

100 Ideas for Strengthening Marriages in the Community



Strengthening your own marriage

1. Be able to laugh together.
2. Create happy memories together.
3. Come to value your differences as strengths rather than irritants.
4. Give both of you a safe place to talk about your ideas and feelings, and your hopes and fears.
5. Manage conflicts without letting them escalate out of control.
6. Be able to offer and ask for forgiveness.
7. Solve problems quickly by negotiating the best solution for both of you.
8. Learn all you can about how to build a strong marriage.
9. Make your marriage a high priority, so that you avoid taking on responsibilities and jobs that will have a negative impact on your relationship.
10. Have a couple who can mentor you through the ups and downs of married life. See the page Marriage Mentoring on www.marriageresource.org.uk
11. Understand how much God loves you and what His love really means, so that you are better able to love your spouse.
12. Pray together at least weekly.
13. Study the Bible as a couple at least weekly.
14. Value each other's strengths and appreciate each other.
15. Celebrate your marriage everyday in small, but thoughtful, and creative ways. Tell each other how glad you are to be married, delight in each other and find ways to show each other kindness, appreciation, affection and support.

16. Make it a goal to attend a marriage enhancing event annually. There are many different ones on offer. Visit www.2-in-2-1.co.uk to find the range on offer.
17. Find a good book about marriage and buy two copies. Read a chapter each week on your own, and then think of three questions you would like to ask your husband or wife about what you have read. Meet weekly to discuss your ideas. Pass the books to other couples when you have finished with them. Or start a book circle to pass pairs of books around a group of married couples. See www.smartmarriages.com for some book suggestions.
18. Sign up for email devotionals for couples from www.familylife.com
19. Try out lots of unusual ways to have fun together! Laugh, share happy memories, and just enjoy being together. Try '40 Unforgettable Dates with your Mate' by Dr Gary and Barbara Rosberg (ISBN 0-8423-6106-5), or buy a 'Simply Romantic Nights' kit from www.familylife.com
20. Subscribe to a magazine that strengthens marriage. 'Marriage Partnership' magazine is an excellent publication. View sample articles and archives online at www.marriagepartnership.com Give gift subscriptions as wedding presents. Forward useful articles to friends.
21. Have regular sessions to coordinate diaries, organise family schedules etc. to take care of the little details of married life.
22. Discover how each of you prefers to be loved. Write a list for each other of the times when you felt very loved by your husband or wife, and look for themes. Talk about other things that would help you to feel special and loved, and listen to the ways in which you could share your love in the future. Keep on talking about your preferences and needs, as they may change from time to time. Don't expect your husband or wife to guess what you need.
23. Sign up for creative ways to 'romance' each other at www.familylife.com You can sign up for ideas for him, or ideas for her, and each of you will be sent an idea twice a week.
24. Talk together about your hopes for your marriage. Make plans to turn these hopes into realities.
25. Do not take each other for granted. Thank you spouse for cooking a meal, cleaning the home, and whatever else they do for both of you.
26. Pray for your own marriage and each other everyday. Consider how much God loves you both, and find ways to show your husband or wife how much they are loved by God.

