

MAJOR INGREDIENTS FOR RECONCILIATION

1. **ADMIT THE NEED TO CHANGE:** We all have a natural resistance to change. There is no 'right way' in which to be married and even if we discover a way that works for us, we will need to change over time as circumstances change. Therefore, willingness to change and grow is an essential element of a functioning marriage. Problems often occur when we enter a new stage or when one partner is changing and the other is not. When communication (regarding the change) breaks down or there is resistance to change, couples get stuck. Our egos often get in the way because admitting the need for change might mean admitting we were wrong. It often takes a crisis to force change. The crisis may be a serious problem with a child or it may be a separation. The crisis of separation is a powerful catalyst for change. The marriage is on the "critical list" during a separation, but if the partners can admit that what they have been doing hasn't worked and that they need to change, it can be the start of reconciliation.
2. **A SENSE OF COMMITMENT:** Commitment to the marriage and the value of marriage and family is an essential ingredient to reconciliation. In the good times, "love" carries us through. In the tough times, a sense of commitment may be the source of motivation. Our moral convictions regarding our vows, our faith and perseverance and our models (family and friends who are living out – or not – their commitments) are all strong factors in reconciliation. It's unlikely that appealing to a spouse's "love" will help at this time, but appealing to their sense of family values, fairness and commitment may. They may be motivated by a desire to be sure they've "done everything they could" before giving up. Sometimes getting in touch with good memories can help too.
3. **WILLINGNESS TO RISK:** We must be willing to risk trying (with no guarantees), to risk hoping when things don't look very hopeful and to risk giving when the other is not. We have to be willing to "unilaterally disarm" – to act kindly even when our spouse is not, to begin trying to meet their needs even though they are not meeting ours. We have to be willing to make that first move and not wait for our partners to do it.
4. **WORK HARD AT IT - PROBLEM SOLVING:** There is a myth that good marriages just happen, but they don't. We have to work at it. If our marriage is in trouble we have to work doubly hard. Instead of working at it, we have a tendency to fall into self-pity or self-righteousness and wallow in our emotional mire. We must honestly evaluate the problems and then go about solving them. We must set aside emotions, hear hard truths and then begin to work on them. It's easy to discover what we must do if we re-play our spouses complaints. If we honestly do not know the basic problem areas or do not know how to make things different, we will need to learn. Learning and changing are both hard work, but essential. We can learn from friends, books, counselors and others. But the work must come from us.
5. **LET GO AND LET GOD:** We cannot do it all. We have to be careful that we don't try "too hard." We have to "plant seeds;" we have to change and we have to be very patient. We can only change ourselves and then "ask God to bless us." Prayer is a valuable ingredient. We ask God for His guidance and help and His will then wait upon His Divine Timing.