

100 IDEAS



**for Strengthening
Marriages in
your Community**



100 IDEAS FOR STRENGTHENING MARRIAGES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

What makes a strong marriage? Every couple is different, but here are some ideas:

1. Being able to laugh together.
2. Coming to value your differences as strengths rather than irritants.
3. Creating happy memories together.
4. Giving both of you a safe place to talk about your ideas and feelings, and your hopes and fears.
5. Managing conflicts without letting them escalate out of control.
6. Being able to offer and ask for forgiveness.
7. Solving problems quickly by negotiating the best solution for both of you.
8. Learning all you can about how to build a strong marriage.
9. Making your marriage a high priority, so that you avoid taking on responsibilities and jobs that will have a negative impact on your relationship.
10. Having a couple who can mentor you through the ups and downs of married life.
11. Understanding how much God loves you and what His love really means, so that you are better able to love your spouse.
12. Praying together and finding creative ways to worship and study the Bible together.
13. Valuing each other's strengths, and appreciating each other.
14. Discovering what you can do to help your husband or wife feel really loved.

Strengthening your own marriage

15. Celebrate your marriage every day in small, but thoughtful, and creative ways. Tell each other how glad you are to be married, delight in each other and find ways to show each other kindness, appreciation, affection and support.
16. Make it a goal to attend a special marriage weekend annually. These are run regularly by the Family Ministries department in the North and South England Conferences. There are other organisations running them too. Visit www.marriageresource.org.uk, www.promoting-marriage.org.uk and www.2-in-2-1.co.uk to find a range of weekends on offer.
17. Find a good book about marriage and buy two copies. Read a chapter each week on your own, and then think of three questions you would like to ask your husband or wife about what you have read. Meet weekly to discuss your ideas. Pass the books to other couples when you have finished with them. Or start a book circle to pass pairs of books around a group of married couples. See www.smartmarriages.com for some book suggestions.
18. Sign up for email devotionals for couples from www.familylife.com.
19. Try out lots of unusual ways to have fun together! Laugh, share happy memories, and just enjoy being together. Try '40 Unforgettable Dates with your Mate' by Dr Gary and Barbara

Rosberg (ISBN 0-8423-6106-5), or buy a 'Simply Romantic Nights' kit from www.familylife.com.

20. Subscribe to a magazine that strengthens marriage. 'Marriage Partnership' magazine is an excellent publication. View sample articles and archives online at www.marriagepartnership.com. Give gift subscriptions as wedding presents. Forward useful articles to friends.
21. Have regular weekly marriage meetings to coordinate diaries, make financial plans, organise family schedules etc. to take care of the little details of married life.
22. Discover how each of you prefers to be loved. Write a list for each other of the times when you felt very loved by your husband or wife, and look for similar styles. Talk about other things that would help you to feel special and loved, and listen to the ways in which you could share your love in the future. Keep on talking about your preferences and needs, as they may change from time to time. Don't expect your husband or wife to guess what you need.
23. Sign up for creative ways to 'romance' each other at www.familylife.com. You can sign up for ideas for him, or ideas for her, and each of you will be sent an idea twice a week.
24. Talk together about your hopes for your marriage. Make plans to turn these hopes into realities.
25. Run a small group seminar for couples in your own home. Use readymade videos and materials to make it easy for you, and invite three or four couples to join you. Visit www.2-in-2-1.co.uk for ideas for resources, or download the HomeBuilders Couples Series from www.familylife.com. For British materials use 'The Marriage Course' from Holy Trinity Brompton, 'Time for Each Other' from CPO, 'Keeping Marriages Health' from Intimate Life Ministries and Connect2 materials from Care for the Family. See resource list.