The marriages of family and friends

27. Write letter of appreciation to couples who have inspired and strengthened your marriage, or design a card for this purpose on your computer. Encourage other couples to do the same.
28. Celebrate the anniversaries of your family and friends in a special way. Hold a surprise party, send cards, and give marriage-building books. Show them that their marriage is important to you, too.
29. Sign up for an email service that offers weekly marriage strengthening tips and forward these ideas to family and friends. www.2-in-2-1.co.uk
30. Pass around an attractive blank book at a wedding reception and invite people to write their favourite marriage 'date' ideas, and any tips they would like to share to strengthen the couples' marriage.
31. During wedding services, have a special moment of recommitment for the married couples who are attending.
32. Invite other couples to come together for fun, either for a meal at your home, or a picnic, or to go bowling, etc. Many couples don't take the time to have fun in their relationship, so this may encourage them to take time to relax together.
33. Invite couples around to watch a marriage strengthening video/DVD such as 'Laugh your way to a better marriage', 'Fireproof', 'the Story of Us', 'A Beautiful Mind', 'Family Man' and 'Town and Country.' Create some discussion questions for the couples to take home and discuss together. Visit www.laughyourway.com. Visit www.smartmarriages.com for an excellent discussion guides for 'Fireproof' and for 'The Story of Us'.
34. Give marriage strengthening books, videos, DVDs and tapes as engagement, wedding, birth, anniversary and birthday gifts.
35. Encourage married couples to visit www.longdistancecouples.com for creative ideas about strengthening a relationship where the husband and wife have to live apart because of work commitments, etc.
36. Offer to provide babysitting, or have your friends' children sleep at your home for the night, so that couples can go out together and have some time alone.
37. Hand out flyers for the www.2-in-2-1.co.uk website. Contact Dave and Liz Percival, through the website, for a supply.

The Marriages of those in your Church Community

38. Plan an annual marriage enhancing event for your church congregation. Choose a good venue – hotels can offer cheaper deals at weekends and provide leisure facilities too. Invite an experienced couple to lead, or use prepared materials. See the list of resources at the end of this page.
39. Avoid giving too many church-related jobs to one family. Where possible, encourage the husband and wife to work together in a shared ministry so that the church doesn't pull couples apart.
40. Take care of the marriages of your church leaders. Help them to be accountable for spending time with their families. Pay for them to attend a marriage event for leaders, such Time Out for Leaders run by One Accord – see www.oneaccord.org.uk
41. Encourage your church leaders to preach about marriage regularly, at least once a year during National Marriage Week (February 7th to 14th).
42. Make sure that every couple who is married in your church is well-prepared for marriage. Best of all offer marriage preparation events that include the use of FOCCUS www.affinities.org.uk or PREPARE/ENRICH www.prepare-enrich.co.uk questionnaires.
43. Where possible, encourage engaged couples to find a mentor couple to support them through their engagement and the early years of their marriage.
44. Encourage your church to honour those who have been married for a long time. Hold a party, or send the couple on a weekend marriage event, or short break away.
45. In a large church, hold monthly or quarterly, anniversary parties for all the couples who have had an anniversary during that time period. It doesn't have to be elaborate, just a drink and cake, or cheese and biscuits, or coffee and dessert. Play games like 'Mr and Mrs' watch a marriage strengthening video together, or share happy marriage memories.
46. Visit www.marriageresource.org.uk to find materials for holding a Marriage Thanksgiving and Rededication Service, to view marriage strengthening pages, and much else.
47. Invite the teenagers in your church to compile a booklet of marriage strengthening ideas. Encourage them to interview some of the married couples in the congregation as they research this booklet.

