

Why Commitment Matters

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With the rise in numbers of couples who live together rather than marry, compounded with the prevalence of divorce, it may seem as though people don't care about commitment anymore. Yet people acknowledge that lack of commitment is a problem. Recent research found that approximately 85% of divorced couples indicated a lack of commitment to the marriage and to each other as their reason for divorce. So is it really realistic for the couples you serve to believe they can live in marriage "until death do us part?"

The resounding answer is, 'YES!' So why is commitment so important? Here's an analogy that may help explain why. The decision to get a high school or college degree carries along with it not only a desire, but an expectation that you will accomplish your goal. You've defined your future. You're aware it will take several years and some studying. You're aware it will take effort on your part to produce papers and pass tests. You might even have to put up with some bad teachers and some tough classes along the way. But you're also aware that you are going to have to invest yourself fully in the process in order to ultimately be successful and walk away with a degree. It takes commitment. Without commitment, there is no degree.

Commitment in marriage is no different. Commitment is the dedicated choice to give up other competing

choices. According to expert Scott Stanley, couples reporting higher levels of commitment report that they:

- ✓ Look at other attractive people less;
- ✓ Feel great relationship satisfaction; and
- ✓ Do not experience feeling trapped in the relationship.

Commitment is the part of the relationship that provides safety and security, so couples can express their thoughts, feelings, and desires openly. When they're committed, they have the confidence that they'll make it through the day-to-day challenges and life's stressors that can tear a marriage apart. Commitment offers couples a sense of being part of a team, a desire for a future together and a



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desire to sacrifice for each other. An individual's commitment to the marriage makes it a priority. It is vital that the couples you serve understand how their decisions about commitment play a role in their future success and that you provide them with the tools to continue to choose a shared and secure future with their spouse. Not being committed carries great consequences, the greatest of which is relationship failure and the possible dissolution of a family.

As a marriage practitioner, you may see spouses who are trying to hang on to options that keep them from being fully devoted or dedicated to their partners. Practitioners can play a major role in helping couples strengthen commitment in their marriages. The following strategies may be effective to help make commitment more concrete for couples. Encourage couples to:

1. Create a commitment statement, similar to a business' mission statement. A commitment statement outlines the purpose and goals for their marriage. It may also include rules and boundaries that strengthen the marriage and keep it safe.

2. Greet each other personally and physically each day. Not only does hugging and kissing feel good, it is a special gesture to reinforce the commitment of spouses.

3. Talk and stay connected about hopes, dreams, stresses, etc. These topics are future-oriented; talking about the future can strengthen the current commitment.

4. Spend both quality and quantity time together. Making time for each other, just to check in or to have a date can strengthen the bond and reinforce spouses' dedication to the marriage.

5. Be best friends with your spouse. Friendship is a commitment.

6. Recognize that memories and traditions expand commitment. Doing special things together builds and honors traditions that are important to building meaning and significance in the marriage.

7. Share spiritual or religious activities together to help promote individual and relationship connection. Outlets like this can help a couple grow closer and strengthen each spouse's commitment.

8. Value doing small acts of kindness for your spouse. While it may be easy to take advantage of what your spouse gives for the benefit of the relationship, everyone desires to feel acknowledged. Doing a chore, bringing home a special gift, or sending a loving note are all simple but effective ways of showing respect and dedication to your spouse and the marriage.
9. Talk about how you met and the many reasons you fell in love and decided to marry. Reflecting on reasons for committing to one another in the first place can renew desire to capture and preserve the relationship.
10. Make intimacy a positive time for connection. This ultimate expression of commitment should be a special time that both spouses can look forward to.

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Commitment keeps couples together and is a cornerstone of marriage. We wouldn't think of leaving our children as a solution to our problems with them. As practitioners, we have an opportunity to help spouses see that through commitment to each other; they won't think of leaving the marriage as a solution to the problems they perceive. Best of all, commitment is a choice, and therefore can be redeemed at any time in a marriage.

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