

Relationship Advice: How Important Are Similarities For A Happy Marriage?



By [Dr. Jane Greer](#)

There is no question that people believe having things in common can lead to a strong marriage. But what if those shared interests fade for one or both partners, or you don't really like that many of the same things in the first place? Can you still build a strong foundation and share a lasting relationship?

According to actor Bill Pullman, the secret to a happy marriage is "putting our hands in the dirt; it's a parallel play of digging and planting." In other words, he and his wife

can do their own activity while being together. "It's helped to keep in tune with each other," he said.

Relationship Advice: For Bill Pullman and his wife, a successful marriage seems to be about embracing common ground. The question is, if you don't have that, how can you maintain a supportive connection?

Clearly it can be easier if you agree on movie genres, favorite cuisines, types of books, travel destinations, and even how often you are intimate with each other. All of that allows you to smoothly spend quality time together. But what happens if suddenly your husband doesn't like to ski anymore but you still do? Or your wife has developed an aversion to Thai food which is always your go-to Friday night dinner out and you still love it? Or what if you have always had sex twice a week, which worked well for you both, and suddenly your husband wants to only do it twice a month? What if none of this was the case, to begin with, and you were swept away by intense chemistry but once the dust settled you realized you didn't like doing that much together? Can you still make your marriage work? Cupid has some [relationship advice](#) on how to maintain a happy and healthy connection with your spouse.

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There is no question that discord in any of these areas, especially if things change over time, can create problems. For example, being affectionate or not can eventually take a toll if one person is feeling deprived of it. Appearance is

another place where people can get caught in the downward spiral. Very often couples get so comfortable with each other that they no longer feel they have to dress to impress and scale down to their basic look. If suddenly you are no longer dressing up and going out, or your partner stays stuck in the same shirt day in and day out or stops shaving, it can make you angry enough as well as turn you off to the point where you might even want to avoid intimacy with them. All of this, as well as the usual wear and tear of everyday life and its responsibilities, can contribute to feeling disappointed and resentful to the degree where it can feel intolerable. So, what can you do to generate harmony and happiness rather than discontent?

The first and most important thing is to keep your desire to please your partner on a full flame. It is not unusual to realize that when you met your partner all you wanted to do was please them, which might have led to your not realizing or even withholding some of how you really felt about certain things. Now that you are married, though, you can be honest, which means you are no longer concealing who you really are. When that happens, it can eclipse your desire to please your partner because you are now focusing on yourself. Hopefully, you are being authentic, but still balancing that with your intent to satisfy them and meet their needs. This can get challenging because if one person asks the other to change their shirt, instead of hearing it as a request that brings them joy, it can sound like a demand that you are telling them what to do. As a result, it can make them feel controlled, which then turns into a power struggle with one person saying *if you loved me you would* and the other person saying *don't tell me what to do*

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The second important step is to learn to include your partner in the decisions you make before you settle on them. Very

often people assume that because they want to see their family, their spouse will be just fine with that. Or since they are social and want to hang out with their friends every weekend, their partner will be on board. The truth is, when you go ahead and make choices based on what you want to do without getting your partner's input, they can't help but feel unimportant and not cared about. By learning to come to joint decisions and discussing your needs as well as theirs before organizing a plan, even though you may not always agree, at least you let your partner know that they are important to you and you value them and want them to feel loved. Finding some middle ground and learning to compromise is what can facilitate your making choices that leave room for both of your pleasures and preferences.

Finally, if you are coming from a place of few shared interests, it is never too late to be open to participating in your partner's hobby or activity. While you might not always enjoy it yourself, you can derive pleasure from seeing how much they enjoy it. It is a way to extend yourself and show your love, as well as enjoy watching them have fun with what they are doing. Also, use it as an opportunity to grow together and see if you can discover activities you both might like. Think about learning to play cards or dancing or cooking together, whatever it is, consider changing lanes and trying something new.

Learning to tolerate the differences and make room for them can help you stay connected, rather than allowing them to divide you. It seems Bill and Tamara have celebrated their similarities which, according to Bill, has been a recipe for a happy marriage for them. However, if that's not the case for you, try to view the things you don't agree on in a positive light that can lead you both to happiness.

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