48. Provide good relationship education for teens in the church. Visit www.celebratingmarriage.com for 'The M Word' and 'Exploring Marriage with News Desk.'
49. Hold marriage banquets in your church, or arrange for a banquet at a local hotel. If you choose a buffet-style dinner this may not be very expensive. Invite speakers for after-dinner marriage speeches, mini-seminars, or even to act out marriage strengthening sketches!
50. Start a marriage strengthening resource library at your church. Include good video packages, such as the 'Time for Each Other' kits from CPO, 'Sixty Minute Marriage' from Care for the Family, and other resources listed in the Resource section.
51. Designate one day a week as a special day to pray for marriages – our own marriages, those of our family and friends, those of our congregations and church leadership, and the marriages of community leaders and policy makers.
52. Make sure that your church has a sign directing couples to Christian counsellors who are skilled at working with marriages, preferably members of another church, so that those facing difficulties know where to turn.
53. Teach as many couples as you can how to do Marriage First Aid. See www.marriageresource.org.uk for details and for materials.
54. Buy books to lend to people with marriage difficulties, like 'How to save your marriage alone' by Ed Wheat, 'The Divorce Remedy' by Michele Weiner Davis and 'Love must be tough' by James Dobson.
55. Buy a 'Choosing wisely: Before you Divorce' kit from Divorce Care so that couples thinking about divorcing can have the best possible information about the alternatives. See www.divorcecare.org
56. Encourage the use of Marriage Resource's Prayer Diary, which gives one topic for each day of the year – see www.marriageresource.org.uk
57. Hold a special prayer breakfast for couples. Serve a delicious breakfast at tables for two, and give each couple a 'menu' of creative prayer ideas. Allow some space and time for couple prayer as well as group prayer.
58. Whenever your church puts on event for married couples, be sure to arrange adequate child care so that as many can attend as possible, having the childcare in the same building as the event can be especially helpful to parents of young babies and mothers who are breastfeeding.
59. Some churches have all their midweek activities on one night, so that families can attend together, with the children having their club night at the same time as their parents go to a prayer meeting, choir practice, etc. This enables families to be together for more nights in the week.

60. Encourage your church to have an offering once a year for a marriage-supporting organization like National Marriage Week.
61. Print off copies of this page and circulate them for discussion by your church committee.

Marriages in your workplace

62. Talk to your employer about the benefits of workers who have happy marriages and help raise awareness of the need to invest in the marriages of employees. Visit www.2-in-2-1.co.uk and www.smartmarriages.com for examples of research to support your case.
63. Ask your employer to honour wedding anniversaries by offering an extra day of leave on wedding anniversaries. Or perhaps by sending a bouquet to the couple or a gift voucher for a cinema or restaurant.
64. Encourage your employer to arrange social events for the whole family to attend.
65. At work parties and banquets have a time where the husbands and wives of employees are honoured and thanked.
66. If you find out when your colleagues are having their wedding anniversaries, send a card, or email them about websites that have marriage strengthening ideas or tips for romance.
67. Offer to run lunch-time marriage strengthening courses in the workplace, or show clips of the video 'Sixty Minute Marriage' by Rob Parsons, from www.care-for-the-family.org.uk . Hand out discussion cards for employees to take home and discuss with their spouse.
68. Encourage your employer to attend Rob Parson's 'Let's Do Life' seminars. Visit www.letsdolife.com
69. Offer your employer the book or audio tape of Rob Parson's bestselling book 'The Heart of Success' on the importance of relationships and the work-life balance. Visit www.theheartofsuccess.com
70. If your employer puts extra pressure on the workforce to work long hours, challenge the practice and encourage work patterns that support marriages and families, instead of those that add extra stresses to relationships. Help the employer to see that when his employees have happy marriages and families, he will have a happier, healthier, and more productive work-force.

