

Cultivating a Culture of Appreciation in Marriage

Couples usually seek help because they have become overwhelmed by their problems, at which point, they often lose sight of what is truly good in their relationship. We want to help them address the problems, but it is also necessary to give attention to the positive parts of the relationship. In this way, the counseling office can also become a place where couples practice positive attunement.

During the session, have the couple face towards each other and make statements of appreciation and affirmation. An example of an affirmation would be, “**I** appreciate the way you...” Then have them reinforce those interactions at home.

Below are suggestions of attunement practices you can help couples build into their relationship. You can pick one to start with and add others as it gets more habituated.

*Express
Gratitude*



Thank their spouse for at least one thing. At home, have them start and end each day this way.

*Rehearse Good
Qualities*



Name their spouse’s good qualities. Encourage them to also mentally rehearse their spouse’s good qualities when they are apart instead of rehearsing their shortcomings. “I love how excited you get about that subject”, “I love the way you play with the kids,” or “I love how committed to a healthy diet you are.”

Tune In



Actively listen when their spouse talks to them about something that matters to them. Reflect back to each other so that they feel heard. Take time to show sincere interest in what’s important to their spouse.

*Affirm
Verbally*



Get into the habit of saying, “I love you,” since verbal affirmation is empowering and builds not only esteem, but also has been found in research studies to have a wide range of health benefits. For spouses that do not feel loving, encourage them that Christ’s unconditional love can lead them towards the grace to grow in their ability to love and honor their spouse.

*Practice
Kindness*



Identify one new way that they can love and care for their spouse. Then have them perform a thoughtful act of kindness that lets their spouse know they matter to them, such as picking up a favorite treat, or taking care of a chore. They can make this a habit by setting a weekly reminder on their phones.

*Celebrate
Intimacy*



Plan a fun date night that focuses on enjoying each other, and does not focus on difficult issues in the marriage or the care needs of others, including kids.

*Grow
Spiritually*



Thank God for his plan in establishing their marriage. Even when it’s hard, they can have full confidence that God cares for the health and success of their marriage, even more than they do.

After working on any of the above exercises with the couple in session, have them connect to each other during the week at home. For further reinforcement, encourage couples to write down how their experiences and interactions went. Then check-in with them the next time you meet them to see how they are cultivating a culture of appreciation and affirmation in their relationship.