Strengthening the marriages of family and friends

26. Write letters of appreciation to couples who have inspired and strengthened your marriage, or design a card for this purpose on your computer. Encourage other couples to do the same.
27. Celebrate the anniversaries of your family and friends in a special way. Hold a surprise party, send cards, give marriage-building books. Show them that their marriage is important to you, too.
28. Sign up for an email service that offers marriage strengthening tips and couple devotionals and forward these ideas to family and friends. www.familylife.org.
29. Pass around an attractive blank book at a wedding reception and invite people to write their favourite marriage 'date' ideas, and any tips they would like to share to strengthen the couple's marriage.
30. During wedding services, have a special moment of recommitment for the married couples who are attending.
31. Invite other couples to come together for fun, either for a meal at your home, or a picnic, or to go bowling, etc. Many couples don't take the time to have fun in their marriage, so this may encourage them to take time to relax together.
32. Invite couples around to watch a marriage strengthening video such as 'The Story of Us', 'A Beautiful Mind', 'Family Man' and 'Town and Country'. Create some discussion questions for the couples to take home and discuss together. Visit www.smartmarriages.com for an excellent discussion guide for 'The Story of Us'. An excellent DVD with discussion material "Fireproof" www.fireproofmymarriage.com.
33. Give marriage strengthening books, CDs/DVDs as engagement, wedding, birth, anniversary and birthday gifts.

34. Encourage married couples who are experiencing a long distance relationship to visit www.longdistancecouples.com for creative ideas about strengthening a relationship where the two of you have to live apart because of work commitments, etc.
35. Offer to provide babysitting, or have your friends' children sleep at your home for the night, so that married couples can go out together and have some time alone.
36. Hand out flyers for the www.2-in-2-1.co.uk website. Contact Dave and Liz Percival, through their website, for a supply.

Strengthening the marriages of those in your church community

37. Plan an annual marriage weekend for your church congregation. Choose a good venue – hotels can offer cheaper deals at weekends and provide leisure facilities too. Invite an experienced couple to lead the weekend, or use prepared marriage seminars. See list of resources at the back of this leaflet.
38. Avoid giving too many church-related jobs to one family. Where possible, encourage the husband and wife to work together in a shared ministry so that the church doesn't pull couples apart.
39. Some churches have all their activities on one night so that the family can attend together, with the children having their club night the same time as adults are having prayer meetings, choir practices, etc. This minimises the disruption to families and married couples, and enables them to be together more evenings in the week.
40. Take care of the marriages of your church leaders. Help them to be accountable for spending time with their families. Pay for them to attend a marriage weekend at least every couple of years.
41. Encourage your church leaders to preach about marriage regularly, at least once a year during the Christian Home and Marriage Week (materials available from your Family Ministries department) which is often at the same time as the National Marriage Week – see website under Resources.
42. Make sure that every couple who has a wedding in your church has been well prepared for marriage. Offer premarital preparation courses such as Dr B Craig's 'Beginnings' <http://adventist.org.au> or PREPARE/ENRICH (see resource list).
43. Start a marriage preparation course using the materials produced by eg Intimate Life Ministries, or Holy Trinity Brompton's marriage preparation course. Run this once or twice a year for couples in your church and local community (see resource list).
44. Where possible encourage your church to provide engaged couples with a mentor couple to support them through their engagement and the early years of their marriage.
45. Encourage your church to honour those who have been married for a long time. Hold a party, or send the couple on a marriage weekend or short break away.
46. In a large church hold quarterly anniversary parties for all the couples who have had an anniversary during that time period. It doesn't have to be elaborate, just a drink and cake, or cheese and biscuits, or coffee and dessert. Play games like 'Mr and Mrs', watch a marriage strengthening video together, or share happy marriage memories.
47. Encourage your church to become a member of Marriage Resource. Visit www.marriageresource.org.uk to discover the benefits of joining. You will also find ideas about holding a Marriage Thanksgiving and Rededication Service, information on learning how to do marriage first aid to support hurting couples, and how to obtain marriage strengthening leaflets and the 'Time for Each Other' video kits.
48. Invite the teenagers in your church to compile a booklet of marriage strengthening ideas. Encourage them to interview some of the married couples in the congregation as they research this booklet.

