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## life advice

### How to Grow the Love in Your Marriage

Acceptance and appreciation go hand-in-hand. When loving, it's important to not just focus on the negatives.  
BY DR. NOELLE NELSON



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To grow your love in marriage you have to participate in the "doing" of love.

Love is both a feeling and an action. As a feeling, it is often mysterious—why you love the woman someone else divorced is a mystery; why you love a sweet goofy guy your best friend would never even consider dating is equally unknowable. But the action of love, the "doing" of love, is not mysterious at all. The miracle is, that as we perform the actions of loving, the feeling of love (which may or may not include "falling in love") blossoms. This is true whether you're in the first flush of love, or settled into an established couple—the "doing" of love brings about the feeling of love.

What is the "doing" of love?

First, when you set out to love someone you spend time with them, getting to know them as they are and you do this in a spirit of curiosity and acceptance. You recognize they may do things or act in ways unfamiliar to you, but you take these differences as interesting, not as good, bad, right or wrong.

Second, you are concerned about the person's well-being. You care about whether or not they are happy or well taken care of and you take active measures to support their well-being.

Third, you appreciate them. You value the person you have chosen to love. You are grateful for all they are and do, and you let them know it—from kind words and affectionate kisses to bragging loudly about their qualities to friends and family.

Gratitude can be considered the bottom line "doing" of love. When you appreciate and value someone you will automatically be concerned about their well-being and be willing to get to know and accept them. When you don't value someone why bother?

If the quickest way to grow a love is gratitude, the reverse is also true. The quickest way to kill a love is to fail to appreciate. Our tendency, all too often, is to get caught up in the inevitable problems and difficulties of the relationship and to stay stuck there—endlessly blaming, criticizing and fault-finding. We ignore what's going right and the love dies. And the more you dwell on your unhappiness the more flaws you find in your mate until you lose your love of him or her entirely.

For example, your spouse fails to take out the garbage, has to be dragged unwilling and in a grumpy state to family events and falls asleep when you want to cuddle. You focus on these shortcomings and forget that this is the same person who sat by your bedside when you were sick for days on end, who loves your body even when you hate it and who will hold you when you cry even if they don't understand why you're crying. You focus righteously on your disappointments and forget to appreciate, to be grateful for what is good. After a while, you don't see anything to be grateful for and the love dies. How sad!

Don't let the love die. Be grateful and express your appreciation often, loudly and with gusto, both to yourself and to your sweetheart, and watch the love between you grow and grow!

*Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D. is a psychologist, consultant, speaker and author. Her most recent book is "The Power of Appreciation in Everyday Life" (Insomniac Press, 2006). Her new book, "Men Are Wonderful" (Free Press) will be released in January 2009. For more than a decade, she has helped people live happier, healthier lives through appreciation—at work, at home and in relationships. For more than a decade, she has helped people live happier, healthier lives through appreciation--at work, at home and in relationships. E-mail: [nnelson@dr.noellenelson.com](mailto:nnelson@dr.noellenelson.com), website: [www.noellenelson.com](http://www.noellenelson.com).*