6 Most Common Reasons for Divorce ...

& How to Stop Them Happening to You!!

savemymarriagetoday

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Welcome to the *Save My Marriage Today!* 6-part mini-course on The 6 Most Common Reasons for Divorce ... and How to Stop Them Happening to You!!

In this course you'll learn powerful tips and tools designed to get you thinking clearly about why marriage problems *really* occur. You'll learn how *your* behavior can stop marriage problems in their tracks … without any effort by your partner! This is truly *radical* information that you *need* to know, backed up by the latest marriage research.

You already know the benefits of marriage. Empirical studies prove that married people are better off than single or couples that live together. People who marry tend to generate more *wealth*, have *better* and *more active* sex lives (that's right… more than sexually active singles and cohabitating couples!), and are *healthier* physically and emotionally. With so many material, social, economic, and emotional benefits to marriage, you can't afford to let your marriage slide.

In my mini-course, this is what you'll learn:

Part 1—Risk Factors for Divorce and Why You Should Ignore Them

- **The top six predictors of divorce**. Be aware of the statistics so that you can confront them head-on!
- **The top six predictors of a long-lasting marriage**. Are the odds in your favor?
- **The keys to a successful marriage** (hint: they're not *being in love* or *always happy*).
- **Who tends to initiate divorce**. Your partner may be contemplating divorce right now and you don't even know it!
- **Who has the real power in your relationship**. I'll tell you exactly who can turn your relationship around and how to do it!

Part 2—The Real Marriage Killer: Loss of Love and Intimacy

- **How to recognize when your relationship is in danger.** Hint: it's *not* when you're arguing all the time!
- **What to do if the love is gone.** You'll be astounded at this advice!
- **25 Relationship Killers.** Keep these from poisoning your relationship!
- **The double 'D's.** How *disillusionment* and *disappointment* can eat away at your marriage.

Part 3—Affairs: How to Spot Them and Prevent Them Before They Occur

- **When affairs are likely to occur.** The stress points in your marriage that you have to watch out for.
- **Where affairs happen.** Prevent an affair before it happens by watching these troublesome areas.
- **Will an affair destroy your marriage?** What to consider.
- **What to do if you suspect an affair.** Hint: it's not to come out straight and accuse him/her.

Part 4—Poor Communication: Getting Touchy Feely with Your Partner

- **Getting your partner to open up.** Some powerful strategies to get the communication flowing again.
- **The Dos and Don'ts of Communication.** Are bad communication patterns keeping your spouse from sharing with you?
- **The Rules of Arguing.** It's not a free-for-all!
- **The Silent Poison.** How resentment can destroy your marriage and how communication can help.

Part 5—Lack of Commitment: If You're Involved in Something (or Someone) Else, You're Not Involved with Your Spouse

- **How modern attitudes towards marriage work against commitment.** How generational attitudes towards marriage can sabotage commitment before it starts.
- **The danger of being a workaholic.**
- **How children can divide a marriage.**
- **The danger of the Internet.**

Part 6—Growing Apart: Keep It from Happening to You!

- **Incompatibility**. Spot it before incompatibility splits you up.
- **Your Partner is a Book**. Read him/her, even if you haven't shared in the past!
- **Mid-Life Crises.** The danger zone of middle age.



Part 1:

Risk Factors for Divorce and Why You Should Ignore Them

If your marriage is struggling, unhappy, or on the verge of divorce, you need to have the best information available at your fingertips. You need to know what factors could be working against your marriage *right now*, even if you see nothing wrong. Many people believe that their marriage is working fine until their spouse gives them the wake-up call.

Marriages either **grow** or **weaken**: they don't stay static. That means that a secure marriage isn't one where things are always the same. A solid marriage is one in which you never stop putting in effort to make it better and better.

This six-part course is intended as an eye-opener to show you why your marriage may have gotten to this point and what behaviors may be leading you further down the path to divorce. If you're going to restore, heal, and strengthen your marriage, you HAVE to think frankly about the reasons your marriage isn't satisfying both you and your partner. That's where this course can help.

Top Six Predictors of Divorce

Let's start out with the things that you can't change. Some marriages start off with a number of challenges arrayed against them; other marriages have factors in their favor. If any of the following situations apply to you and your partner, don't despair. These are *risk* factors—not *determining* factors. It may just mean that you need extra help (such as professional counseling) to work through the issues that you and your partner are facing.

1. You married in your teens.

Study after study shows that age at marriage is one of the most powerful and consistent predictors of marital stability. If you marry before you turn twenty, you are much likely to divorce.

2. You lived together before marriage.

Many young people today believe that living together before marrying will test their compatibility and keep them from making a mistake by marrying someone they don't know fully. Despite the widespread prevalence of this belief, the evidence just doesn't back it up. Even though over half of all first marriages are preceded by a period of living together, don't do it just because everyone else is doing it. Living together before marriage *considerably increases* your chances of eventually divorcing—unless you were already engaged beforehand and marry soon after moving in together.

3. Your parents or your partner's parents were divorced.

Children of divorced parents are more likely to divorce themselves (as well as less likely to marry in the first place). This risk can be mitigated if one of you comes from a happy, intact family. If both you and your partner come from broken homes, the divorce risk soars.

4. You have a child together before marriage.

On a positive note, couples with children have a slightly lower risk of divorce than childless couples, if their first child is born seven months or more after they marry. Having a child together before that period will increases your risk of divorce.

5. You haven't been married long.

The first two years of a marriage are critical, and half of all divorces occur by the seventh year of a marriage. The longer you've been married, the more likely you are to stay married.

