

Secrets of a Successful Intercultural Marriage

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1. **Individuate (leave your parents):** Consciously become aware of, examine, accept or reject influences from your family of origin and cultural upbringing; decide who you want to be in beliefs and actions.
2. **Grow up:** Learn to differentiate between how you *feel* from what you *think*, *need* or *decide*.
3. **Research your partner's culture**, such as family values and practices, tastes, worldview, manners or beliefs. Become aware of which aspects of your partner's culture you can tolerate, and which aspects you can accept, and which YOU actually are willing to assimilate into your identity.
4. **Show respect** for your partner as a person, even when you find aspects of your partner's culture as repulsive, unacceptable or annoying.
5. **Free up your partner to choose** or reject aspects of your culture. Don't try to push or force your culture on your partner.
6. **Try to view aspects of each other's culture as different**, rather than as *good* or *bad*. Be open to other perspectives within the parameters of your highest authority (i.e. Bible, law of the land) and your common welfare.
7. **Adjust your expectations.** Consider and accept the reality of your partner's limitations, needs, abilities, and different values and worldview without pushing him to change.
8. If your partner pushes you or forces you to adopt aspects of his/her culture, **consider it anyway**, but tell your partner that it is hard for you to be open-minded when you feel pushed.
9. **Try to integrate** some of your partner's family rituals into your new family traditions, but also try to integrate some of your own.
10. **Be flexible** in your negotiation: "You adapt to my culture while you're in my country, I adapt to your culture when I'm in yours." Or, "This is what I'll do to adapt to your culture, and this is what I hope you'll do to adapt to mine."
11. **Don't take yourself too seriously.** Laugh at your mistakes. Laugh with (not at) your partner.
12. **Find a common interest and activity** you can both enjoy together *regularly*. Repeat those activities (or discover new ones) which nurture your attraction to each other. **Avoid those that cause repeated conflicts or "turn-offs."**
13. For balance, **nurture your own roots** and identity. Read in your language, watch a film, listen to your type of music, religious activities, etc., as long as you also allow time for your common interests as a couple.
14. **Understand the severity of acculturation stress** of the partner who lives in a country other than his/her country of origin. Be patient with him/her and yourself as you both deal with it. Be supportive.
15. **Learn to cope with other stressors**, such as finances, job change, illness, a move to a new city or house, illness in the family, etc. Get help when they affect your mood and your relationship.
16. **Build up a new core of friends** as a resource, especially if you are geographically separated from trusted family members and friends. Be patient; it takes time and plenty of exposure.
17. **Allow your partner to nurture his/her cultural roots** – such as music, language, association with fellow countrymen. Support his/her desire to travel to his/her country of origin from time to time. Travel with him/her if possible.
18. **Find out the priority needs** of your partner (love/belonging? Freedom? Power/significance? Pleasure/fun? Peace/security/harmony?) Be aware of your own and share it with your partner.
19. **Find out your partner's love language** and tell him/her yours. (Touch, words, gifts, time, etc.)
20. **Set some common GOALS** for the immediate future and the distant future. Discuss the steps that will lead to fulfilling them. Renegotiation.
21. **Discuss issues before they arise:** such as, roles, in-laws, future location, finances, social schedule, money management, children, vacation, and career.
22. **When conflicts arise**, keep in mind the possibility of misunderstandings due to language and cultural differences. Get an interpreter or neutral mediator. Say **"time out"** when conflict escalates to angry words or actions, and continue the discussion when emotions have "cooled off." **Brainstorm new possible solutions** you can both tolerate. Repeat the solutions or actions that brought harmony before.
22. **Rekindle the original spark** between you by recreating activities or going back to settings where you first met or fell in love.