

# 7 Tips For Strengthening Your Marriage



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With Your Host

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Hi there. Welcome to the Design Your Dream Life podcast. My name is Natalie Bacon and I'm an Advanced Certified Mindfulness Life Coach as well as a wife and mom, if you're here to do the inner work and grow, I can help. Let's get started.

Hello my friend. Are you ready to talk about how to strengthen your marriage? I wanna talk about strengthening your marriage with seven specific tips, but first I want to just point out that we tend to think about working on marriage from a negative place. It's like something is wrong with the marriage, so we need to work on it. I wanna flip that. I think that we should normalize working on our marriages because we care about them, not because they're in trouble. If you think about other things that we work on, we work on our physical health, we exercise because we care about our bodies, not because something is wrong with them.

Now of course you can go to the doctor if you break a bone, just like you can go to a therapist if your marriage is in trouble. And yet, what about just the normal care that you want to take of your body? You exercise it. That is the work that we are doing on this podcast and inside Grow You. This upcoming month, I'm teaching a brand new class on how to strengthen your relationships, not from a place of, oh my gosh, they're in trouble, but from a place of, yeah, things are pretty good, but I want to work on it. I wanna show up intentionally as the woman and wife who I want to be. So with that, I thought let's talk about marriage specifically on the podcast and seven tips that I have for strengthening your marriage. Number one is to get out of black and white thinking.

Black and white thinking sounds like I'm right and he's wrong, he's bad and I'm good or he's lazy and I'm productive. It's either or thinking all or nothing thinking. You may have heard it referenced before, it is ignoring the gray first and then second, it isn't true and it puts you against your spouse. So it's a little bit of scarcity thinking here. If you notice your brain going into this all or nothing thinking this black and white thinking, just be aware of it and say, maybe not. So if your brain has the story that he's sort of lazy and I'm productive, maybe, but maybe not. What else is true? There are parts of

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him and his personality that are more laid back that brings so much joy and love and fun and laughter to the marriage. And it's also really good that he's not you.

So often we want our spouses to be us. I'm like, we don't need another you because there's you. So I'm so guilty of this too. Whenever I think that Steve should do something the way that I wanna do it, I just remind myself, I don't wanna be married to me, I wanna be married to Steve. And that sort of gets me out of that thinking, that default brain does that, thinks that everyone outside of us should do things the way we do. And of course when we say that out loud, we know that's not true. And yet in our marriages we end up kind of acting that out like it should be true and it's just not. So notice your brain and get out of that all or nothing thinking.

Tip number two is to focus on the likable parts of your spouse, but before you zoom in and do this about your spouse, generally speaking, do you like people? Do you like your spouse and do you like yourself? I think that if you are in the habit of liking, it's often easier to do this tip because your brain doesn't care so much what the object is. It just generally likes to like people. So if you are someone who finds it hard to like people, it's probably hard for you to like your spouse. It's probably hard for you to like yourself. It's probably hard for you to like other people. And this doesn't mean that you're bad. It doesn't mean that you are wrong. It just means that there's probably this critical part of your brain that is in overdrive, that part of the brain likes to look for what's wrong, to keep you safe and to solve problems. It's very useful when you have a challenge to navigate. It is not useful when looking at your spouse during the day.

For example, if you are making a decision about where your family is going to live in the next year, using that critical part of your brain is really helpful to consider and weigh all of the options. But applying that same part of your brain to your spouse, let's say he gets home from a long day of work and you start noticing what he's doing wrong, what you don't like, and all of the other things that are kind of bothersome and annoying to you, you end up judging him. So I say this and use this as an example because I think it's so

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common and we don't have control to change it. When we don't have awareness that it's just coming from this critical part of our brains, it's not actually coming from our spouses to override this part of the brain, you can really condition your mind to look for what you like, what you like about him, what you like about yourself, what you like about your life.

For example, maybe every day in the morning you write down what you like about your spouse or your life or yourself or your marriage. You could think about all of the things that you haven't thought about in a while with respect to those areas. I think that creating some sort of practice to focus on the likable parts of your spouse is so helpful, particularly if you find yourself going to the negative or being critical or a little bit more judgmental. All it is is changing the channel in your brain and it is as simple as that. And yet it takes some practice. I was thinking about my son learning how to walk and how he had seen so many people do it and he understood how to do it and he had taken a few steps here and there and yet it still took so much practice his body needed to get comfortable walking.