6. Your annual income is under $25,000.

Money matters. Financial strains often break up marriages, as when money is tight, arguments and marital tensions increase. In fact, the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers considers financial problems to be one of the five most common reasons for divorce (along with *poor communication, lack of marital commitment, infidelity*, and *a dramatic change in priorities*.)

Top Six Predictors of a Long-Lasting Marriage

If you're facing challenges in your marriage, it may be comforting to know that you have some factors in your favor. These predictors are limited to factors that were set in place when you married and don't include aspects like good communication and conflict resolution skills.

1. You were both older when you married.

Getting married over the age of twenty-five (as opposed to your teens) will decrease your chances of divorce. This is because older individuals tend to be more mature, clearer about what they're looking for in a partner, and have more economic stability.

2. You share the same religion or belief system.

Sharing a religion is a powerful bond, because it brings you and your partner together on a spiritual level and gives your marriage a sense of a higher purpose. When you are both active in a religion, you have counseling and a strong support network available to foster you through difficult times in your marriage. Too, your shared values and life goals sustain your marriage and keep you growing together rather than apart.

3. You have some higher education.

A college degree isn't necessary to increase your chances of a long-lasting marriage, but some higher education will decrease your chances of divorce considerably with comparison to a high-school dropout.

4. Your parents are still together.

If you grew up in an intact family, your chances of divorce are less in comparison to someone who grew up with divorced parents. This is because so much of what we learn about marriage and marital behavior comes from watching our parents. If our parents developed strategies for staying together, we'll absorb those strategies in childhood and be able to use them ourselves in our adult relationships.

5. Your income is above $50,000.

Couples with medium to high incomes tend to experience less strife over money management. They have the financial security to worry less about making a living and more about making a life.

6. You have a child together.

Couples with children have a lower risk of divorce compared to childless couples. However, be warned: the most stressful time in a marriage is after the birth of the first child. That's why it's so important that the first child is born only after the marriage has developed a strong foundation.

The Keys to a Successful Marriage

According to Michael P. Johnson, professor of sociology at Penn State, there are three things that keep a person in a marriage: people *want* to stay, they feel they *ought* to stay, and/or they *have* to stay. This combination of personal, moral, and structural commitment serves to keep people in marriages.

Notice that *commitment* keeps people in marriage—not *happiness*. Dr. Ted Huston of the University of Texas Austin studied couples from courtship to marriage. His ten-year-plus study exploded many popular misconceptions about love. For example, he found that many recently wed couples did not experience newlywed bliss; in fact, couples whose marriages began with "Hollywood romance" intensity soon burned out. A couple expecting wedded bliss every day of their lives was actually more likely to divorce than a couple with a less exciting relationship, because they were more likely to consider divorce when those intense feelings subsided. Does that mean that less exciting, even lackluster relationships last? They do indeed, perhaps because they have less far to fall.

Research shows that unhappy periods in a marriage are not indicative of future unhappiness. In fact, one study showed that 86% of unhappily married couples who stayed with their marriage were happier five years later—three fifths of whom were

"quite" or "very happy."
According to the 2004 "State of Our Unions" report by the National Marriage Project, the percentage of married people 18 or older who said that their marriage was very happy has declined over the last quarter century, from about 69% in the mid 1970s to 64% for men and 60% for women today. That's less than two-thirds of the married population who considers themselves very happy in their relationship. Clearly, you don't have to be blissfully in love or very happy for your relationship to last. What do you need?

It's not love and luck. It's **commitment** and **companionship**. Commitment means that you have powerful personal, moral, and structural reasons to stay in the relationship. Companionship means that you and your partner form a unified team against whatever challenges life hands you. Team members may fight, disagree, and encounter stalemates, but they know that their happiness and satisfaction in life depends on the success of the team—not on their individual success.

When Marriage Fails ... Who and How

Contrary to popular belief, it's not men who seek divorce. It's women, by an overwhelming majority. The reasons for this are varied. Part of it is the nature of divorce laws; another part is the fact that men tend to have more problems with marriage-destroying behaviors like alcoholism, affairs, and substance abuse, that cause their wives to seek separation.

Divorce is hard on everyone. The damage divorce causes to children is usually worse than the damage caused by living in a two-parent home with marital difficulties. This is contrary to the popular belief that children are better off if their parents divorce rather than live together. Studies show that only in a minority of high-conflict situations is this true.

After a divorce, a woman's standard of living can be expected to drop while a man's standard of living may actually improve. Yet men suffer in other ways. Divorced and separated men are two and a half times more likely to commit suicide than married men. This is partially due to the fact that men, unlike women, are less likely to have a strong support network to share their feelings. Whether due to this need for companionship or not, divorced men are more likely to remarry than divorced women, and they're more likely to remarry sooner.

Who Has the Real Power in a Relationship

Regardless of whether you're a man or a woman, whether you pay the bills or stay at home, or whether you need your spouse more than your spouse needs you, there is only one person in control of any relationship. That person has the power to turn a relationship around or run it into the ground. And that person usually never realizes how much power he/she wields until it is too late.

That person is you.

You have the choice to either *react* to the situation you're in (by complaining about your marriage, allowing yourself to be swamped by negative emotions, or feeling out of

control), or **to take responsibility and choose your actions.** Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "No one can hurt you without your consent."



Even if you cannot change your partner's behavior, you *can* choose how you respond to that behavior. You can internalize the blame, the hurt, and the criticism, or you can take responsibility for your own feelings and choose to act the way you want to feel.

