

GREAT DATES #6

FINDING UNITY IN SPITE OF OUR DIFFERENCES

Oh, those pesky differences!! I remember a therapist telling me that if two people are the same, then one of them is not necessary. So every couple has differences to deal with. How you negotiate those differences will make or break your marriage.

1. The first place to start is to agree that differences are not bad, they just are. We tend to think and feel that our way of looking at things or doing things is the ONLY WAY or the RIGHT WAY. It is not until someone does something a different way that we even become aware of how we do things and how we prefer that things get done. It exposes what we value.
2. Each of us has individual strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes our strengths and weaknesses complement each other so that as a couple we are stronger than we are as individuals. This is called your "combined couple assets."
3. We need to appreciate each other's strengths and not feel threatened by them. We also need to not beat each other up over areas of weakness. Acceptance and grace is necessary in responding to each other's weaknesses.
4. If you have areas that are really similar, you will have to find ways of working smoothly together. Areas of similarity can also be a liability to your relationship. For example, if you are both time challenged it will be harder for you to be punctual.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Identify 5 strengths of your spouse and share them with each other tonight. How do these strengths of your spouse in particular contribute to your family and make you stronger as a couple?
2. Attached are two pages that have a list of values. It is not an exhaustive list. If any values occur to you that are not on the list, please feel free to add them. Take some time and **circle** ten of the words that you think describe your spouse's values.
3. Then **check** ten of the words that describe your own values.
4. Share your lists with each other and talk about why you chose the ten words you chose for each other and for yourself.
5. Now look at yourselves as a couple and list your "combined couple assets." This identifies how you complement each other and how each of your different strengths contribute to the relationship.
6. Think about what would change if you accepted each other's personalities and operating styles. What would have to happen for you to quit resisting each other's differences and worked with them instead?
7. For those of you who want to pursue identifying values and strengths further, there is a page attached that takes you to an online test that ranks 24 values. It can be an interesting thing to do in order to understand yourself better and to know each other better.

PERSONAL HOMEWORK

Quite often, when we see differences in our spouse, we become irritated and may respond negatively. The following four steps are taken from the book, 10 Great Dates To Energize Your Marriage by David and Claudia Arp.

1. On a list of paper make two columns. In the left column, list your spouse's differences that trigger a reaction in you. In the right column, list your inappropriate responses to those differences. Do you sigh, neglect, nag, criticize, roll your eyes, etc.? Often our responses are worse than the differences we are reacting to.

DO NOT SHOW THIS LIST TO YOUR SPOUSE. WHEN YOU ARE DONE, TEAR IT UP AND THROW IT AWAY!

2. Admit your inappropriate responses and attitudes.
3. Accept your mate with his or her strengths and weaknesses. An atmosphere of acceptance in a relationship provides the safety and encouragement a person needs to work on the changes they need to make. The more change is demanded by one spouse, the less the other spouse is willing to change. One way to do this is to focus on things you are thankful for about your spouse every day.
4. Ask your spouse's forgiveness for your past inappropriate responses. No relationship can thrive without forgiveness.

SETTING BOUNDARIES

It is never okay to tolerate or accept physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse. These are not the sort of "differences" I am talking about here. If these things are occurring in your relationship, seek help from one of our counselors or a counselor of your choice. If you are not sure if something constitutes abuse, seek the advice of a counselor.

Sometimes couples can get into a negative pattern of responding to each other and may need an objective third party in the form of a counselor to help them see the pattern and see where changes can be made by both spouses.