

Create Lasting Love with 'Marriage Meetings'



 By Brittany Stubbs

Despite the scary divorce rates, couples *can* make love last; they just need to learn how. Dr. Marcia Naomi Berger, a psychotherapist and clinical social worker, has created a way for couples to keep their relationships strong and healthy by encouraging an interruption-free meeting each week. Following an agenda, a marriage meeting includes the kind of appreciation that fosters intimacy and paves the way for collaborative conflict resolution.

In her new book *Marriage Meetings for Lasting Love: 30 Minutes a Week to the Relationship You've Always Wanted*, Berger teaches you how to effectively communicate and connect with your spouse each week with step-by-step guidelines. The communication tips and techniques explained in her book are the same ones that Berger has used to guide hundreds of couples towards deeper, more lasting love. Although the title of the book is *Marriage Meetings*, don't let that fool you. This book is not just for married couples but for anyone in a committed relationship, and the skills you use in marriage meetings will transfer to and benefit all relationships in your life.

Can you explain what a marriage meeting is for our readers?

A marriage meeting is an occasion that happens once a week between married or committed couples. Ideally, they last from 30-45 minutes with an agenda that covers 4 areas of a relationship: Appreciation, Chores, Planning Good Times, and Dealing with Problems or Challenges. The purpose of these

meetings is to increase romance and intimacy, to foster team work, and to resolve issues that come up in any relationship.

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You make the point that marriage meetings are for all couples, not just those going through a rough patch, correct?

Definitely. Ideally, a couple will begin having marriage meetings when things are fairly calm. The meetings aren't designed to fix a crisis; they are more of a proactive kind of solution for preventing problems from building into a crisis.

Besides having 30-45 minutes of uninterrupted time with your partner, are there any other ground rules for having a successful marriage meeting?

Absolutely. There's a whole chapter on preparing for your meeting. One rule is scheduling the meeting at a time where neither partner is tired, hungry, or intoxicated.

Also, both partners should be in a calm state of mind so they're able to communicate in a positive and respectful manner, even if they might be upset about something. Make sure that your phones are off and that there's no television in the background – or anything else that will distract one another. Another rule is using the positive communication skills described in detail in the book.

What is the main difference between having a marriage with your partner versus going to a counseling session?

Marriage meetings are for couples that have a healthy relationship. Couples that go to therapy can also have a healthy relationship and maybe just one aspect they really need to work on. But in my experience as a couples therapist, couples often come to therapy after they've let their relationship deteriorate to the point that they're not able to

have a civil, respectable conversation about the issues they're dealing with or not dealing with.

What would you say to a couple or specific partner that is hesitant about trying marriage meetings?

I would encourage everyone to read the book and truly understand what the meetings entail before making up your mind. In every relationship, there's always room for growth and improvement. Even if everything is going well, these meetings and skills are simply a tool to make your relationship even better.

I would also tell anyone hesitant that these meetings aren't meant to make anyone feel criticized; they focus on positive appreciation and encouragement. Men, who are usually more hesitant at first, often like the meetings even more than women because the meeting structure is positive and direct and there's a time limit. I even encourage the less-verbal partner to speak first to ensure they'll be heard.

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Besides marriage meetings, what advice to you have for our readers to make their love last?

Use those positive communications skills every day. It may be difficult when something is going wrong, but don't forget to acknowledge all the things still going right. Ask for what you want in a respectful way rather than just stating what is going wrong. For example, instead of saying, "You never bring me flowers," say, "I would love for you to bring my flowers." And if he doesn't want to bring flowers, ask yourself if it's really such a big deal. Let go of those little things, buy your own flowers, and focus on the positive things.

In a marriage, you have to remind one another that you're in it together. It's not going to always be a fairytale and you're going to have to put in energy and effort every day to

make it better and continue to be strong.

To purchase Marriage Meetings for Lasting Love: 30 Minutes a Week to the Relationship You've Always Wanted, check out Amazon or your local bookstore!