Think again about that last concept. **You should act the way you want to feel**. *If you want to feel more loving towards your spouse, act more loving*. If you want to feel happier in your marriage, smile more and express gratitude for the good things in your marriage. It's one of the strangest aspects of human psychology that the more you act the way you want to feel (*thankful, peaceful, loving, affectionate, etc*.) the more you will begin to feel that way.

Few people realize this. When a marriage begins to crumble, their first instinct is to act out their emotions. They feel hurt, so they lash out. They feel criticized, so they become defensive. They feel vulnerable, so they close up. These are *reactions,* not *actions.* Your feelings should NOT make you act in ways that you don't want to.

You have the power to transform your marriage, *even if your partner doesn't want to*. That's because your behavior has an enormous influence on your partner, to the point that *married people actually grow alike over time*. We can't help but pick up our partner's moods, preferences, and ways of saying certain things. If you transform yourself—your attitude, the way you communicate, how often you show love and affection—your partner will be incapable of resisting. **A happy, fulfilling relationship begins with you**. And in the next part of this mini-course, I'll show you how to start achieving it.

Part 2:

The Real Marriage Killer: Loss of Love and Intimacy

In this section of the course, we're going to discuss the *real marriage killer*. It's not conflict. It's not arguing. It's not sniping at each other all the time. *It's the loss of love and intimacy.* When you stop respecting your partner, you've set your marriage on the path to divorce. In this lesson, I'll show you exactly how it happens and how to prevent it.

It's in Your Hands

Let's take a moment to review what you learned in the last lesson. In Part I, we discussed how factors beyond your control can affect how likely you are to divorce, including whether or not you're from a broken family, your age at marriage, and whether or not you lived together before marriage. While these factors can make you statistically more or less likely to divorce, they're not determining factors. *You* personally have an enormous power to influence and control the course of your marriage. By acting the way you want to feel rather than *reacting* to your situation, you can stop the deterioration of your marriage in its tracks and set it on the path to healing and recovery.

Sound impossible? It's not, but it is extremely difficult. Most people are highly resistant to change. By now, you've built up patterns of negative behavior in your marriage (*even if you thought you were doing nothing wrong*), and it will take effort, determination, and absolute commitment to change yourself. **Changing yourself is the only way to save your marriage.** I'm not going to tell you how to manipulate or change your partner. I'm won't validate your need to blame your partner. That's because *playing the victim will not save your marriage.*

You cannot abdicate responsibility for marital conflict—even if you don't think you're the one "with the problem." That's because every marital conflict has two components: *the behavior* and the *response.* For something to cause problems in a marriage, **the response to a behavior is more important than the behavior.**

In other words, even if you think your partner's actions are causing problems in your marriage, your response to those actions are actually more important to your marriage than the actions themselves.

This can be difficult to grasp fully, so let's look at an example. Mary's husband always promises to bring home the groceries that she needs but always forgets to do so. For Mary, this is inexcusable. His broken promises erode the trust in their marriage. She is sorely tempted to *react* emotionally to the situation and lash out at her husband every time he comes home empty-handed. But she knows that this response will drive her husband away further.

Instead, she decides to *respond proactively* and develops a plan of action. The next

time her husband forgets to bring home the groceries she needs for dinner, she doesn't blame or criticize him. Instead, she sets her husband to watching the children, gets in the car, and drives to the store to get the groceries she needs. She enjoys her small outing without feeling bitter. Although they have a late dinner that night, her husband sees that she's not angry with him.

After a few more times like this, Mary realizes that the most important goal in the situation is to have what she needs to make her family dinner—no matter who gets the groceries. Her husband realizes that not having the groceries does indeed inconvenience Mary. As a result, her husband eventually asks her what they could do so that one of them doesn't have to get the groceries during the week. He confesses that he doesn't get the groceries because he is tired after work and hates having to make a detour to the store. As a result, Mary and her husband decide to plan better and spend a bit more time on their weekend shopping trip so that they don't run out of food mid-week.

Mary's *response* transformed a high-tension situation into a manageable one—even though her husband's behavior didn't change. Was Mary's response an easy one to make? No. She wanted to react emotionally, and it took an enormous amount of self-control not to give into the temptation to blame him or feel resentful. It took time and creativity to decide the best plan of action in the situation. Mary knew that it would have been so much easier just to give in to her anger and expect her husband to change, but she made the effort because she valued her marriage.

As I said before and will say many more times again, saving your marriage takes effort, dedication, and absolute commitment. It's not easy, but an easy solution is like a band-aid. It will hide the wounds but won't keep your marriage from getting injured again and again.

To measure your commitment to saving your marriage, consider this story. I often ask people how much effort they put into losing weight. One woman told me that she'd bought dozens of books, tried a hundred and one diets, and even pumped money into a professional weight-loss program. Yet this very same woman had an unfulfilling marriage with a husband who could do no right. "If you put that much money into weight loss," I told her, "why do you put less effort into saving your marriage?" She was stunned. She'd expected her husband to change to save their marriage; she didn't think that she had to do anything.

What Happens when Love Dies

When you don't put effort into your relationship, love dies. Remember that a marriage either grows or weakens. Think of your marriage like a plant: if you fertilize it, water it, and notice when it is unhealthy, it will thrive. If you leave it to grow on its own, without any attention, it will wither.

One of the most common marital complaints is that, "We're not in love anymore." There are numerous people who file for divorce with the explanation, "I don't love my spouse anymore." Where does love go and how can you get it back?

