

Redbook gives

BRITNEY SPEARS THE SECRETS TO A HAPPY MARRIAGE

First rule: Make your marriage your top priority. That's just what Britney did when she dropped out of sight to honeymoon with her new husband, Kevin Federline. (But she managed to send us a postcard from Fiji!)

As a wedding gift to her, we asked our Redbook Marriage Institute experts for advice that Britney—indeed, every woman—can use. By Melanie Mannarino

MARRY YOUNG, GROW OLD TOGETHER? When Britney and Kevin tied the knot in September, after having dated for just five months, she was 22 and he was 26. Their whirlwind romance made for juicier gossip than The Apprentice. The big question: Are they too young to make their marriage work?

"Those who marry young must have a job and social life outside of the relationship. Couples who marry in their early 20s have the highest divorce rate. Being self-sufficient can prevent problems later." John Gray, Ph.D., marriage therapist; author,

"Life is short, marriage is *long*. So go out and have fun together; there

Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus

will be *plenty* of time for being 'an old married couple.'"

Jenny Lee, author, I Do. I Did. Now What?!

"Over time, as personality traits develop, power struggles arise. Compromise: Focus on the 'we' instead of the 'me.'"

Jane Greer, Ph.D., marriage therapist; author, Gridlock: Finding the Courage to Move On in Love, Work, and Life



their unity as

a couple.

BRINGING HOME THE

BACON With a reported net worth of \$100 million, Britney's status as primary breadwinner puts her in good company: One in three American women earns more than her husband does. How can couples handle the potentially negative impact of this nontraditional situation?

"The secret in these marriages is that the man has to be a partner in some way. Maybe Britney respects his business mind and career advice. Or maybe she trusts him more than anybody in the world and he's her sounding board. That would make a partnership. But if he's not carrying some sort of significant role in her life, then who is he, besides an antidote to loneliness?" Laura Berman Fortgang, life coach; author,

"Power and money are two primary sources of conflict for couples. Marriages with breadwinner wives can work if each partner feels respected for what he or she does."

Now What? 90 Days to a New Life Direction

Tina B. Tessina, Ph.D., marriage therapist; author, How to Be a Couple and Still Be Free

"For a man to be with a woman who is very powerful, he has to be secure in his own maleness-or he won't be able to weather it." Lou Paget, sex educator; author, 365 Days of Sensational Sex

"At first, a relationship like this is blissful. The wealthier person spoils the other, which is what Britney has been doing. Then, what I've seen happen is that the person signing the checks gets spender's remorse: She feels a bit bitter, especially if the partner is spending what she considers to be a lot of money. That's when fights start. Most couples in this situation put some money in a joint account to share. Britney may give Kevin a 'spousal allowance' and pay the bills." David Bach, financial advisor; author, Smart Couples Finish Rich

THE BENEFITS OF A STARTER

MARRIAGE Kevin wasn't the first man to hear Britney say "I do." Her January 2004 marriage to Jason Alexander was quite possibly the shortest starter marriage the tabloids had ever seen—it was annulled after just 55 hours. Is there any insight to be gained from these increasingly common test-run unions? (Usually, a starter marriage lasts fewer than five years—but more than two days.)

"People can learn from a marriage that doesn't last very long. But you have to think about why it didn't work-and get help in understanding it-or else you risk repeating the same mistakes. Britney had a whirlwind romance [with Kevin], so one wonders if it's a little impulsive." Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Ph.D., marriage researcher; codirector, The National Marriage **Project, Rutgers University**

"There is some validity to saying that the younger that you start out as a couple, the more likely it is that you'll grow radically over the years from where you started out in your marriage. But as long as both people keep growing in the same direction, at relatively the same speed, they will most likely stay together!"

Laura Berman Fortgang

BUILDING A BLENDED

FAMILY In marrying Kevin, Britney became part of a blended family (he has two children with ex-girlfriend Shar Jackson). Being a new wife is one thing, but how can a woman navigate the choppy waters of stepmotherhood?