Marriages in your local community

71. Invite your congregation to offer regular baby-sitting at the church so that parents can go on dates together. This could also be offered as a service to your local community. Consider Saturday or Sunday afternoons/evenings. Parents need to pre-book places so that you have enough helpers. Children can bring their own packed tea and the church can provide care and play for the little ones and a programme of activity for the older children. Check that your helpers have all been police-checked and trained in child protection and safety.
72. Talk to head teachers about the benefits to their pupils when their parents have happy marriages, Find research at www.2-in-2-1.co.uk and www.smartmarriages.com to help support your case. Invite the school to help sponsor an event to strengthen the parents' marriages.
73. Choose one of the activities in this leaflet and put it into action during National Marriage Week - February 7th to 14th. For more information and ideas about National Marriage Week visit www.marriage-week.org.uk and www.marriageresource.org.uk
74. Run a small group seminar for couples in your own home. Use ready made videos and materials to make it easy for you, and invite three or four couples to join you. Consider using 'The Marriage Course' from Holy Trinity, Brompton, www.themarriagecourse.org or 'Keeping Marriages Healthy' from Intimate Life Ministries www.relationaltraining.co.uk , or 'The 21st Century Marriage' from Care for the Family www.care-for-the-family.org.uk , or visit www.2-in-2-1.co.uk for other ideas for resources, or download the HomeBuilders couples series from www.familylife.com
75. Sponsor a contest in your local paper. Free papers may be especially open to your ideas. Invite people to write 200 words starting with the line, 'I'm happy to be married because...' Ask the paper to print the winning ones, and offer the prize of a restaurant voucher, theatre voucher or weekend break for the winner, and marriage strengthening books for winner and runners up. You may be able to negotiate with restaurants, hotels and book shops to donate the prizes.
76. Encourage health visitors and other providing antenatal classes to include a session for couples to help them strengthen their marriage as they enter parenthood.
77. Explore the material in 'Ten Great Dates' by David and Claudia Arp. Find this at www.marriagealive.org This offers couples short mini-seminars at a central venue, then the opportunity to take a worksheet away to discuss during their own choice of date. The organiser can provide childcare for the couples to help them make the most of this opportunity and the 'dates' can be run once a month.

78. Contact 'Care for the Family' and sponsor a marriage strengthening event in your local community. They can offer different programmes according to your needs and will help with the publicity. You need to provide a suitable venue and guarantee a minimum number of couples.
www.care-for-the-family.org.uk
79. Make up your own leaflets of marriage strengthening ideas, or use relevant pages from the Marriage Resource website www.marriageresource.org.uk . Take these and leave them in your local doctor's surgery, dentist, library and maternity units.
80. Ask your local library to provide a list of the marriage strengthening books they hold. Often you can request that your library provides specific books, and you may be able to persuade them to purchase more books to loan.
81. Sponsor a float at the local carnival. Create a design to show the value of marriage and hand out marriage strengthening leaflets along the way.
82. Make a marriage strengthening display and ask your local library if you can set it up for a fixed time period. Try for National Marriage Week. Include leaflets for people to take away, and advertise marriage strengthening events. If you have any friends who are skilled at graphics and display ask them to help you.
83. Hold a special exhibition about marriage. Take along computers and offer pre and post marriage questionnaires - PREPARE/ENRICH www.prepare-enrich.co.uk and FOCCUS www.affinities.org.uk. Serve refreshments at attractive tables for two; invite local restaurants and healthclubs to offer special deals for married couples and to provide advertising and activities at the event. Show clips of marriage strengthening videos. Include thoughtful posters and activities to encourage the couples to think about their happiest memories, and funniest stories. Include a display of wedding dresses, and serve wedding cake as part of the refreshments.
84. Create poster to encourage people to work on their marriages, Work with any graphic designers that you know. Be creative with your computer publishing programme. Small A4 posters could be placed in buses, libraries, surgeries, public notice boards, etc.
85. Sponsor a writing competition at your local school. Set a subject like 'How to have a happy marriage'. Offer prizes that will appeal to the age of the children in the school. Perhaps you could offer vouchers for the whole family to have a special outing to a local theme park.
86. Help to develop a Community Family Trust in your area. See www.bcft.co.uk for a model in the Bristol Family Community Trust.

87. Get together a group of people with experience of working in or visiting schools, and purchase samples of useful teaching materials on relationships. See Marriage Resource's Marriage Education for Young People page at www.marriageresource.org.uk . Contact school heads and/or heads of PHSE and offer to demonstrate the use of the materials to them.

People you meet

88. Wear a white carnation during National Marriage Week – it can lead to a conversation about the importance of marriage and of strengthening it. An artificial carnation lasts longer (for years!) and has low maintenance.
89. When chatting with strangers on a plane, or elsewhere, invite them to tell you their marriage strengthening ideas. You can tell them that you are collecting them for a booklet or leaflet. If they are interested, take their details and send them a copy of the finished product.
90. Ask people in conversation to share their happiest marriage memories, or best marriage date ideas.

