

# Five tips for making marriage work this Valentine's Day

February 13 2016, by Ayleen Barbel Fattal

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Credit: tOrange.us

This Valentine's Day, six million people expect or are planning a marriage proposal. Each year, 2.2 million marriages take place in the United States—40 to 50 percent of those will end in divorce.

Florida International University psychologist Lisa Arango believes a way to beat the odds is to build a strong, satisfying and meaningful relationship with your [partner](#). She provides some tips on how to prevent relationship disasters.

1. **Avoid a harsh startup.** The way you start a conversation sets the tone. If you start with an accusatory tone, chances are it will not end well—96 percent of the time, conversations that begin with a harsh startup will end negatively. Instead, use "I" statements ("I feel this because") to lead to a more gentle startup.
2. **Stay away from criticisms.** A criticism is an attack on your partner's character or personality. You can have a complaint addressing a specific action without criticizing your partner—remember the gentle startup.
3. **Avoid defensiveness.** Take responsibility—it is not always your partner's fault. Relationship satisfaction depends on your ability to discuss conflict issues.
4. **Steer clear of contempt** – it is poison to a relationship, and more toxic than simple frustration or negativity. Sarcasm, cynicism, mockery, name-calling, eye-rolling, all convey disgust. If you see your partner as beneath you rather than your equal, you are less likely to see his or her opinions as valid and less likely to attempt to view a situation from his or her perspective. Instead, create a culture of appreciation. Affection, fondness and admiration can be rekindled and are all considered antidotes for contempt.
5. **Avoid an emotional shut-down** or stonewalling. This is the point where you or your partner have just had enough. Instead of shutting down and shutting each other out, stop the conversation, take a few minutes and physically do something to calm down.

Arango reminds us no couple is perfect—even the happiest of marriages can experience any one of these 'things to avoid' just not as frequently.

When they do happen, successful couples are more effective at overcoming them. Her advice for this Valentine's Day (and every day) is to spend time together nurturing your friendship—strengthening the foundation of your [relationship](#), creating shared meaning. As couples move through life together, they have the opportunity to **create and find meaning together**.

Arango is the director of the [Professional Counseling Psychology program](#) at Florida International University (FIU) and provides family counseling services at FIU's [Center for Children and Families](#) (CCF). The center offers the Gottman Relationship Check-up and a workshop titled the Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work based on protocols developed by best-selling author and researcher John Gottman.

Provided by Florida International University

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