49. Provide good relationship education for teens in the church. Visit www.celebratingmarriage.com for 'The M Word' and 'Exploring Marriage with News Desk'.
50. Hold marriage banquets in your church, or arrange for a banquet at a local hotel. If you choose a buffet-style dinner this may not be very expensive. Invite speakers for after-dinner marriage speeches, mini-seminars, or even to act out marriage strengthening sketches!
51. Start a marriage strengthening resource library at your church. Include good video packages, such as the 'Time for Each Other' kits from CPO, 'Sixty Minute Marriage' from Care for the Family, and other resources listed in this leaflet.
52. Designate one day a week as a special day to pray for marriages – our own marriages, those of our family and friends, those of our congregations and church leadership, and the marriages of community leaders and policy makers. Marriage Resource encourages churches to observe the first Sunday in National Marriage Week as a day of prayer for marriage.
53. Ask Marriage Resource to send you a free prayer diary to help you pray for their work, the work of other marriage supporting organisations and for marriages, day by day.
54. Get copies of the book *The Divorce Remedy* by Michele Weiner Davis to lend to anyone with marriage difficulties. www.amazon.co.uk supply it cheaply in paperback.
55. Make sure that your church has a notice directing couples to Christian counsellors, such as South England Conference 0845 741 3602, North England Conference 0161 740 3602. They are skilled at working with marriages, so that those facing difficulties know where to turn. (Marriage Resource also provide a Back from the Brink programme called 'Crossing out Divorce'.)
56. Buy a 'Before you Divorce' kit from Church Initiatives so that couples thinking about divorcing can have the best possible information about the alternatives.
57. Teach as many couples as you can how to do marriage first aid. Contact Marriage Resource for materials.
58. Provide a good divorce care group using DivorceCare materials from Church Initiatives, so that those who do get divorced can have the best spiritual nurture and guidance.
59. Encourage your church to take up a special collection once a year in support of Marriage Resource, or another marriage supporting organisation.
60. Hold a special prayer breakfast for couples. Serve a delicious breakfast at tables for two, and give each couple a 'menu' of creative prayer ideas. Allow some space and time for couple prayer as well as group prayer.
61. Whenever your church puts on an event for married couples, be sure to arrange adequate child care so that as many as possible can attend. Having the child care in the same building as the event can be especially helpful to parents of young babies and mothers who are breastfeeding.

Strengthening marriages in your workplace

62. Talk to your employer about the benefits of workers who have happy marriages and help raise awareness of the need to invest in the marriages of employees. Visit www.smartmarriages.com for examples of research to support your case.
63. Ask your employer to honour wedding anniversaries by offering an extra day of leave on wedding anniversaries. Or perhaps by sending a bouquet to the couple, or a gift voucher for a cinema or restaurant.
64. Encourage your employer to arrange social events for the whole family to attend.
65. At work parties and banquets have a time where the husbands and wives of workers are honoured and thanked.

66. If you find out when your colleagues are having their wedding anniversaries, send a card, or email them about websites that have marriage strengthening ideas or tips for romance.
67. Offer to run lunch-time marriage strengthening courses in the workplace, or show clips of the video 'Sixty Minute Marriage' by Rob Parsons, from Care for the Family. Hand out discussion cards for employees to take home and discuss with their spouse.
68. Encourage your employer to attend Rob Parsons' 'Let's Do Life' seminars. Visit www.letsdolife.com.
69. Offer your employer the book or audio tape of Rob Parsons' bestselling book 'The Heart of Success' on the importance of relationships and the work-life balance. Visit www.theheartofsuccess.com.
70. If your employer puts extra pressure on the workforce to work long hours, challenge the practice and encourage work patterns that support marriages and families, instead of those that add extra stresses to relationships. Help the employer to see that when his employees have happy marriages and families, he will have a happier, healthier, and more productive workforce.