Let me address the second question first. If you're the partner who's lost those loving feelings, there's a simple and effective answer to your question. Get it back by loving your partner. I first came across this method ten years ago. Stephen R. Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,* tells us that love isn't a feeling; it's an action. If you don't feel warm and affectionate towards your partner, ask yourself a simple question: are you acting warmly and affectionately towards your partner? If not, there's your solution.

You *cannot* maintain feelings of love and affection unless you consistently act in a loving way towards your partner. This means that you listen to your partner. You compliment and verbally appreciate your partner. You think of a million and one ways to show your partner how much you respect, admire, trust, and believe in him or her. Maybe you give your partner a card on obscure holidays; maybe you surprise your partner by washing his or her car, or by initiating a back rub on a quiet weekday night. Read more about the concept of the Love Bank in my complete **Save My Marriage Today!** book.

You may not be able to change your feelings by pure force of will, but you can change your behavior. Luckily, changing your behavior is often all it takes to change your feelings. If you don't love your partner anymore, love your partner even more. It's not a contradiction. Act out the love that you want to feel.

Twenty-five Relationship Killers

If your partner is the one who doesn't love you anymore, don't go looking for blame. You cannot make your partner love you again by arguing, tears, manipulation, or threats. The only way you can recapture your partner's love for you is by being a more lovable person yourself.

Most of us think that we're easy people to love. Love is an emotion: it can be turned on or off, right? Wrong. Love is an action, and unless it is acted out it will die. As a result, you may be resisting being loved without even knowing it.

If you are uncomfortable giving and receiving loving acts, you may be a hard person to love. If you find it more comfortable to criticize than to compliment, you may be a hard person to love. If you shrink away from hugs and avoid kissing in public, you may be a hard person to love. If you show your affection towards your partner by teasing or making fun of him or her, you may be a hard person to love. If you always have to be right and don't listen to your partner, you may be a hard person to love.

Lovable people love others. They are positive people. They enjoy physical intimacy and often initiate it. They trust and believe in their partner. They're proud of their partner, and they make sure their partner knows this. Because they are open and uncritical, their partners know that they can come to them with anything.

Does this sound like you? Do you want it to sound like you?

You may be thinking, "Those types of people are easily taken for the fool." It's true. Lovable people can be taken advantage of. But the one place where no walls should exist is in a marriage. Your partner is not like other people. For intimacy to grow, both of you

must be comfortable loving one another—both giving love and receiving it.
The following relationship killers nip love in the bud. They'll make it impossible for your partner to love you and, as a result, will cause your partner's loving feelings to die. If any of them apply to you, it's up to you to change yourself. You cannot get your partner's love back until you make it easy for him or her to love you.

1. **You're disappointed in your partner.** Your partner can sense when you are disappointed in him or her, even if you try to hide it. *Respecting your partner is a must*. You cannot have a healthy marriage if you are disappointed in your partner, period.

2. **You're disillusioned with your marriage.** Disillusionment is another marriage killer. You may feel as if your marriage hasn't lived up to your expectations. If so, take responsibility for your feelings. Don't blame your partner or your marriage. If your marriage isn't what you want it to be, change it. If you're disillusioned, examine your expectations. Maybe they weren't realistic in the first place. You are responsible for your own happiness, and blaming your partner for not giving you the marriage you want is a cop-out.

3. **You don't respect your partner.** In some ways, respect for your partner is even *more* important than love for your partner. Have you ever noticed how you find it easy to like people who look up to you? When you respect and admire your partner, your partner will feel more loving feelings towards you. If your partner feels as if he or she has to live up to your expectations, constantly disappoints you, or can never get it right, you've failed to show your partner the respect that he or she deserves.

4. **You don't like or respect yourself.**
5. You don't do what you say you are going to.
6. **You let pride get in the way.**
7. You always have to be right.
8. **You don't listen to your partner.**
9. You do things because they annoy your partner.
10. **You're dishonest.**
11. You have temper tantrums and/or are unable to control your emotions.
12. **You are hurtful and put down your partner.**
13. You criticize your partner in front of others.
14. **You take pride in being difficult to live with.**
15. You're unwilling to meet your spouse's requests or compromise.
16. **You want your spouse to change who he or she is.**
17. You let others get between you and your spouse.
18. **You don't fight fair.**
19. You want to stay exactly how you are and resist growth.
20. **You can't handle stress and take it out on your spouse.**
21. You take everything your partner does or says personally.
22. **You always see the negative side of things.**
23. You refuse to admit there is a problem or seek professional help.
24. **You engage in alcohol or substance abuse.**
25. You are physically or verbally abusive to your spouse.

Part 3:

Affairs: How to Spot Them and Prevent Them Before They Occur

In this section we'll discuss the number one reason for divorce: affairs.

Affairs: Get the Facts

All of us are capable of having affairs. To be incapable of having an affair is to be incapable of feeling temptation. Feeling the temptation to have an affair isn't the same thing as having it, however. Many happily married couples admit that they are attracted to members of the opposite sex from time to time. Yet instead of repressing or nursing those feelings, they acknowledge them as the sign of a healthy sex drive and let them go.

When a person is unable to let go of that feeling of attraction towards someone not their spouse, they may risk everything—even their marriage—to give into their feelings. Sadly, affairs are the number one cause of divorce. In January 2005, the BBC published a survey of matrimonial lawyers in which affairs came out as the number one cause of divorce in the U.K., accounting for 27% of divorces in 2004. Family strains were the second highest cause at 18%, physical or emotional abuse the third highest at 17%, and mid-life crises were fourth highest at 13%.

