

## 5 Deceptively Simple Ways to Improve Your Marriage

By: Autumn Schulze, MA, LMFT

While the most profound marriage improvements take the involvement of both partners, don't make the mistake of thinking that one person can't make a difference on his or her own. If one person in any relational interaction changes their behavior and responses, then the relational dynamic – by definition – changes. So, if you'd like to improve your marriage, but so far you're the only one that's willing to make changes, here are some ideas to get you started:

1. **Take the initiative to greet your spouse when he/she gets home.** If you've ever had a dog, you know how great it feels to have someone who's ecstatic that you've come home! Now, I'm not suggesting you attack your spouse with slobbery kisses when he/she comes home, but let them know that you're glad they're home and that you missed them.
2. **Find one thing about your spouse to praise each day.** Just the simple act of focusing on the positive, in order to find something to praise, can help you recapture the old feelings of love you used to have for your spouse. No spouse is an angel or a devil – we're all a mix of good and bad. We can just as easily choose to focus on the good, rather than on the bad.
3. **Stop acts of disdain or disrespect toward your spouse.** Eye-rolling, name-calling, swearing, sarcasm – are all weeds in the garden of marriage. So, time to roll up your sleeves, put on the garden gloves, and start plucking these out of your repertoire!
4. **Intentionally do those things that you know speak love to your partner.** Emphasis on *“to your partner.”* Most couples I work with have different love languages, yet we often try to speak love to our partners in the ways that speak love to us. So, think about what your partner really appreciates and do more of these things. Offer to put the kids to bed, sit down and spend time with your spouse doing what he/she likes to do, go to bed when he/she does, get up early with your spouse. You know that thing they always want you to do, that you always avoid – do that! But, be careful about your attitude when you perform these acts of love. If you do them grudgingly or with an attitude of resentment, it will show and you'll find yourself expecting your spouse to reciprocate. But, if you do it of your own free will, simply as an act of love, then that will show, too!
5. **Don't fantasize about divorce or even consider it as an option.** Every marriage has rough spots. This doesn't mean you necessarily married the wrong person, just that you married an imperfect human being. So, the next time the going gets rough, focus your mental energy on brainstorming solutions rather than on fantasizing about a simple escape. Make it your policy to never discuss divorce or even consider it as an option. The truth is, divorce is anything but a simple way to escape the pain of a distressed marriage. Divorce is extremely expensive – in terms of mental health, the wellbeing of children, and finances.

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