

## 10 Relationship Skills for the Almost Perfect Marriage

When I saw Stephanie Dowrick's book *The almost perfect marriage* on the shelf at my favourite book shop, I couldn't resist buying it.

I wondered, what does an almost perfect marriage look like? I'm almost sure it would be something different to each one of us, including our partners!

According to Stephanie, it's not your age, sexuality, wealth, religion or culture that will determine the success of your relationship. It's your willingness to discover what love truly means.

Here are 10 attitudes and actions she suggests to support a genuinely loving, intimate relationship:

### 1. Saying 'yes' to it all:

The moments you might not have chosen, the habits you've only just discovered, the differences in opinion and experience - these all add depth to your relationship. The wonderful moments are precious too. And they can be increased. What counts most though is saying 'yes!' to it all, loving and accepting your partner wholeheartedly, and allowing yourself to be loved and accepted also.

### 2. Take your power seriously:

You have the power to lift your partner's spirits or to dash them. Take this power seriously. The choices you make will profoundly affect your partner, your relationship and yourself.

### 3. Being loving matters much more than being right:

When it comes to love, think like a poet not an accountant. Don't keep a ledger of who has done what and what you are owed, nor how often you are right and your partner is wrong.

### 4. Give your partner the very best of yourself:

Your partner will always be more, not less, vulnerable to your attitudes and behaviour than anyone else. Don't expect your partner to make allowances that you would not assume from other people. Give your partner the very best of yourself. Always.

### 5. Honour one another:

In a healthy relationship, power is shared between equals. Differences in age, gender or wealth should not be barriers to a basic belief that your partner's life, opinions, choices, experiences, actions and decisions are of equal value to your own.

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## **6. Be aware of your moods:**

Finding your partner unbearably annoying? This is the moment to ask, 'What's going on with me?' Rather than projecting your negativity onto someone else, those bleak moments are a priceless chance to grow in insight. Be aware of how dramatically your own moods determine whether you are critical or appreciative.

## **7. Praise, encourage, admire and validate:**

Do this explicitly, lavishly and imaginatively. This has three great benefits: it lets your partner know that you love and appreciate them; it reminds you of what's wonderful about your partner; it's the best possible defence against taking one another for granted.

## **8. Make time for one another:**

It isn't possible to build a relationship with someone who is never there. Quality time counts for something only when there is a reasonable quantity of it also. Make time for one another, even and especially when there is 'no time'.

## **9. Your relationship is not a mini-corporation to be run with maximum efficiency:**

Let it be passionate, creative, soothing, spontaneous, relaxing, uplifting, messy, romantic, precious and unpredictable.

## **10. The almost-perfect couples exercise:**

On your own individual sheets of paper, formulate your vision for yourself and your relationship, but write the sentences as though you've already achieved them. 'We settle our differences easily'. 'We talk a lot'. 'We have fun'. After 20 minutes or so, compare what each of you has written. Underline the sentences that express much the same intention. Decide which sentences are the most important to you both. Write out a fresh sheet with just those sentences on it and put that sheet up where you can see it and be inspired by it. Keep all the sheets in a folder. Date them. As you repeat this exercise over a number of years they will tell a rich story.

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