the relationship needs and looking after personal needs. This is typified by the distinction between "permission" and "consultation." Often we will hear that one partner needs to get the other

partner's "permission" to go away for the weekend, make a purchase, to stay late at work, etc. However, a need for "permission" from another adult implies a degree of authority and control one person has over the other, and in the long term this often generates resistance, resentment, and recrimination. Rather than looking for permission, tell a partner what you intend to do, but then invite them to tell you how they feel about this. Negotiations and modifications then get made from this perspective. Although it might sound as though this will increase conflict, in the long run it actually works to remind both people in the relationship that if both sets of individual needs are not frequently addressed within the relationship, trouble will be just around the corner.

Number 4

Love is Behaviour (not words):

This therapist secret is about the common understanding that "talk is cheap." We all want to hear about the love and affection the other person has for us and not hearing "I love you" can be damaging to a relationship. However, we also know issues can be avoided or minimized with clever phrases and false promises. Showing someone you love them (rather than only telling them) ironically "speaks" volumes. The one resource we can't make more of is time, and giving our time to our partner, showing them they are worth our time is one of, if not the most powerful way to let someone know they are important to you.

Number 5

Focusing on gender differences is a waste of time:

Time and time again research shows us that men and women are far more similar than they are different. Despite the fact that we have been socialized to occupy different roles in society, the reality remains that men and women think the same way, want the same things, and have the same feelings about important issues. To drive the point home, I'm fond of saying that knowing someone's gender only tells you as much as knowing what language they speak. Essentially knowing someone is a man is like knowing they speak English: it tells you a little bit about them, but it would be foolish to assume you know about their emotional needs, their degree of ambition, their desire to parent, etc. simply because they speak English.

Number 6

Common Courtesy remains a very powerful relationship tool:

Related to the point about production vs. connection, when we get busy (but also when we become accustomed to each other and move out of the honeymoon phase of a relationship) it is easy to both take the other person for granted and feel taken for granted ourselves. Remembering to acknowledge on a daily basis the little things that are done for each other means that we haven't stopped paying attention to our partner and all the things they bring to the relationship. Some couples scoff when I explain this and incredulously ask, "So I'm supposed to say thank you every time he folds the towels or every time she deposits a pay cheque!?" The answer is "YES!" Research overwhelmingly shows that the most satisfied couples are ones who regularly and frequently offer each other positive and appreciative comments.

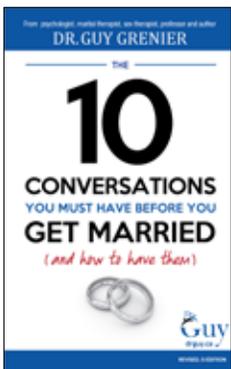
Three Tips:

Teaching couples better communication techniques and reminding them to show common courtesy to each other remain the two quickest and most effective ways to bring couples back from the brink of breakup.

The final tip is to remember there is no "end zone," or "finish line," in marriage. Although it has become cliché that we have to work to make our relationships last, the bigger truth is that that work never stops. ■

Stay well!

Dr. Guy



Getting married or know someone who is?

From sexual compatibility to personal ambition, from chores to church, from fighting about the fight to pet politics, The 10 Conversations equips partners, old and new, with the necessary tools required to create a laughing, lasting, and loving relationship. The must-have book for all couples who are thinking of tying the knot!

Order on-line at www.drguy.ca

Marriage Stress Test

What stresses marriage? Below are some of the more common and more toxic relationship stressors. See if you experience any of the following:

1. Money problems like hidden debt, lack of autonomy, insufficient/meager resources, unilateral financial plans, etc.
2. When intimate contact is often confused with a request for sex.
3. A substantial difference in how often each of you want sex.
4. Gender double standards (e.g., it's OK for him, but not for her)
5. Poor communication (jumping to solutions, giving advice, fighting about the fight, etc.).
6. Poor problem solving skills (e.g., little progress is made with problems, having the same discussion or fight repeatedly, etc.).
7. Personal development that takes couple members in different directions (e.g., you spend increasing amounts of time doing pleasurable but separate activities).
8. Lack of together time (busy family, work demands, other family obligations, etc.).
9. Mental health concerns (depression, anxiety, personality disorder, etc.).
10. Lingering animosities (unresolved issues, trust violations, etc.).

Unfortunately there is little positive about the above list; dealing with only one of the above issues can cause significant relationship strain, and having more than one to deal with certainly means you will have negative relationship issues frequently on your mind and this leads to stress.

Self-help books, advice columns, and guidance and suggestions from friends and family can help particularly with issues 1, 4, 5, 6, and 8. More sophisticated or professional help is often required for issues like 2, 3, 7, 9, and 10.

The items above are some of the most common relationships stressors, however this list is not exhaustive: there are many other things that can lead to relationship anxiety. Not experiencing any of the above issues does not mean you are not stressed. ■

Contact Dr. Guy:

Office: Suite 203B, 186 Albert Street, London ON N6A 1M1

Telephone: 519.438.7131 • Email: guy@drguy.ca