Strengthening the marriages of those in your local community

71. Invite your congregation to offer regular baby-sitting at the church so that parents can go on dates together. This could also be offered as a service to your local community. Consider Saturday or Sunday afternoons/evenings. Parents need to pre-book places so that you have enough helpers. Children can bring their own packed tea and the church can provide care and play for the little ones and a programme of activity for the older children. Check that your helpers have all been police-checked and trained in child protection and safety.
72. Talk to head teachers about the benefits to pupils when their parents have happy marriages. Find research at www.smartmarriages.com to help support your case. Invite the school to help sponsor an event to strengthen the parents' marriages.
73. Choose one of the activities in this leaflet and put it into action during National Marriage Week. This is the week containing 14th February. For more ideas and information about national Marriage Week visit www.marriage-week.org.uk. Ideas for observing National Marriage Week can also be found at www.marriageresource.org.uk.
74. Why not wear a white carnation in National Marriage Week, and use it as a discussion starter?
75. Sponsor a contest in your local paper. Free papers may be especially open to your ideas. Invite people to write 200 words starting with the line, 'I'm happy to be married because...'. Ask the paper to print the winning stories, and offer the prize of a restaurant voucher or weekend break for the winner, and marriage strengthening books for winner and runners up. You may be able to negotiate with restaurants, hotels and book shops to donate the prizes.
76. Encourage health visitors and others providing antenatal classes to include a session for couples to help them strengthen their marriages as they enter parenthood.
77. Explore the material in 'Ten Great Dates' by David and Claudia Arp. Find this at www.marriagealive.org. This offers couples short mini-seminars at a central venue, and the opportunity to take a worksheet away to discuss during their own choice of date. The organiser can provide child care for the couples to help them make the most of this opportunity, and the 'dates' can be run once a month.
78. Contact 'Care for the Family' and sponsor a marriage strengthening event in your local community. They can offer different programmes according to your needs and will help with the publicity. You need to provide a suitable venue and guarantee a minimum number of couples. www.care-for-the-family.org.uk.

79. Make up your own leaflets of marriage strengthening ideas, or use the 'Marriage under Pressure' leaflet from CPO. Take these and leave them in your local doctor's surgery, dentist, library and maternity units.
80. Ask your local library to provide a list of the marriage strengthening books they hold. Often you can request that your library provides specific books and you may be able to persuade them to purchase more books about marriage for their borrowers.
81. Sponsor a float at the local carnival. Create a design to show the value of marriage and hand out marriage strengthening leaflets along the way.
82. Make a marriage strengthening display and ask your local library if you can set it out on their premises for a fixed time period. Try for National Marriage Week. Include leaflets for people to take away, and advertise local marriage strengthening events. If you have any friends who are skilled at graphics and display, ask them to help you.
83. Hold a special exhibition about marriage. Take along computers and offer pre and post marital couple inventories, such as PREPARE/ENRICH. Serve refreshments at attractive tables for two; invite local restaurants and health clubs to offer special deals for married couples. Show clips of marriage strengthening videos. Include thoughtful posters and activities to encourage the couple to think about their happiest memories and funniest stories. Include a display of wedding dresses, and serve wedding cake as part of the refreshments.
84. Create posters to encourage people to work on their marriages. Work with any graphic designers that you know. Be creative with your computer publishing programme. Small A4 posters could be placed in buses, libraries, surgeries, public notice boards, etc.
85. Sponsor a writing competition at your local school. Set a subject like 'How to have a happy marriage'. Offer prizes that will appeal to the age of the children in the school. Perhaps you could offer vouchers for the whole family to have a special outing.
86. Help to develop a Community Family Trust in your town. See www.bcftr.co.uk for a model of the Bristol Family Community Trust.
87. If you are a higher education teacher maybe you could offer to teach an evening class to strengthen marriages. Use pre-prepared materials to help you. Personal invitations to such an event are usually the most effective.

Strengthening the marriages of people you meet

88. Wear a lapel pin that is a symbol of a strong marriage. For example, CPO sells lapel pins depicting an oval made of three plaited strands to illustrate that 'a cord of three strands is not easily broken' (a marriage where the couple is working together with God is strengthened by God's love, too). Lapel pins can be a discussion starter to enable you to talk about the importance of strengthening marriages.
89. When chatting with strangers on a plane, or elsewhere, invite them to tell you their marriage strengthening ideas. You can tell them that you are collecting them for a booklet or leaflet. If they are interested, take their details and send them a copy of the finished product. Keep some of the Marriage Resource Key Cards, available from CPO, in your handbag or briefcase, ready to give away.
90. Ask people in conversation to share their happiest marriage memories, or best marriage date ideas.