When marriages end in divorce as a result of infidelity, men are three times more likely to be the adulterous partner. However, women cheat on their spouses as well. A 2002 survey by the National Opinion Research Center at Chicago University found that 15% of women surveyed had had an extramarital affair. This number had risen five percent from their previous survey ten years earlier, and experts expect that the number will continue to climb until women have just as many affairs as men. The number of men who'd had an affair remained steady at 22%.



If roughly one in five men and one in six women have an affair at some time in their life, could your spouse be one of them?

The numbers climb even higher if emotional affairs are included. An emotional affair can be even more threatening to a relationship than a physical affair, because the lover replaces the spouse as the primary source of emotional well-being and companionship. Peggy Vaughan, author of *The Monogamy Myth*: *A Personal Handbook for Recovering From Affairs*, estimates that the chances of a woman having either a physical or emotional affair at some time in her marriage are 50% or more.

What Triggers an Affair

The roots of affairs are difficult to pin down and are usually many, not one. Even if you are in a happy, stable marriage, you or your partner could find yourself tempted to have an affair simply for the excitement, novelty, and break from routine.

A variety of motives, both internal and social, spur people to have affairs. The most fertile ground for affairs occurs when there is a potential lover who is available and willing, when conditions make the practical side of giving into the temptation easy, and there is little to no expectation of a powerful social or moral condemnation for having the affair.



Here are some of the most common social and marital conditions that pave the way for affairs.

- **Increased social contact with members of the opposite sex, especially in the workplace.**

  Temptation is everywhere, but as men and women spend more time with each other away from their partners, giving into that temptation becomes easier and easier. When a man or a woman spends a lot of time with a member of the opposite sex—whether friend, co-worker, or teammate—they develop a platonic friendship that can become much, much more. Familiarity, emotional intimacy, and common professional or sporting goals create a powerful bond that may feel more compelling than the marital relationship. Computers and cell phones make keeping in touch with a lover simple.

  Can men and women ever "just be friends"? In 1989 movie *When Harry Met Sally,* Harry's answer was emphatically *no.* Harry tells Sally, *"*…Men and women can't be friends, because the sex part always gets in the way…. No man can be friends with a woman that he finds attractive. He always wants to have sex with her."

  If your spouse is defensive or secretive about his or her friendship with a member of the opposite sex, you need to have an open and honest talk about the limits on your relationships with members of the opposite sex. It's not okay for your husband's best friend to be another woman. It's not okay for your wife's number one confidant to be another man. In a strong marriage, both partners look first to one another to get their emotional needs met. This brings us to the next point…

- **Not meeting one another's emotional needs.**

  This is this single greatest cause of affairs. When relationships are struggling, both men and women look elsewhere to get their emotional needs met and easily find themselves in the arms of someone "who appreciates them."

  If you and your partner take each other for granted and treat one another like

housemates instead of lovers, the stage is set for one of you to have an affair. Women, feeling unappreciated by their husbands, find solace with someone who *does* listen to them. Unfortunately, an emotional affair can be just as devastating to a marriage as a physical affair. Men, feeling as if they're always being criticized and cannot please their wives if they try, enjoy the emotional reinforcement of someone who thinks that they're wonderful and can do no wrong.

Affairs often occur when one or both partners are under stress. Maybe you've just taken a new job; maybe your partner is struggling with the demands of a new child or ailing parent. If one of you cannot meet your partner's emotional needs for any length of time, your partner's chances of having an affair skyrocket.

Avoid this situation through open, honest communication. Notice when your partner is feeling down and don't rest until you've understood the source of your partner's emotions. If you feel that your partner isn't there for you when you need him or her, talk about it. Open the conversation with a description of the things that your partner does for you that you appreciate, then explain what your emotional needs are and exactly what your partner can do to meet them. Next, turn the tables and ask your partner to share the same with you. Unless you know what your partner's emotional needs are, you cannot hope to fulfill them by guesswork.

- **Commuter jobs, or where one partner is away for long periods of time.**

We all know the stories of musicians, actors, or athletes who spend long months on tour and return home to a wrecked marriage. Cheating is easy when partners spend long periods of time away from one another. Even if your partner calls you every night, you have no idea what they're doing in the time away from you. It is easy for your partner to disassociate what they do in their time on their own from what they do with you. They may feel as if they live in two separate worlds that need never meet.

If you and your spouse spend long periods of time away from one another, you need to develop a plan of action to maintain your bond and sense of intimacy even during those times when you're away. Increase your accountability to one another. Your partner should have a cell phone that you can call anytime, and you should always know where your partner is staying. The best solution in cases like these is to minimize the amount of time you're away from one another, even if it requires changing jobs or relocating.

- **Overly scheduled lives with little leisure time spent together.**

When partners don't have time to relax together, their marriage becomes all work and no play. If both of you have overly scheduled lives, crammed to the full with taking your kids to school and after-school activities, meetings, overtime, fixing up your house, and social engagements on the weekends, your marriage will suffocate from lack of attention. Just because you live together and wear a ring doesn't mean that your marriage is invulnerable. A marriage thrives when there

is space for both partners to spend quality, unstructured time together, doing nothing but enjoying one another's company.

If your partner always spends his or her leisure time with others (at the bar, with a hobby that excludes you, with members of a social or sporting club) rather than you, the stage is set for infidelity. Your partner should have the time and space to do activities that he or she personally enjoys, but at least half (preferably more) of your partner's leisure time should be spent with you.

