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life advice

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Making It Through Troubled Times, Together!

Life is full of unexpected hardships, but it's possible to pull through with your marriage intact. Here's how!

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A friend of mine made the mistake of driving after a night of drinking with the guys—and seriously injured a lady crossing the street. He was truly "scared sober," but nonetheless, paid for his error in judgment with jail time. Along with the jail time came the loss of his job, serious erosion of his credibility in the community and a host of other issues. He feared the consequences to his marriage would be dire.

Stuff happens. Not necessarily as dramatic as what happened to my friend, but serious and unexpected. You lose your job. Then your spouse is downsized. Or one of you requires an unanticipated surgery at horrendous expense: now you don't have enough for the mortgage. Or there's an accident or illness and the recoup time and effort puts a strain on both of you, not to mention the fear that nothing will ever be the same again.

How can we deal with troubled times? How can we get through them without the loss of our marriages on top of everything else?

1. See yourself as a team ("We can get through this together").

The power of "together" is tremendous. A couple who sees themselves as a team will pool their talents and resources to mutual advantage, give strength to one another, and sustain hope: when one's down the other can help him or her up.

2. Focus on each other's strengths and qualities. This is not the time to dwell on your own or your partner's weaknesses. On the contrary, this is the time to empower each other by taking inventory of your strengths and qualities.

3. Express appreciation to one another, resist the temptation to put down or criticize. Insecurity is rampant in troubled times, not just in our external lives, but also internally. In times of crisis, we doubt our abilities, we question whether we have what it takes to pull through, we worry about how much worse things can get. Criticizing or putting down your partner just intensifies those fears, not only in them, but in yourself. Instead, let your spouse know how much you appreciate them just as they are, and reassure them of your love. Express your gratitude often—for however they contribute to the betterment of your lives—whether it is helping out with the kids, putting in overtime, or sending out yet another resume.

4. Set goals you can work on together; focus on problem solving, not blaming. The only way there is light at the end of the tunnel is if you see it there. Brainstorm together to figure out what goals you seek, break those down into smaller goals and rough out a plan for getting there. Keep your sights constantly on "How do we resolve this?" not, "You'll never be able to do that." Keep that precious "we" front and center, respect your partner's ideas and input as much as you do your own.

5. Acknowledge and celebrate small victories along the way. The more crisis enters your life, the more difficult it is to sustain positivity and pro-activity. That's why it's so important to acknowledge and celebrate every small gain you achieve. Whether it's figuring out a swap with the neighbor—after school child care in return for computer lessons—or making through the next round of layoffs without losing your job, enthusiastically cheer every bit of progress.

My friend's marriage survived the consequences of his DUI, and because he and his spouse took the challenge on together, as a team and couple, they are stronger for it.

You don't need troubled times in your marriage to forge a stronger bond together, but should a crisis arise it's good to know that your marriage doesn't have to be sacrificed to it. Just remember the power of together!

Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D., is a relationship expert, popular speaker in the U.S. and abroad, and author of nine best-selling books, including her most recent, "[Your Man is Wonderful](#)" and "[Dangerous Relationships](#)." Dr. Nelson focuses on how we can all enjoy happy, fulfilling lives while accomplishing great things in love, at home and at work, as we appreciate ourselves, our world and all others. For more, visit www.noellenelson.com and www.yourmaniswonderful.com/blog.