

# What Makes a Marriage Strong?

Pete Bruno

Here's the surprising story from the 6,000 couples we first interviewed when we knew we needed a baseline coming into this century. Later replicated nationally and in 16 separate states, their results are:

**1) Full commitment**—meaning two people who jump in with both feet instead of taking an “I’ll try it and see if I like it” approach. Their commitment is to be married and to stay married; to do whatever is necessary to solve all problems together.

**2) Good communication**—the ability to talk about needs, to be a caring and encouraging listener, and to explore solutions together. Communication is a solution when there is turning toward each other at times of distress, being influenced to change for the better by what each other says.

**3) Conflict resolution**—both people's needs are being met by the strategy or solution, which is agreed on and implemented. Conflict is natural. Conflict never has to be catastrophic so long as you keep resolution your focus and goal. Just remember to seek the right solution for you both, not who's right.

**4) Best friends**—being and staying each other's best friend. Friendship is an important aspect of a strong marriage—especially when friendship includes being influenced by the needs of each other.

**5) Shared interests**—meaning you enjoy several things together along with some individual pursuits. Over the years your shared interests must grow, so you find enjoyment in several activities together. You must make your mutual interests many and frequent. Thus, you must try out lots of activities together.

**6) Sexual satisfaction**—you communicate well to find your own unique sexually satisfying relationship. You as a couple must have a clearly/gently

communicated understanding of what pleases and displeases, what will work well and what will not work and should not be included in your own sex-life, and what sometimes “works” but will not always be included.

**7) Fidelity**—you keep each other foremost and exclusively first. More than keeping your vows and being trustworthy, it is undivided attention that allows more and more brain space to be dedicated to positive perceptions about your partner.

**8) Financial security**—you feel safe enough to not engage in relationship destructive arguments about money.

**9) Church together**—you regularly attend this proven stress reducing and personally strengthening activity.

**10) Intimate prayer**—you pray together daily for each other and the people and things important to your partner.



Although we developed this research in collaboration with *Focus on the Family* and the *Family Research Council* and hired *Wirthlin Worldwide* to finalize and conduct the research, my attachment to state government at the time required us to leave the church out of our focus of research. But in all samples, it was the strongest couples who added their church and prayer to the significant results. ■

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