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The 4 Secrets to Having a Spectacular Marriage

Peek into [the lives of happy couples](#) and find out how these four love moves will bring the two of you closer than ever.



What do couples who describe their marriages as spectacular do differently than those who describe their marriages as simply so-so? The differences are quite small, actually. "When we look at [happy couples](#), we see that great marriages are not the result of hours of hard work," says relationship researcher Terri L. Orbuch, Ph.D., who followed 373 couples for over 22 years as part of a marriage study funded by the National Institutes of Health. "It's small changes in behavior and attitude that can transform your relationship." In her new book, [5 Simple Steps to Take Your Marriage from Good to Great](#), Orbuch shares the steps you can take to marital greatness.

Understand Each Other's Needs

"The main reason marriages break up is not conflict, communication problems, or sexual incompatibility," Orbuch says. "It's frustration — the day-to-day disappointment of the gap between what you expect and how your partner acts — that is most damaging." To diffuse that frustration, share your expectations with each other. Maybe you desire [more affection](#) and he craves more [relaxed couple time](#). "And be sure to [check in with your partner once a year](#), as added pressures or life changes can create new expectations," Orbuch says.

Show Him Some Love

Husbands whose wives give them affirmation — those [words and gestures that show they are appreciated, respected, and loved](#) — are twice as likely to describe themselves as happily married. And men may need affirmation *more* than

women, Orbuch's research showed. "Women are constantly receiving flattery from friends and even strangers who say, 'Love your outfit!'" she says. "But men don't get that recognition." Can you imagine a passerby stopping your husband to compliment him on how well his tie matches his shirt? Not gonna happen — which is why men rely on that attention from their wives. Luckily, there's another payoff to your flattery: He's more likely to return those loving deeds back to you.

Take 10

A [weekly date night](#) is always recommended as a way to reconnect, but sometimes all you *need* is a few minutes. "I call this the 10-Minute Rule: Take 10 minutes a day to talk about anything — except for kids, responsibilities, or chores," Orbuch says. Throw out Mom's old advice about how an air of mystery keeps the flame alive: Orbuch's research showed that 98 percent of happy couples say they intimately understand their partners. And knowing your spouse intimately isn't always about engaging in heavy conversations: Anything that helps you learn something new will bring you closer, Orbuch says. You can bond over why you think your dog is the smartest one on your block or which superpower you'd want most. You'll get to know each other's inner world and strengthen your bond of happiness.

Focus on the Good

The best way to make your relationship better is to work at fixing what's *wrong*, right? Nope. "The most effective way to boost fun and passion is to add positive elements to your marriage," Orbuch says. "That positive energy makes us feel good and motivates us to keep going in that direction." This doesn't mean that you can't feel — or talk about — anything negative, but "pretend you are weighing your interactions on a scale," she says. "If you want a happier relationship, the positive side needs to far outweigh the bad." The more you honor the love and joy in your bond, the sooner you'll transform your marriage into one that is truly great.

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