

Relationship Advice: What Makes a Marriage Strong?



By Dr. Jane Greer

Actor Hugh Jackman's marriage to Deborra-Lee Furness has stood the test of time. He recently appeared on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, where he spoke fondly of his wife saying, "it gets better and better" with time. This [celebrity couple](#) has been together for more than 20 years, and are a perfect example of a couple making marriage succeed. It's heartening to hear, especially in Hollywood where there are a lot of exit opportunities as well as added stressors that can tax any relationship. So what's the secret (or [relationship advice!](#)), for them and for anyone who manages to have a marriage with mileage?

How do two people love and respect each other, learn to work through conflicts and problems, and maintain intimacy, attraction, and desire for the long run? The bottom line is, how do you make it strong so that it lasts? Check out this [relationship advice](#).

Appreciation.

Many things go into keeping two people together for the long haul, but there are four core ingredients that stand out to me as important in keeping that union humming. The first is appreciation. I can't stress its power enough. Being grateful and recognizing the things your partner does for you, and the TLC they give you, can go a long way. Without realizing it, you can get used to all that and, as it becomes part of your average day, you might stop noticing it and even take it for granted. But you want to start taking the opportunity to show your spouse that the things they do for you mean a lot. It is a real chance to build and strengthen those fibers that go into constructing the fabric of your connection. Oftentimes in my office I hear one partner express how angry they are about the things the other partner doesn't do. However, when I help them change their expectations to see who their partner really is instead of who they want them to be, it allows them to stop seeing their spouse coming up short and instead to see them as tall, looking up to them for the support they do show. It enables them to feel lucky that their partner is there for them by focusing on what they do rather than what they don't do. It makes all the difference.

Consideration.

Another important ingredient is consideration. It isn't that you always have to agree with your partner, or do just what they say, but to let them know that they are important to you and are being considered when you're deciding to do something. If you're planning to go out with your friends on Friday night, check in and make sure it works for your spouse instead of just telling them. That way they will feel considered and probably tell you to have a good time. If you simply announce what you are doing they are likely to feel abandoned and might become angry. The goal is to avoid resentment building because it then turns into bricks that will make you feel divided, keeping you apart rather than feeling on the same team. By considering each other's needs, and knowing you are each part of the equation when it comes to making plans and choices, you at least leave room for both of you to voice your preferences before making the final decision.

Acknowledgement.

The third key factor in a successful marriage is being able to acknowledge the other person. I can't tell you how often I sit in my office hearing one person complain that when they talk to their partner at home the other person doesn't answer them, doesn't look up from their computer, doesn't look at them directly, so basically they feel ignored. Consequently, the first person winds up either repeating themselves because they haven't felt heard, or asking in an annoyed tone, "did you hear me?" It's really important to pay attention and convey to your partner that you are listening when they talk to you. A simply okay, fine, I get it, I hear you, that works, any verbal acknowledgement as well as looking at them goes a long way. Even if you disagree with what they are saying, you can reply, "well, I don't necessarily agree, but I do hear what you're saying, and we can talk about it at another time." This will prevent one person from feeling ignored and neglected, and the other person from feeling nagged and badgered by their

partner's saying the same thing over and over.

Laughter.

Finally, laughter. It seems so obvious and simple, but it has such tremendous healing power. It takes effort to keep up with all the communication, appreciation and everything else in your daily lives, and all that work needs an antidote – which is laughing together because it creates instant intimacy. Developing a Morse code with a shared joke or funny expression is a default button that can diffuse the heat of any argument, and give you a chance to let it go and clear the resentment rather than letting it turn into a big deal. When you're married you learn you have to pick and choose your battles, otherwise there are so many things to go to the mat over, and you need a tool that says this is not that important, let's laugh it off. You can then revisit the more important issues later to address them in a serious matter.

If you are able to keep these four very potent techniques in mind and you begin to use them regularly, you're likely to find that you and your partner start to feel happier with each other.

The key to a positive marriage is to feel that your spouse has your back and is looking out for you, and they know that you always have theirs as well. It certainly seems that Hugh and Deborra-Lee have their secret to making their marriage strong.