

10 truths to divorce-proof YOUR marriage

Private detectives, divorce lawyers and marriage counsellors share relationship-saving lessons to help keep your love flame alive and burning

1 Get To Know His Friends And Family

"Before your husband met you, he probably had a good social life and spent time with his parents and family," says Adriene Cheong, divorce lawyer at Harry Elias Partnership LLC. "They remain an important part of his life, so put in an effort to get to know them. A common complaint I hear is 'My spouse made no effort to get to know my friends'. Gradually those friends drop away – and the spouse becomes resentful at losing contact with them."

Adriene's suggestion: "Take the initiative – organise outings or invite them for meals. Do not always wait for him to initiate meetings, as he may not want to impose on you."

■ **LOVE LESSON** Chang Song Eng, head of REACH Counselling, which specialises in marriage and family counselling, agrees. "A relationship

with your spouse's family and friends is a source of support and yields useful information on your man – who he was and will be. It also provides diversity and keeps a marriage from becoming too suffocating."



2 Be Intimate And Sexy With Each Other

"It is easy for married life to become routine and filled with the responsibilities of work and children," admits Adriene. "Some of my clients say sexual intimacy between them dropped drastically after their child was born. So try your best to allocate some romantic moments with your spouse."

Private investigator James Loh Teck Choon, founder of SG Investigators, provides an example: "One husband told my client – his wife – that he felt forced to visit the red-light district area because she neglected him."

Gloria James-Civetta, a divorce lawyer at Gloria James-Civetta & Co, has also seen couples torn apart by lack of intimacy. She advises, "Learn to throw in the element of surprise. Keep thinking back to when you first fell in love."

■ **LOVE LESSON** Roger Ho, a marriage counsellor at Pasir Ris Family Service Centre, states, "Romancing your spouse does not have to stop after marriage. The effort you put into surprising your partner need not be excessive. Look back on the day you fell in love and got married, and focus on bringing yourselves closer."

3 Empathise With His Relationship With His Parents

"One of my clients found out her husband had a separate bank account which he kept secret," recalls James. "She suspected he was keeping a mistress. We carried out investigations and it turned out the husband was using the money to pay for his mother's

medical expenses. His mother-in-law did not get on well with his wife – and he was terrified his wife would be unhappy if she found out."

Adriene observes, "I often witness husbands placed in a very stressful position of having to choose between his wife and mother. As far as possible, try to avoid creating these situations."

Gloria agrees, but says mothers-in-law also have to play fair. "Common problems I see are mothers-in-law poisoning the son's ears with gossip about their daughters-in-law, or not giving the couple enough privacy."

■ **LOVE LESSON** Song Eng suggests using the principle of "keep it near, yet keep it clear". This means keeping in-laws near through respect, by including them in your lives and understanding and supporting your spouse in all family matters. But also draw up clear boundaries to safeguard your marriage – to "keep it clear".

4 Leave Work At Work

"Do not bring office problems back home," says James. "After a bad day at work, it is easy to transfer that towards your spouse by being easily irritated or short-tempered. One of my clients admitted she used her husband as a channel to vent her frustrations... which indirectly led to his affair with a female colleague and the eventual end of their marriage. She later told me she regretted how she had treated her husband."

■ **LOVE LESSON** "Unless you intend work to be a third party in your marriage, have a work-life family balance and make your spouse top priority. Agree on an acceptable arrangement when it comes to career and family roles," relates Song Eng.

5 Learn To Trust Him

Gloria reveals, "I had a case where the woman did not trust the husband. She took to calling his workplace and close friends, checking his phone and setting up a spyware device on the computer to trap him." The husband turned out to be innocent – but the lack of trust killed the marriage anyway.

James has also seen mistrust work poison. "If your husband has a late night, do not automatically assume he has another woman. He may be genuinely doing overtime work or he just wants to spend time with friends. When wives or husbands are too mistrusting, it's very stressful to a marriage. I've seen spouses snap under the stress."