"My best advice for Britney is to have humility. Recognize the challenges you're facing. The kids will always want to build up their 'real' parent in your presence. You're the intrusion. Realize that you won't get recognition for the wonderful things that you do now, but it will pay off much later, when the kids are older and they recognize just how much you've given them." John Gray

"It's almost inevitable that you'd feel some jealousy or competition for your spouse's time, since he's a father. The situation requires sensitivity and unselfishness. Hang in there and hope for the best, and don't make things worse. Over time, it will get better."

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

"Make sure the kids have a bedroom in your home—even if they don't live there full-time. Let them know that they are home when they're with you." Kristan Cunningham, host, HGTV's Design on a Dime "The best outcomes happen when everyone in this parenting triad acts like a mature adult. This could be a really volatile situation, so being loving to the kids, and never letting volatility touch them, is key.

Especially in the beginning, assure the biological mother that you will follow her rules and respect her opinion. Communicate with the mom and say, 'Hey, I'd love to take them to the circus. How would you feel about that?'"

Laura Berman Fortgang

HANDLING THE

IN-LAWS When Mom and Dad Spears talk, Britney usually listens. Reportedly, it was mom Lynne's decisive action that led to Britney's hasty annulment after her elopement, and the 22-year-old begrudgingly signed a prenup with Kevin at her parents' insistence. How can this new couple maintain loving relationships with their in-laws, while also keeping them at a healthy distance?

"To help build a relationship with your in-laws, find out what they like to do most. For example, if Britney's mom is a good cook, Kevin can ask her to teach him some of his new wife's favorite recipes. And Britney can do the same with Kevin's family.

Doing things together lets you bond.

Also, Britney and Kevin need to have a clear agreement on boundaries:

How will they handle the holidays?

Is it okay if one family likes to 'drop in' for visits? It will set the pattern for how their families interact for the rest of their married life."

"Your own parents can drive you crazy, but you've had your whole life to learn how to 'manage' them. New parents-in-law are probably going to have that same skill of making you crazy, but it will take you a while to figure out the best way to deal with them. Just be patient, and when in doubt, screen your calls!"

Jenny Lee

Readers' best marriage advice

"Nurture the friendship

that allowed you to fall in love.
We always made time for 'us.' Even
when our kids were young, I'd
prepare candlelight dinners for
two, while the kids watched videos."

Suzann Falgione, 42, married 21 years

"Laugh! A lot! My husband and I don't annoy each other because we just laugh at each other's idiosyncrasies." Jennifer Chell, 32, married two years

"Learn together through trial and error. There's always that first (bad) meatloaf that requires a call to the pizza deliveryman. Keep a sense of humor and you'll go the distance."

