

Setting Up Goals With Your Spouse

Marriage is a series of endless transitions and, at each new stage in life, your goals will change. There are five steps you can take to make sure you and your spouse are moving in the same direction.

Every successful marriage has one thing in common: shared goals. In order to set goals, you must decide what is important to you individually and as a couple. Your goals must be compatible in order for the two of you to be compatible. To be realistic, you should limit the number of short-term and long-term goals to a manageable number; prioritize them; and set a deadline with mileposts along the way.

As you achieve your goals, you can add new ones. But, at any given time, you should be working toward no more than a handful of challenging goals; otherwise, you may become discouraged and quit.

In the goal-setting process, you have to decide what resources you'll need to reach your goals, determine what steps you have to take to reach them, and agree on how you will measure your progress.

Inevitably, goals involve some sacrifice and compromise so it is important that you engage in open dialog and listen attentively to what is said and how it is said.

Many couples start out with the goal of having successful careers, a large home in the suburbs, 2.5 loving children, luxury cars and dream vacations. Those are worthwhile goals and they're important enough to be empowering. But achieving any goal is not a matter of luck; it takes a concerted effort by both spouses in the face of numerous challenges and setbacks.

Here are five things you can do as a couple to make sure you achieve your goals:

- **Dream together:** Share your hopes and dreams with your spouse. At the outset, the ideas may seem a little vague and unrealistic, but avoid criticism and listen actively – playing back what each other have to say in order to make sure you understand. Vocalizing goals helps bring them to life and commits you to achieving them. It gives your spouse an opportunity to give you feedback, encouragement and support.
- **Pray together:** Write your goals down and slip that piece of paper into your Bible as a constant reminder of your goals. Set aside a regular time each day to pray as a couple about your goals. Participate in marriage enrichment activities at church such as Marriage Encounter and Cursillo. There is much wisdom in the saying, “The family that prays together stays together.”
- **Work together:** You may have different jobs and career goals, but you can work together in other ways. You can share responsibilities around the house and you can

volunteer as a couple in church ministries and social activities. The church is a great place to meet other faith-filled couples with strong marriages like yours.

- **Play together:** Set aside one night a week as date night and plan an activity outside the home that you both enjoy. Celebrate special events such as birthdays, your wedding anniversary, Valentine's Day, Father's Day and Mother's Day. Reward yourselves for reaching important milestones on the way to your goals. Court one another by planning an occasional romantic getaway for just the two of you at nearby resorts and bed and breakfasts. (Yes, babysitting is expensive, but think of it as an investment in your marriage.)
- **Budget together:** Any worthwhile goal will require substantial financial resources. Decide which one of you is responsible for the family finances, draw up a budget and sit down once a month to review where you are at on routine household expenses and the money you need to set aside to achieve your goals.

Marriage is a series of endless transitions and at each new stage in life your goals will change. By taking these five steps, you'll make sure you are both moving in the same direction.