- **Increased public acceptance of affairs.**

Public acceptance of affairs has transformed dramatically over the past few decades. There continues to be strong social and moral condemnation of infidelity, but the consequences of having an affair are not as great as in the past. Nowadays, an affair isn't shadowed by the threat of pregnancy, the brand of social stigma, or losing one's job as a result. Cheating spouses are comforted by the ease of divorce that would allow them to leave their spouse for their lover. As culture removes more and more of the consequences of infidelity, more spouses will cheat. It's as simple as that.

- **Increased importance placed culturally on having a great body and superb sex life.**

Men and women both have high expectations of marriage—that their partner will be their soul mate, that love will be effortless, that their sex life will be dynamic and exciting. When these expectations are not fulfilled, mean and women often look to someone else for fulfillment rather than examining their own expectations.

More and more women are having *Desperate Housewives*-style affairs with hunky young men, risking marriages with men who socially would be considered real catches: impressive jobs, wealthy, mature and responsible. Why would these women risk the security and comfort of their marriages for 20-somethings with great bodies but not much else?

Modern Western culture places a high premium on an exciting, fulfilling sex life. When everyone else is doing it—in the movies, on the billboards, and in the media—we think we need to be doing it, too. Yet a poll by *Self* magazine discovered that 58% of women polled were disinterested in sex, of which nearly a fifth were completely dissatisfied, preferring to watch television. Why were these women unhappy with their sex lives? Was it their partner, their attitude, or their expectations?

Although research proves that married men and women have better (e.g., more fulfilling and more frequent) sex lives than singles or couples living together, popular opinion believes the opposite. Many people believe that once you marry, sex becomes dull and boring. What better to liven it up than the allure of an illicit rendezvous?

In fact, sex can actually *improve* in a marriage as a result of affair. The cheating partner feels guilty and doesn't want the spouse to suspect anything, so he or she puts more effort into their sex life. Cheating can also increase a cheating spouse's sex drive, because when you're having more sex, you want more sex.

Unfortunately, many couples don't put the effort into their sex life until it's too late. If you and your partner are distant, kiss infrequently, and seem to have lost any sense of intimacy, one of you may seek physical comfort elsewhere. Decrease the chances of this happening by making an effort to be physically intimate with your spouse on a regular basis. Kiss and cuddle often. Touch one another randomly, whether by touching your partner's waist or arm. Invest in your appearance and don't use your marriage as an excuse to let yourself go. Keep yourself fit. Avoid wearing worn-out, ill-fitting, or unattractive clothing around the house—and especially to bed. Liven up your sex life by regularly trying new things; if you can't think of any, purchase an erotic book or visit an adult shop. The investment you put into physical intimacy will pay off by making the hours you *do* spend together—sleeping side by side—into ones to cherish.

Where Affairs Happen

You should already be able to guess the number one place for affairs to begin: the workplace. The vast majority of affairs start in the workplace, primarily because many people today spend more time at work than they do at home. When men and women work in close proximity to one another, they can find it easier to relate to one another than to their spouses back home—especially if their home environment is rife with conflict.

Affairs can happen anywhere your partner frequents without your company. This includes mixed-gender clubs or societies, out-of-town conferences, or the gym. Another growing arena for affairs is the internet. Websites advertise personals for persons seeking extramarital affairs. The internet offers the advantages of anonymity, ease of communication, and the ability to meet like-minded individuals. If your spouse spends a lot of time on the internet with the door closed, you need to have a serious talk. Don't accuse: if your partner is using the internet for research or to communicate with friends, he or she will have nothing to hide. But if your partner is indeed using the internet to conduct an affair or view pornography, he or she will become defensive and tell you that what he or she surfs the net for is none of your business. That's a red light. Keeping the computer in a public area where you or anyone else can see the screen is a wise move.

Will an Affair Destroy Your Marriage?

Many people seek marriage advice only after they've discovered that their partner has been having an affair. In many cases, the cheating spouse has already moved out and is living with their lover. An affair can destroy your marriage, but it doesn't have to.

Positive signs that your marriage can be rebuilt after an affair include:

- Your partner told you about the betrayal on his or her own.
- Your partner is willing to answer questions about the affair.

- Your partner expresses guilt or remorse.
- Your partner is willing to cut off all contact with his or her lover.
- Your partner asks for or agrees to marriage counseling.
- You are willing to let go of your resentment and look inside yourself for reasons that your partner may have sought fulfillment of his or her needs with someone else.
- Both of you are willing to make personal changes to get your marriage back on solid ground.

If your partner is unwilling to talk about the affair, refuses to cut off all contact with his or her lover, and accuses you of causing him or her to have the affair, you will have many challenges to overcome to get your marriage back together again.



What You Should Do if You Suspect an Affair

Take some advice from the experts at **How to Catch a Cheating Lover.**

"When you suspect your partner is cheating on you, you need to resist your first instinct to confront your partner and accuse them. This may seem like the most logical thing to do, but you have to resist this strong instinct and think carefully and strategically. If you expose your suspicions immediately, what sort of response do you hope to get?

If you don't have any proof, or your proof is just circumstantial, the most likely response you will get is denial. If you can't prove without a doubt that you know about their affair, there is little you will be able to do that will refute their denial.

From a strategic point of view, you will have jeopardized your chances of catching your partner in the act because you will have alerted them to your suspicion. In future they will be more careful to hide their tracks, making it harder for you to find proof. If you claim ignorance, and don't confront your partner, they will have no reason to think you suspect anything. In fact, they may become reckless and become complacent when it comes to hiding evidence of their affair.

From a strategic point of view, acting as though you are ignorant is the best tactic to use. If people don't think you are listening, it is surprising what they may say. They may unconsciously let little things slip….

