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Keys for Strong Commitment in Marriage

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Having commitment means being dedicated to a cause. Commitment comes in all different shapes and sizes, but the most important type of commitment, for many, is commitment to your marriage. Often couples start their marriage with commitment, but they don't realize commitment takes continual time, energy, thought, and action. This fact sheet presents three types of commitment and describes how to strengthen your marital commitment.

Three Levels of Commitment

Dr. Michael Johnson, a Sociology professor at Penn State University, has studied commitment and has developed three different types of commitment. These three types: personal, moral, and structural commitment, can give you balance and dedication in your relationship (Temple, 2003).

- Personal Commitment is also known as “I Want To” (Temple, 2003). If you have personal commitment, you may find yourself thinking, “I want to stay in my marriage.” You may feel pleasure or joy from things you have personal commitment for.
- Moral Commitment is also known as “I Ought To” (Temple, 2003). Moral commitment means being committed because you believe it is the right thing to do. This may include staying in a marriage because of a certain set of values or beliefs. You may say, “I made a commitment before God and I should keep my commitment” (Temple, 2003).

- Structural Commitment is also known as “I Have To” (Temple, 2003). If you have structural commitment, you would find yourself thinking of staying in the marriage for your kids, it costs too much to get divorced, or staying together because you might worry about what others think of you.

Strengthening Your Marital Commitment

While all three types of commitment may be present at times in many marriages, personal commitment, or *I want to* commitment is what makes a solid foundation in marriages. Since commitment is an ongoing process, it is important to think about and work on your relationship and commitment often. Here are three ways you can strengthen the personal commitment in your marriage:

- 1) **Plan and Try to Commit.** Cultivating a great marriage requires commitment (Goddard & Marshall, 2010). It is important to have commitment not only when you begin your marriage, but in the day-to-day tasks of marriage as well. Commitment is a choice and choosing to plan and commit to your marriage will help you and your spouse grow a committed relationship (Goddard & Marshall, 2010). One way you and your spouse can plan for commitment is goal setting (Temple, 2003). Setting goals for the future as a couple can join the two of you towards a common purpose and improve your commitment. If you and your spouse have a goal of buying a house, and strive to work towards that goal, you will have

greater commitment and purpose together. Other goals may include getting out of debt, going on a vacation, remodeling a room in the house, or saving for your children's college education.

- 2) **Think and Act to Strengthen Your Marital Commitment.** Your behavior will reflect your marital commitment (Goddard & Marshall, 2010), so act in ways that will be positive towards your marriage and strengthen your commitment. Often couples will get married and think marriage will be much like dating: great conversation, good food, exciting times, and endless affection (Goddard & Marshall, 2010). These couples don't understand strong marriages take work and commitment. You can strengthen your marital commitment by showing your spouse in actions and words. For example, be available to chat with your spouse when they have had a rough day. Support your partner by listening to and encouraging their dreams. Make room for quality time with your spouse. These are ways that let your spouse know you are committed to him/her.
- 3) **Notice and Appreciate Your Spouse's Commitment.** Remind yourself of all the positive aspects of your partner (Temple, 2003). What do you love about your spouse? What are you thankful for? How have you grown from this marriage? Think of a time when your partner made a difficult decision in order to invest in you and your

relationship (Goddard & Marshall, 2010), or a time when their commitment was specifically shown to you. Positivity is a powerful tool and when it is strong and consistent in relationships, they are much more likely to flourish, and commitment is increased.

There are many ways to define commitment and three of these were reviewed in this fact sheet. There are several ways you can strengthen your personal commitment to your marriage. It may be helpful to find time to sit down with your spouse and make a list of how the two of you will work on strengthening your marital commitment. Commitment is an important aspect of marital happiness and satisfaction. Making sure to continually work towards and check in on your commitment will help you to have a strong marriage.

References

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