Using the media to help strengthen marriages

91. Ask your local radio station to run a competition for the most creative ideas for a low-budget date for a married couple.
92. Write letters to the editor of your local paper praising any community effort to strengthen marriages and pointing out the harm that can be done by any policies undermining marriage. Always be courteous and polite when writing letters.
93. Ask your local Yellow Pages if they could include some marriage strengthening tips in their empty advertising spots. You will need to give them a list of short tips to include. If necessary, be willing to sponsor adverts close to Counselling, Marriage and Wedding listings.
94. When you see a television programme that offers a positive picture of marriage, write and thank the producer. If you see an advert or programme that portrays a negative picture of marriage, write and share your views in a polite manner. Use statistics to help support your case and do all you can to encourage producers and presenters to give marriage good publicity.
95. Offer to write a regular feature of marriage building ideas for your local paper. Talk to the editor about the word-count he requires and show samples of your articles.
96. Encourage your local paper to run feature articles on couples who have been married a long time.
97. Write to 'agony aunts' telling positive stories of how marriage education and mentoring has helped your marriage.
98. Make a list of ten exciting 'dates' for married couples in your area. Publish them in your local paper or make them into a leaflet to leave in the information centre, libraries, etc.
99. Hold an unusual sponsored event to raise money for marriage strengthening organisations. Choose something that will capture the imagination of the public, such as a sponsored kiss – by married couples of course! Work closely with your local media to ensure maximum publicity.

And finally...

100. Keep working on your own marriage, making sure that it is a priority in your life. Think of your spouse more highly than yourself and do something every day that makes them feel extra specially loved, so that your relationship will be the best advert for marriage your friends and family can have!

Useful Websites and Resources

www.familywellness.com

www.marriageresource.org.uk – Marriage Resource, eg "Taking Marriages Seriously in Your Church" – manual.

www.promoting-marriage.org.uk

www.2-in-2-1.co.uk – excellent website for all kinds of information on marriage.

www.smartmarriages.com – research, marriage strengthening tips, books, conference information, video discussion guides, etc.

www.familylife.com – email devotionals, romance tips, a study guide for couples and the 'Simply Romantic Nights' kit.

www.marriagepartnership.com – magazine website.

www.marriagealive.org – information about David and Claudia Arp's 'Ten Great Dates' kit.

www.longdistancecouples.com – ideas for couples who live a long way apart.

www.care-for-the-family.org.uk – books, videos, magazines, resources and seminars.

www.celebratingmarriage.com – a range of materials to promote positive understanding of marriage and family life for all ages from young children to teenagers, including an exciting CD Rom programme for older teenagers.

www.bcft.co.uk – Bristol Community Family Trust.

www.cpo.org.uk – leaflets about marriage, ‘Time for Each Other’ videos and workbook packs.

www.divorcecare.org – small group materials for people who are divorced or separated, encouraging personal and spiritual development. Thirteen video sessions, leader’s notes and participant workbooks.

www.prepare-enrich.co.uk – inventories for engaged and married couples that facilitate communication and understanding. To be used with a trained facilitator.

www.marriage-week.org.uk – National Marriage Week information.

Seventh-day Adventist – Family Ministries

<http://family.adventist.org> – General Conference, Family Ministries department.

www.adventist.org.uk – British Union Conference, Family Ministries department.

<http://adventist.org.au> – South Pacific Division.

Adventist Book Centre - Grantham

Alma Park
Grantham
Lincs
NG31 9SL

01476 539 900

South England Conference – Cornerstone Helpline

They offer confidential counselling over the phone or face-to-face appointments.

0845 741 3602

North England Conference – Rainbow Helpline

They offer confidential counselling over the phone or face-to-face appointments.

0161 740 3602

Care for the Family

PO Box 488
Cardiff
CF15 7YY

www.care-for-the-family.org.uk

mail@cff.org.uk

www.letsdolife.com

www.theheartofsuccess.com

CPO (Christian Publicity Organisation)

CPO
Garcia Estate
Canterbury Road
Worthing
W Sussex
BN13 1BW

www.cpo.org.uk

Church Initiatives ('Before you Divorce' and 'DivorceCare')

Merrily Richie
57a Windsor Road
Forest Gate
London
E7 0QY
Tel: 0208 534 7339

Holy Trinity Brompton

The Marriage Course
The Marriage Preparation Course
HTB – Brompton Road
London
SW1 1JA

www.themarriagecourse.org

Intimate Life Ministries (Relational Ministries)

ILM Relational Resources
The Lifecentre
1-5 Stockport Road
Romiley
Stockport
SK6 4BN

www.relationaltraining.co.uk/content/

Prepare/Enrich

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This booklet was written by Karen Holford and is adapted from 'The Family Book', Karen Holford, 2004, The Stanborough Press Ltd, England.