The longer you are able to maintain the illusion of ignorance the more proof you will be able to gather. Remember, without concrete proof, you should never accuse your partner. Not only is there the likelihood they will deny it and make it harder for you to prove their guilt, but there is also the possibility, however unlikely, of you being wrong."

Edward T, *How to Catch a Cheating Lover*

If you want more information on how to discover whether or not your spouse has been cheating on you, visit Edward's website. .

Part 4:

Poor Communication: Getting Touchy Feely with Your Partner

This part of the course will focus on getting you closer to your partner. You'll learn how to increase the love and intimacy you may be lacking and what danger spots you need to avoid at all costs.

According to Howard Markman, Ph.D., professor of psychology and head of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver, "The quality of the couple's communication before marriage is one of the best predictors of future marital success." It's not the differences in opinions and preferences that matter; what matters is how those differences are dealt with and resolved.

This requires strong communication skills, skills that few couples develop before it's too late. Once a marriage has broken down, neither partner feels inclined to communicate or open up to the other person. Markman's solution is to teach constructive arguing techniques before a couple marries, but that doesn't help the millions of couples out there with advanced marital problems.

Are You a Good Communicator?

If, as Markman claims, 30% to 50% of couples are *mutually abusive,* or respond to verbal or emotional abuse with like abuse, then it's little wonder that so many marriages are dysfunctional. Do you have any negative communication patterns or attitudes? Check any that fit you from the box below.

- ❑ I act defensively when my spouse brings up any criticism of me or our marriage.
- ❑ I always have to be right.
- ❑ I always talk about the negative side of things; it's more realistic.
- ❑ I avoid conflict by turning off emotionally.
- ❑ I blame my spouse if it is his or her fault.
- ❑ I bring up the past in arguments.
- ❑ I criticize my spouse in front of others.
- ❑ I don't ask for what I want directly. If my spouse loved me, he or she would read my mind.
- ❑ I don't believe that I have to do everything I promise to do.
- ❑ I don't have to be respectful to my spouse. We're married, so we can treat each other as we like.
- ❑ I don't share everything with my spouse and keep my feelings to myself.
- ❑ I don't tell my spouse everything. Secrets are okay.
- ❑ I find it difficult to say, "I'm sorry."
- ❑ I find it hard to wait to speak until my spouse has finished talking.
- ❑ I let conflicts last for days or sometimes months.
- ❑ I mock or ridicule my spouse.

- ❑ I never forget anything my spouse has done to me.
- ❑ I often find myself raising my voice when I disagree with my spouse.
- ❑ I often talk over my spouse.
- ❑ I resent my spouse for comments that he or she has made in the past.
- ❑ I tease my spouse in ways that my spouse finds upsetting.
- ❑ I want to win every argument, not reach a solution.
- ❑ I'm afraid that sharing my most personal thoughts with my spouse will allow him or her to abuse them (such as by ridiculing me or by sharing them with others).
- ❑ If my spouse misinterprets what I said, I get angry.
- ❑ If something that my spouse does bothers me, we have an argument about it.
- ❑ My attention often wanders when my spouse is talking to me.
- ❑ My spouse is too sensitive to what I say.
- ❑ When I don't feel like talking about something, I end up getting angry.
- ❑ When my spouse doesn't know anything about a topic, I let him or her know it.
- ❑ When we have an argument, I often end up yelling, crying, or storming out of the house.

It is hard to create an environment of positive, loving communication when you've never experienced that kind of environment yourself. People who grew up in dysfunctional families with negative communication patterns often find themselves falling into those same behaviors themselves when they get married. Nevertheless, bad communication can destroy a marriage. If you can…

- **Replace criticism with praise,**
- Replace accusations with attempts at understanding,
- **Replace talking with listening,**
- Replace defensiveness with openness, and
- **Replace silence with sharing,**

…you'll be amazed at the difference it makes in your marriage.

Getting Your Spouse to Open Up Again

Often, both partners in a marriage want to be perceived as "tough." They don't want to give in first. They want to show their partner that they don't need him or her. As a result, the communication gap grows wider. Neither person will confess what it is that is worrying them. Mistrust fills the gaps created by silence. Soon, differences feel irreconcilable.

They aren't. If you want to get your spouse to open up and break the silence barrier, there are a few things you need to do.

Often, the reason that your spouse isn't talking is because he or she doesn't want to create conflict by confessing their feelings. We all have negative feelings about our spouse or our relationships from time to time. In many marriages, partners zip their

lip and say nothing, repressing their feelings until resentment seeps through. In other marriages, partners react angrily towards their spouse and express their feelings through criticism and verbal abuse. Neither option makes for a healthy marriage.

Even if your spouse isn't saying anything to you, chances are that he or she has a lot to say. It's just that your spouse doesn't know how to bring it up, is afraid of your reaction, or doesn't think it is worth the effort to share with you.

You can get your spouse to open up to you again by creating an environment in which he or she feels comfortable talking. Tactics *not* to try include:

- *Demanding that your spouse tell you what's wrong or why they won't talk.*
- *Accusing your partner of giving you the silent treatment.*
- *Getting angry at them for not contributing their part to the conversation.*
- *Feeling resentful that they're making life difficult for you.*

Instead, what you need to do is:

1. Practice your own listening skills. Instead of filling in the silences with chatter, allow those silences to remain. Often, one spouse compensates for another's lack of speech by talking too much. Your partner may feel that you never give him or her a chance to speak because you're always talking.