So even though he understood what it was, the repetition was required. And that's how I like to think about some of this mindset work so that we don't beat ourselves up about it and think, oh my goodness, I should know better. I know better. I know I'm being negative. I don't wanna be so critical. That is sort of like if my son was saying, I know how to walk already. I've seen everyone walk, I've walked before, my body should be able to do this instead of, let's just try again. Let's get better at it. That's why I want you to think about this. So focus on the likable parts of your spouse by creating a practice where you train your brain, you train your mind to get to a place where it likes more things about your spouse.

The next tip is to practice positive thoughts about your spouse. So this is a little bit different because in the last tip, you are just thinking about your spouse and what you naturally like about them. But in this tip, I want you to intentionally just create positive thoughts about your spouse by going inward and not looking to the facts, not looking to specifically what he's doing or saying or not doing to try to come up with intentional thoughts, but

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instead just deciding what you want to believe about him. Did you know you can do this? So for example, you could decide to think the thought, my spouse is a really good man. My spouse tries his best. I am so glad I'm married to my spouse. These are intentional thoughts that you can think that will feel so good for you and be really helpful in increasing connection, um, in your marriage. And it comes from looking inward to yourself to decide on purpose what you want to think.

Tip number four, repair and apologize when you're wrong. On default, the brain loves to blame others. It feels very powerful to blame because if we have someone to blame, then it's not our fault. Then we can reaffirm our identity as good. And what I want you to know is that you are good on the inside no matter what. You are good and you are a messy human who makes mistakes. So practice thinking this about yourself so that it becomes easier to repair. It's actually pretty hard to repair because we tend to go to shame and judgment of ourselves. And so if you can practice this as a skill, it's going to help you as a wife, it's going to help you in your parenting, it's going to help you in so many areas of your life with relationships because you will get over that hurdle of kind of judging yourself and going into shame with repair.

I like to think I wanna be the one in the relationship who apologizes the most. I think this is such a useful way to think about it. Instead of doing the opposite where we tend to go tit for tat or want the other person to apologize. Instead, if we can just focus on what we can control, which is how often and when and to what extent we apologize and the way with which we apologize, we then can feel really empowered and connected in our marriages because we're showing up how we wanna show up as the wife who we want to be.

Tip number five, create little helpful rules for yourself. For example, you might decide on a rule that you are going to give your spouse a kiss and a hug once a day, or you are going to say good morning and make eye contact with your spouse right when you see him in the morning. Or you are going to set up a date night once a week. The point is not to sort of add

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another thing to your to-do list, but it's just a useful way for you to allocate some of that attention and your resources towards your spouse and towards your marriage in a way that is almost like a habit. And um, and and it puts emphasis on strengthening that marriage instead of what I think at least I can speak for myself, we sort of fall into default habits and patterns with the logistics of life and parenthood and, and full lives where our resources and that includes our attention go towards the home, the kids, the calendar, the to-do list. And even though intellectually we would of course say that our spouse and our marriage is a top priority, we don't often show that in the day-to-day actions. And so creating little rules for yourself, whether it's like a daily rule, like I like to say good morning and give Steve a kiss first thing in the morning. Or it could be a once a week thing or once a month, however you wanna do it. It's a little way for you to have more intention behind how you show up in your marriage in a way that again, I think helps you be the woman and wife who you want to be. And it it helps prioritize your marriage.

Tip number six, meet your own needs. This is such a hard one for a lot of my clients and it used to be a really hard one for me. I've gotten so, so much better at it. Meet your own needs. The purpose of marriage is not for the other person to meet your needs. Have you noticed that if you think this, a lot of tension builds up, a lot of resentment builds up. It's not because there's anything wrong with you or your spouse, it's because you're just confused about whose responsibility it is to meet your needs. Have you ever noticed that it's hard for us to even meet our own needs and yet we have delegated this responsibility to our spouse who again isn't very good at meeting their own needs and now we want them to meet our needs. It's kind of crazy. And yet we do this all of the time. So let's take an example. Let's say that your spouse leaves laundry on the floor. If you don't like it a hundred percent make a request. Hey, spouse, could you pick up the laundry off the floor? And they may pick it up or they may not. But if your spouse doesn't start picking up laundry, don't make it mean something about you and your relationship and get mad meeting your own needs is I have a need and a want for there to not be laundry on the floor.



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I can either stop caring about that need or want or I can come up with other solutions to get this need met. Maybe I pick it up or if I don't be wanna be the one to do it, maybe I offer um, chores for my kids to pick it up or have someone else pick it up. Put your brain to work on how you can get this need met. I think that we put so many expectations on our spouses in a way that sounds really nice, but creates a lot of tension. And it goes back to what I said in the beginning because it ends up that we are trying to get our spouses to be us. For example, I was raised in a home where you didn't ever put dishes in the sink, the dishes just went straight into the dishwasher. I never can recall even seeing dishes piled up in the sink.