Using the media to help strengthen marriages

91. Ask your local radio station to run a competition for the most creative ideas for a low-budget date for a married couple.
92. Write letters to the editor of your local paper praising any community effort to strengthen marriages and pointing out the harm that can be done by any policies undermining marriage. Always be courteous and polite in the letter-writing.
93. Ask your local Yellow Pages if they could include some marriage strengthening tips in their empty advertising spots. You will need to give them a list of short tips to include. If necessary, be willing to sponsor adverts close to Counselling, Marriage and Wedding listings.
94. When you see a television programme that offers a positive picture of marriage, write and thank the producer. If you see an advert or programme that portrays a negative picture of marriage, write and share your views in a polite manner. Use statistics to help support your case and do all you can to encourage producers and presenters to give marriage good publicity.
95. Offer to write a regular feature of marriage building ideas for your local paper. Talk to the editor about the word-count required and show samples of your articles.
96. Encourage your local paper to run feature articles on couples who have been married a long time.

97. Write to 'agony columns' telling positive stories of how marriage education and mentoring has helped your marriage.
98. Make a list of ten exciting 'dates' for married couples in your area. Publish them in your local paper or make them into a leaflet to leave in the information centre, libraries, etc.
99. Hold a sponsored event to raise money for a marriage organization. Work with your local media to ensure maximum publicity.

And finally

100. Keep on working on your own marriage, making sure that it is a priority in your life. Think of your spouse more highly than of yourself and do something every day that makes them feel extra specially loved, so that your relationship will be the best advertisement for marriage your family and friends can have. Remember these twenty-one words –
The key to success in marriage is to help your spouse enjoy being married to you, and to do so continually.

Useful Websites and Resources

www.marriageresource.org.uk – many resources for individuals and for churches

www.marriage-week.org.uk – Marriage Week UK information

www.2-in-2-1.co.uk – website for all kinds of marriage matters

www.themarriagecourse.org - The Marriage Course, and The Marriage Preparation Course, Holy Trinity, Brompton

www.prepare-enrich.co.uk – PREPARE/ENRICH questionnaires for engaged and married couples that facilitate understanding and communication, and help identify useful areas for discussion. To be used with a trained practitioner.

www.affinities.org.uk – FOCCUS questionnaires for engaged and married couples that facilitate understanding and communication, and help identify useful areas for discussion. To be used with a trained facilitator.

www.care-for-the-family.org.uk – books, videos, magazine, resources and seminars.

www.letsdolife.com

www.theheartofsuccess.com

www.relationaltraining.co.uk - Intimate Life Ministries (Keeping Marriages Healthy) – course, help with marriage problems

www.smartmarriages.com – research, marriage strengthening tips, books, conference information, video discussion guides, etc.

www.familylife.com - email devotionals, romance tips, a study guide for couples and the 'Simply Romantic Nights' kit.

www.marriagepartnership.com – magazine website

www.marriagealive.org – information about David and Claudia Arp's 'Ten Great Dates' kit.

www.longdistancecouples.com – ideas for couples who live along way apart

www.celebratingmarriage.com – a range of materials to promote positive understandings of marriage and family life for all ages from young children to teenagers, including an exciting CDROM programme for older teenagers.

www.bcft.co.uk – Bristol Community Family Trust – model of what can be done

www.oneaccord.org.uk – one of the UK marriage organizations. They include specific events for ministers and spouses.

www.laughyourway.com – an amusing American marriage strengthening site

www.divorcecare.org – materials for people who are divorced or separated, encouraging personal and spiritual development.

Credit

The idea for this page came from a booklet called 'Strengthening Marriages in your Community – 101 Ideas To Get You Started' published by the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, LLC, 5310 Belt Road NW, Washington, DC 20015-1961 info@smartmarriages.com

Karen Holford and Edward Pratt.