

Can puppies help your marriage? By Julie Nakis

Could looking at pictures of cute puppies make you feel better about your spouse? A study suggests it might help.

Published in the journal *Psychological Science*, the study included more than 140 married couples who were under the age of 40 and married for less than five years. They were shown pictures of their spouse followed by a picture of either a positive picture, such as puppies, babies and pizza. Or they were shown a neutral image, such as a button. Then, the couples rated the quality and satisfaction of their relationship.

The researcher's goal was to determine how the images affected the participant's satisfaction with their marriage, and whether or not associating someone's spouse with positive imagery could lead to attitudes that are more positive.

People who were positive images reported viewing their partner in a more favorable light than those who viewed a neutral pictures.

James McNulty, lead author of the study explained: "One ultimate source of our feelings about our relationships can be reduced to how we associate our partners with positive affect, and those associations can come from our partners but also from unrelated things, like puppies and bunnies."

Dr. David Kemp, a psychiatrist at Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn, Ill., and co-medical director of the behavioral health service line for Advocate Health Care, weighs in on whether viewing pictures of adorable puppies could save a marriage.

"Pictures of cute puppies or babies are not enough to save a marriage, but this study shows that positive associations can evoke positive feelings," Dr. Kemp says. "Dogs and puppies can also symbolize loyalty and faithfulness; qualities that center around commitment and help cultivate a successful relationship."

Dr. Kemp says the real secret to maintaining a healthy, strong relationship is compromise, effective communication and effort from both sides.

"Five fundamental pillars of a loving and happy partnership are friendship, open communication, respect, commitment, and trust," he adds. "Regardless of viewing cute puppy pictures, you are more inclined to be in a healthy and satisfied relationship if you and your partner both follow those five pillars. They are ultimately the foundation of any relationship."

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Wishing you joy and good health,
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