It just wasn't part of how we ran the kitchen. And I was taught this from a very young age and I still do this and all the dishes go straighten the dishwasher. It's amazing Steve did not have that experience. So Steve puts dishes in the sink and my husband is amazing. He does so much around the house. He even eventually will put things in the dishwasher. It's just not right away. So it could be that night or the next day. It's just not immediate. And I don't like to see the dishes in the sink. So I've asked him, Hey Steve, could you put your dishes in the dishwasher? And he tries, but it's just not a habit. He hasn't been doing this for 30 year like I have so often dishes stay in the sink. And you know what I decided? I decided there isn't a right or wrong here.

There's just a different way. We have different minds. My husband has a different mind than me. If I want dishes in the dishwasher, that's something that I can create. How do I want to create that? And I just decided that I'm gonna be the one. I'm the one who puts the dishes in the dishwasher so I don't ask him anymore. And it's so freeing because now when I see his dishes in the sink, I never think, Ugh, he didn't put 'em in the dishwasher again as if he was supposed to do that. Now this isn't to say that whenever you know something around the house needs to get done, that if your spouse doesn't wanna do it, that you are the one that does it instead. I just want you to think about it in terms of what your wants are and what your needs are. I remember coaching someone who was cleaning up her kitchen and her spouse was sleeping. He was sleeping in and they were in

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a disagreement about it later because he was interrupted by all of the cleaning in the kitchen and it woke him up and she thought that cleaning the kitchen was much more important and that he should be really appreciative that that's what she was doing. And there isn't a right or wrong here, there's just two different minds. One mind is valuing the clean kitchen, the other mind is valuing sleep. And that's okay.

Can we allow that, allow space for that while not expecting the other to change? That's where we get into trouble is when we think that, you know, because I like words for example, big words of affirmation person that Steve should be giving me more words. I never have that thought. I think to myself, if I want more validation, I'm gonna go journal. I'm going to go into Grow You. I'm going to do the self-validation tools and processes that we have so that I can get that need met. Now if I want to go out on the town or or get outta the house or something, and that's a need that I have and Steve doesn't wanna go, I can call up a girlfriend. I can do that with someone else. So it's not that other people aren't involved in us meeting our own needs, it's just that we put such high expectations on our spouse to be the one to meet that need.

One of my girlfriend's parents have been married for decades and the mom, my girlfriend's mom loves to travel and her dad doesn't. And so the mom travels either alone or with a girlfriend all of the time. And I love this. It's such an example of both spouses getting their needs met. Dad wants to stay home, he stays home. Mom wants to travel, mom travels. A lot of times. I think what gets in the way of us coming up with creative solutions for meeting our own needs is the vision that we had for what it would look like in our marriages. Specifically, that it would be our spouse who would be the one to travel with us or that our kitchens would be run a certain way and that the spouse would do it that way. Or it could be something completely different. But I think it's the the movie that we're playing in our mind about what that was going to look like that is so hard for us to get over and really get it out of our own way.



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Because once that's out of your own way and you realize that was just a story that you had about how this would go, you can create a new story and you can come up with creative solutions about how to make sure that your needs are met. There are so many examples that I could go into with meeting your own needs, but just think about for yourself, what are your needs that aren't getting met right now? And how could you meet them yourself?

And the seventh tip for strengthening your marriage is to say nice things out loud to your spouse about them. I think that we have these thoughts about our spouses, but very rarely do we say that nice thing to them. We might come up with reasons why we don't do this. Oh, I just forget I'm busy. Or they know that I think highly of them. But isn't it so nice when someone says something nice to us about us? It sort of instructs us to give us that nice thought, that validation. So just start practicing saying nice things out loud to your spouse about him. You might say, Hey, you are really amazing. Thanks for all you do around here. Or I just love being married to you. You are such a great spouse. Or I noticed how you handled our son's tantrum yesterday and I was so impressed. Or I know you've been really stressed about work lately and you've been able to handle it and be a husband and dad on top of that. And I'm just really proud of you. Like so often we think nice things but we don't say them. And so this is just a tip for you to say it out loud. It doesn't get old, right? If you think about it for yourself, if someone was saying nice things out loud to you, no matter how much you've heard it, it doesn't get old. So give that gift to your spouse. Alright my friends, give these seven tips for strengthening your marriage a try, and I will talk with you next week. Take care.

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