■ **LOVE LESSON** Says Song Eng, "Learn to trust – as difficult as it may seem. It is a leap of faith to let go of your fears and believe your spouse can be trusted to make the right decisions when caught in tempting situations." Adds Roger, "If you cannot trust a man, no matter how well he behaves, and no matter how many times he says 'I love you', the problem may be with you – and not him."

6 Share And Discuss Financial Burdens Together

"As families increasingly become dependent on dual incomes, there may be conflicts on how to deal with finances for the household expenses, mortgage and children. Have an understanding on how general joint expenses are to be shared."

"Also discuss what would happen if one party stops work to care for the children, and whether an allowance for their personal expenses is to be expected," says Adriene. "One common complaint I hear is when one spouse feels the other does not contribute enough financially – be it due to lack of ambition, poor job performance or the mismanagement of finances."

Says James, "Make essentials such as children's education, medical costs and utility bills your top priorities. If you are on a strict budget, try to limit spending on luxuries such as branded goods and new technology. I've seen couples stressed out trying to maintain an overly-materialistic lifestyle."

■ **LOVE LESSON** "Couples argue about finances more than any other topic," says Roger. "Determining a budget, savings plan and financial goals are proactive ways to avoid stress." Try to do this early on in your marriage to avoid future conflicts.



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7 Talk About Domestic Problems In Private

Sensitive issues are best spoken of when there's just the two of you. "Do not reprimand him in public, even if he is at fault, as most men value their pride," shares James. "If a husband is scolded by his wife in the presence of their children, the children may also disrespect him."

■ **LOVE LESSON** "A husband needs a wife who respects him as a man. Do not make him lose face in public and he will respect you for your sensitivity," says Song Eng. "This upholds the team spirit of your marriage and yields huge returns for the whole family."

8 Do Not Neglect Your Husband After You Have Kids

Gloria recalls a divorce case she handled. "The mother doted on her baby so much that she took to sharing the same bed to care for her. She stopped being intimate with her husband and they did not sleep in the same bed. Needless to say, he strayed. I think it is useful to set aside a day every week to go out for a meal or romantic stroll together." On your date, make it a point to talk about other things in life, like your hobbies. Do not just talk about the children.

"Even if it is not possible to get away, perhaps at night after the children are asleep, have a late supper or a drink and chat together about your day," suggests Adriene.

■ **LOVE LESSON** "You are married to your husband, not to your kids. Your husband is a parent, alongside you," says Song Eng. Adds Roger, "A husband needs love and affection from his wife! The best gift you can give your children is a loving relationship with your husband."

9 Give Him Space

"Every individual needs space. Some wives try to restrict their husbands' contact with friends after marriage, claiming they must be fully committed to their families. No doubt, the family should be

top priority after marriage, but any individual will want to maintain their circle of friends," reasons James.

Adriene declares, "As much as you would love to spend all your time with him, he needs his own space to do his own activities or just hang out with his buddies. The worst thing is to make him feel smothered in the marriage."

■ **LOVE LESSON** Song Eng notes, "Being together all the time may mean love for a woman, but may mean suffocation for a man. Giving each other some space may seem like neglect to you, but he sees it as showing love and respect. Learn to read each other's need for company and space, and communicate what you both need."

10 Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

"Communication is key," says Adriene. "When couples are dating, they talk for hours on the phone, go on long dates and discuss almost everything. After marriage, this appears to be one of the first areas that suffers, after couples get very comfortable with each other. Everyone is busy with their own life and no one realises the lack of communication until it is too late. In the end, it becomes a marriage between two strangers."

Gloria agrees. "Do not allow a lack of communication between each other to widen further and further until both parties are no longer able to communicate with each other."

■ **LOVE LESSON** "Open communication is an essential building block of marriage, and couples should take daily moments to contact and connect with each other," Roger concludes. W