Lisa Ryan, 41, married 20 years

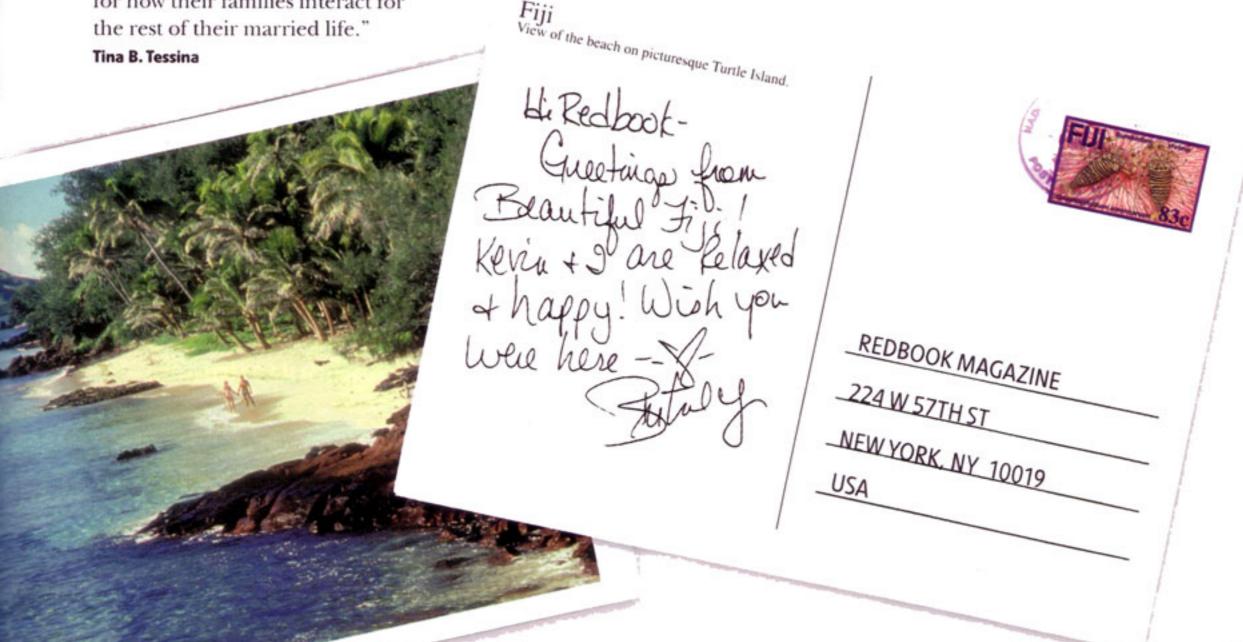
"The first year of marriage is the toughest. Figure out who is better at doing what, and stick to it. I handle the finances; my husband deals with the cars. And we take turns with the laundry, dishes, and cooking."

Sandy Schipper, 35, married seven years

"Be passionate. My husband and I always kiss and say how we feel about one another, just like when we were dating. The spark that first drew us together keeps the fires burning."

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Glynis Anne Buschmann, 41, married two years





"When problems arise between you and your spouse and a set of the in-laws, it's important to present a united front. Right then, you define that 'we are a couple, we are a team,' and that you support your partner."

Jane Greer

SURVIVING MEDDLING

"Is Brit Pregnant?," and eBay auctions of her used chewing gum are just further proof that Britney's life is a public commodity. How can the newlyweds tune out everyday input from family and friends—and turn a blind eye to the microscopic scrutiny from the public at large?

"Just smile, be gracious, and ignore everyone. Every marriage is different, and no one will ever understand your marriage the way you do (if you understand it at all yourself—but, hey, that takes time!). Also, never, ever believe those couples

who tell you they never fight—they're lying."

Jenny Lee

"Give a clear message:
'Unless I ask you for
your advice, I do not want
to hear it. I want you
to respect my choice and
my boundaries.'"

Jane Greer

HOW TO KEEP SEX HOT AFTER THE

HONEYMOON Britney and Kevin made a romantic escape for a rare two weeks off—her first since she was 16 years old—on Fiji's Turtle Island. Intimacy is easy when it's the two of you on a tropical island. The struggle comes when couples return to the real world filled with work, bills, running the house, and, eventually, kids. A little lingerie outfit and a CD of Phil Collins' greatest hits did the trick for Kevin and Britney on the eve of their wedding, but how can a couple keep the passion alive every day?

"Paying attention to someone is unbelievably seductive. Britney is letting Kevin know he is the man she wants to be with. That's a huge thing that a lot of women tend to overlook."

Lou Paget

"When couples are relatively new, nature plays a big trick on us. We have all these hormones running through us that make us really sexual. These powerful chemicals tend to dissipate over time, so even the sexiest relationships tend to fizzle a bit. There can be a bit of a letdown. It's important to get away on a regular basis—not to Fiji or Hawaii, necessarily—even if it's just renting a room at an inn to fall back in love."

Michele Weiner-Davis, marriage therapist; author, The Sex-Starved Marriage