

THE 12 CORNERSTONES OF A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

1. Personal Responsibility

The first thing we typically think when we hear "who's responsible" is "blame", "fault" or "obligation." Being "responsible" does not mean I am to "blame" for something nor does it mean something is my "fault". From a psychological point of view, being responsible simply means that I "own" my existence. It means that I own my feelings, my thoughts, my body sensations, my beliefs and my perceptions. And being the "owner" of my existence simply means that I create how reality shows up for me.

2. Openness

Being open is a natural outgrowth of being responsible. Being open means that I am willing to share the reality of my inner world without giving it special meaning. We often hold back from sharing our honest self because of all the meaning we attach to our feelings. When I can know that my feelings don't mean anything apart from the meaning which I give to them, that my feelings just *are*, I am free to say what's there because I am responsible. There is no blame nor fault nor justification but rather simple observation. Openness is simply observing and acknowledging, "what is" in terms of my awareness.

3. Honesty

Honesty is a natural expression of openness. When I am observing and acknowledging, "what is", I am not pretending or deceiving. I am simply saying things "the way they are" for me. Being honest has nothing to do with being "right" or justified. Nor is it an attempt to convince or change. Honesty is simply being real.

4. Presence

True communication can only occur in the present. Being present recognizes that this moment is all there is. The past is gone and the future is not yet. Everything else is talking *about* something.

5. Acceptance

We often think of acceptance as a "passive putting up with." Acceptance is not "tolerating" something nor is it based on some "should" that I be more accepting. Acceptance is a result of honest dialogue which may include an acknowledgement of something which I *don't* accept. When I am expressing myself honestly and listening openly I am creating a real opportunity to come to a place of acceptance. When I accept, I am giving up the futile attempt to "change" myself into something I am not, or change my spouse into something that he or she is not. The paradox of acceptance is that, through acceptance, change occurs *by itself*.

6. Listening

True listening naturally arises out of acceptance and being *present* to your partner. True listening is hearing and comprehending what is said without defensiveness or invalidation. Listening is often more than merely listening to the words; it is listening to the emotions and feelings contained in the words. Sometimes listening is hearing what is *not* being said. If there is an opinion being expressed, true listening recognizes that there is another point of view that is no less valid than mine.

7. Generosity

Being generous is not just about giving *things* nor is it just about making sacrifices. Being generous means that I am giving *myself*, and giving myself means that I am open with who I am, my self-expression.

8. Trust

Trust is a major cornerstone of a healthy marriage. Trust means that I give up trying to control things and recognize that a positive outcome to all things is assured. When I try to control I am creating the conditions for the very thing I am *afraid will occur* if I give up control.

9. Patience

Patience recognizes that growth takes time. Patience is recognizing that the outcome of things is as certain as a tree bearing fruit. The paradox of patience is that it brings immediate rewards; it is not waiting for the future to arrive. The future is *now* and is unfolding exactly as it will. Patience produces a positive outcome *now* by bringing the result of peace.

10. Joy and Peace

Peace and joy come out of my own inner work and is not dependent on my partner. It is not dependent on my partner changing nor is it dependent on *getting* anything from my partner. True joy and peace arise out of *giving up* the illusion that joy and peace come from outside of me.

11. Commitment

Commitment simply means that I give my word to do what I say or *not do* what I am unwilling to do. Commitment means that my words and actions are in accord with one another.

12. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the cornerstone that produces all of the other cornerstones. Forgiveness simply recognizes my own humanity and the humanity of my partner. When negative emotions arise or if there is a break in trust or commitment I work within myself to communicate and release these feelings. Forgiveness is for *my* benefit, and all situations are opportunities for me to learn forgiveness.