

Nine Psychological Tasks for a Good Marriage

Research on what makes a marriage work shows that people in a good marriage have completed these psychological "tasks":

- Separate emotionally from the family you grew up in; not to the point of estrangement, but enough so that your identity is separate from that of your parents and siblings.
- Build togetherness based on a shared intimacy and identity, while at the same time set boundaries to protect each partner's autonomy.
- Establish a rich and pleasurable sexual relationship and protect it from the intrusions of the workplace and family obligations.
- For couples with children, embrace the daunting roles of parenthood and absorb the impact of a baby's entrance into the marriage. Learn to continue the work of protecting the privacy of you and your spouse as a couple.
- Confront and master the inevitable crises of life
- Maintain the strength of the marital bond in the face of adversity. The marriage should be a safe haven in which partners are able to express their differences, anger and conflict.
- Use humor and laughter to keep things in perspective and to avoid boredom and isolation.
- Nurture and comfort each other, satisfying each partner's needs for dependency and offering continuing encouragement and support.
- Keep alive the early romantic, idealized images of falling in love, while facing the sober realities of the changes wrought by time.

Thanks to Judith S. Wallerstein, PhD, co-author of the book *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts*.

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