

Secrets to Staying Married for 50 Years (Or More)



By GalTime Lead Ambassador Jenny Tiegs for GalTime.com

Danny DeVito and Rhea Perlman have separated after 30 years of marriage. Why does it feel so sad? Maybe because, in a reality-TV world, we are so used to seeing relationships go the way of Kim Kardashian. Here's how to put aside the sad news of spotlighted break-ups and focus on staying with your own leading man for 50 years (or more).

1. Stay Alive: This may sound like a smart-aleck answer, but it is true. Take a good look at yourself and realize that you're not that strapping 20-something anymore and you have to take care of your health in order to make it to 50 years of marriage. Joe Hewitt, a retired pastor, mediator and married man of 50 years was blunt when asked how to make it to celebrate that many wedding anniversaries.

"To make it to the 50th wedding anniversary, first of all, the couple has to stay alive." Make the choice and decision to be healthy for you, your partner and your family.

2. Take Time to Talk: Life is busy for everyone at every stage of life, but it is vital to your marriage to take a time out each day and reconnect with your spouse. Christina Steinorth is a licensed psychotherapist and author in Santa Barbara, California and believes 30 minutes is all it takes to stay connected.

"With all the interruptions couples have between jobs, kids and smart phones, it's very easy to lose touch with each other over the years, only to find out five or ten years down the line that you have very little in common anymore."

If you can't find a solid half-hour, Steinorth suggests breaking into 15-minute sessions. In-depth talks that will involve some Kleenex aren't necessary – just some simple conversation. “Talk about your day, make plans for the weekend or even talk about current events,” she advises – all to build and maintain a strong bond.

3. Check-Ups: Everything we own needs maintenance: our cars, our teeth, even our technology need to be charged and updated. So why wouldn't we do the same for a marriage? Dr. Carletta Perry, a psychology professor, therapist and relationship and life coach, tells couples not to be afraid of attending counseling, a workshop or a fun couples retreat.

“Check ups can provide you with a third-party perspective on issues you ‘talk’ about well into the wee hours of the morning,” she says. These exercises will help you learn what's normal for relationships, teach you new things about how to be a stronger couple or just learn how to have more fun together. Most of all, participating in a check-up can also reassure you that you're not alone, Dr. Perry says. “Everyone has problems...even that perfect couple you compare yourself to.”

4. Know When to Speak and Know When to be Silent: Certified dating and relationship coach Yvonne Chase says the key to her parents' marriage was being adept at responding with words and with silence. Chase's mother told her, “You don't have to respond to everything you see in your marriage. Stop picking the little things. So what if he didn't cover the toothpaste? It's not worth it. Know when to speak and when to be silent.”

Chase also provides a bit of self-reflection with a hint of Gandhi: Be the change we wish to see.

“Change *you*. Don't waste your time trying to change your spouse. It's an exercise in futility. Work on the person in the mirror and that will bring the changes you want to see in

your marriage.”

5. Fight! We’ve heard it before, so why hasn’t it stuck yet? Happy couples need air – and resolve – their grievances.

“Couples who don’t fight at all are actually more likely to divorce than couples who do fight, but do it productively,” Jennifer Soos, a marriage and family therapist in San Antonio, Texas points out.

Happy couples have figured out how to hash out their problems in a manner that is respectful and gets problems solved. To do this, you need to know the “rules of fight club.” They include starting conversations with a soft-start-don’t go into a discussion with swords already drawn. It’s also wise to know when to take a break if you get emotionally overloaded. A half-hour can make a huge difference when things get heated, so step away and return when you’ve taken a breath. And lastly, don’t be too extreme on either end when an argument starts. Soos warns that couples enter gridlock when one or both people either refuse to talk or want to fight about everything at that moment.

Finally, one of the best pieces of advice came from Jack Quinn, married 52 years, who simply says, “Don’t sweat the small stuff and don’t do anything that you would be ashamed to tell your children or your wife.”