

Love is Not Enough for a Healthy Marriage



Love gets you on the road to a healthy marriage. It can get and keep you in the game and help to keep you on the road.

Love is not enough, however, to play the game well. Love is not enough to get you where you want to go. Love is not enough for a healthy marriage.

Marriages are a test of our emotional and life skills. Since most of us were never taught many of these skills, it is no surprise that so many marriages, even those that are based in love, are a continual struggle and often fall apart.

The following is a list of various, interrelated emotional and life skills that are necessary for a well-functioning marriage. As you read through the list, ask yourself:

Which of these am I good at? Which of these do I need to improve? Which of these are hard or nearly impossible for me? Are there any skills that I think are missing from this list?

Emotional & Life Skills Necessary for a Healthy Marriage

1. An ability to know and name your emotions at any given time.
2. An ability to communicate your emotions verbally and directly.
3. An ability to manage the full range of your emotions without acting out destructively toward yourself or others. (Acting out destructively means channeling your internal feelings into behaviors that cause emotional or physical damage to yourself or others.)
4. An understanding of what helps you to manage emotions, and a willingness and ability to seek those supports when necessary.
5. An ability to tolerate feeling a lack of connection to your partner sometimes.
6. An ability to disconnect from other people, technology, and other types of stimulation, and to be alone with yourself.
7. An awareness of your physical needs and a willingness to make choices that optimize your physical health.
8. An ability to be emotionally present for a loved one even when you are unable to do anything to fix his or her pain or suffering.
9. An ability to laugh at yourself.
10. An ability to see how your actions, even when well-meant, can sometimes negatively affect others.
11. An ability to apologize and take responsibility for the way your actions affect others.



12. An ability to communicate verbally, directly, gently, and respectfully to others when their actions affect you negatively.
13. An ability to receive critical feedback without blocking it through defensive tactics such as denial, shifting of blame, playing the victim, or bullying.
14. An ability to identify what you need or want from others and communicate that verbally and directly.
15. An ability to tolerate feeling disappointed by others without acting out destructively toward yourself or others.
16. An ability to tolerate the experience of having others disappointed in you, without action out destructively toward yourself or others.
17. An ability to step back, gain perspective on any given situation, and see it in the context of the big and complex picture of life
18. An ability to step back and see the whole picture of yourself or another person, in all of its complexity, shades of grey, and seemingly contradictory parts.
19. An ability to have another person see all the different parts of you, even those parts that you dislike or detest.
20. An ability to tolerate sometimes feeling misunderstood or inaccurately perceived by others.
21. An ability to allow space for another person's thoughts, ideas, perceptions, or feelings, even if they seem wrong to you.
22. An ability to ask for space for your own thoughts, ideas, perceptions, or feelings, even if they cause conflict or upset others.
23. An acceptance that there are pros and cons to any choice, and that there is no way to avoid sacrifice, compromise, and dissatisfaction.
24. An ability to move beyond your own thoughts, ideas, or fears, and truly understand how another person is feeling.
25. An ability to verbally and directly show that you understand how the other person is feeling.
26. A basic competency in navigating the world professionally, socially, and practically.



27. An ability to face your aging and death, and the aging and death of others, without acting out destructively toward yourself or others.
28. An ability to let go of pain from the past, forgive yourself or others, and refocus on the present moment.
29. A basic level of competence in organizing your daily life and managing time.
30. An ability to tolerate feeling bored and dissatisfied.
31. An ability to seek and explore ways to grow, expand, and change.
32. An ability to set limits and boundaries with others and with your environment in order to take care of your own emotional, mental, and physical health.
33. An ability to recognize the experiences of feeling powerless or out of control, and to tolerate those feelings without acting out destructively on yourself or others.
34. An ability to respect and accept other people's boundaries, even if they upset you, without acting out destructively toward yourself or others.
35. An ability to tolerate the possibility of being rejected or abandoned by your loved ones without trying to 'close off their exit door' through controlling behaviors, inducing guilt or threatening to be destructive to yourself or to them if they leave you.
36. An ability to remain reasonably calm during difficult discussions or conflicts with others.
37. An ability to agree to disagree, make compromises and create solutions to conflict.

Do not despair if you are not good at some of these skills. A marriage, fueled by love, has an excellent chance at health if you and your partner are simply committed to working on developing competency in these areas. No one ever reaches perfect mastery in this realm. We all muddle through as best as we can.

If you truly want a healthy marriage, however, take responsibility to evaluate what you need to work on and get whatever support you need to improve your skills.