2. Cultivate an attitude of non-judgmental acceptance. This means that you unconditionally love and accept your partner, no matter what he or she says. If you often respond defensively or critically when your partner shares his or her thoughts and feelings, you are actually punishing your partner for opening up to you. If your partner tries to open up, acknowledge his or her comments to show that you are listening, but refrain from adding your own opinion until you've heard everything that he or she has to say. Sometimes, we just need to be heard, and it feels better knowing that our partner has listened to us all the way through without criticizing or condemning us.

3. Learn how to apologize and mean it. One apology, meant sincerely, goes a long way. When your partner shares a concern or problem that he or she is having with your marriage, don't resort to an angry retort. Listen carefully, without criticism or a knee-jerk self-defense. If you are too upset to think clearly, tell your partner that you appreciate hearing about his or her concern, but that you need time to think it over. If you come to the conclusion that what your partner has told you has some truth in it, apologize clearly and directly. Instead of muttering, "I'm sorry," look at your partner in the eyes and tell him or her, "I am sorry for X. I am sorry for having made you feel like you did." By telling him or her in your own words what you're sorry for—in other words, what you did or said that made your partner feel hurt—you show your partner that you really do understand.

4. Making opening up to one another a positive experience. It may sound wishy-washy or fuzzy, but verbally thanking one another for sharing thoughts and feelings is valuable positive reinforcement. A hug after a difficult conversation can make all the difference. It doesn't matter if you agree or disagree with your partner; what matters is that you show your partner that you really do care about his or her feelings and opinions.

Every time your partner shares something, no matter how little, express your gratitude. Tell your partner, "I'm glad I know that you like that/feel that way/believe that. I like knowing more about you. It makes me feel closer to you."

How to Argue

Most couples are exceedingly poor at resolving conflicts. In my complete book, **Save My Marriage Today!**, I give you a number of techniques designed to teach you healthier conflict resolution. Right now I'll just outline the most basic ground-rules for arguments. Discuss these with your spouse and agree on them together.

1. Abuse and physical violence will not be tolerated. If things get too hot, take a break or take a walk.
2. Avoid assigning blame. Instead, talk about how your partner's actions made you feel.
3. Be honest. Don't argue about one thing if something else is bothering you.
4. Don't take things personally. When someone is upset, they can say or do things that make it worse.
5. Focus on resolving the issue—not winning the argument. Think negotiation, not competition.
6. If your spouse hasn't understood your motives or misunderstood what you said, don't get angry. Explain yourself.
7. No bringing up hurtful events from the past. Stay in the present.
8. No going to sleep on an argument.
9. No name-calling.
10. Once an argument is resolved, forgive and forget.

The Silent Poison: Resentment

When hurt piles upon hurt, it is easy to feel as you and your spouse are in a competition where the more you can hurt the other person, the more points you get. This is a dangerous and deadly way to think of conflicts. As your marriage continues to crumble, you'll begin to feel more comfortable thinking about your spouse in terms of *resentment, blame*, and *disappointment* rather than in terms of *love, forgiveness,* and *teamwork*.

Every negative feeling that you have about your spouse builds and builds, even if you don't act out on those feelings. Unless you do something about those negative feelings, you will find yourself becoming more and more resentful of your spouse and his or her ability to make your life unpleasant.

There are several things you can do. I suggest consciously counteracting every negative feeling with positive acts of love, affection, and respect. You should also learn how to talk to your partner about your feelings in a neutral, non-accusatory, calm way. This is extraordinarily difficult and will take a long time to master. Negative feelings expressed in anger or as a knee-jerk reaction grow and become worse. If you can learn to express your negative feelings neutrally with the express purpose of finding some way to resolve them, you may find that they dissipate with the mere act of sharing them.

Part 5:

Lack of Commitment: If You're Involved in Something (or Someone) Else, You're Not Involved with Your Spouse

In this lesson, you'll learn how lack of commitment to a marriage can kill it. With today's hectic lifestyle, it's easy to get distracted with career, child, economic, and social commitments. But, unless you commit to your marriage first, you may find your relationship buried and forgotten under stacks of "to do" lists.

Why Do We Marry?

First of all, let's take a look at what commitments held marriage together in the past. Historically, marriage has been seen as necessary protection for child-rearing families. In other words, you got married to have kids, because getting married ensures that you'll stay together to form a healthy, stable home for the baby.

Today, Americans don't think that way. Seventy percent of Americans believe that the purpose of marriage is something other than raising kids. We're having fewer children as well. Today, only one third of American households include children under the age of 18, compared to about half of all households in the 1960s. When a couple does have children together, the presence of children does not have the same kind of deterrent effect on divorce as it did forty years ago. A 1994 study found that only 15% of the population agreed that parents of children should stay together for the sake of the children, even if the parents no longer get along.

In the past, another reason to stay married was because of economic dependence. Marriage used to provide a form of economic security. If one partner's earning ability was threatened, there was always the other partner's income to fall back on. Today, young people do not believe that a marriage provides any form of economic security. They prefer to make it on their own financially—men and women both—before considering themselves ready for marriage. As a result, financial interdependence is not a strong enough reason to hold married couples together.

Historically, religious beliefs also fortified marital vows. Yet today fewer and fewer couples share a religious view of marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman before God. In fact, according to the National Marriage Project, only 42% of young people consider it important to marry someone with the same religion. As a result, for many couples their wedding vows don't have the same force of commitment.

Currently, there is less social disapproval of divorce or extended periods of singledom than ever. Men and women are single longer and don't feel the need to marry due to the availability of alternative lifestyles, such as co-habitation. In fact, the median age of marriage for American women is 25; for men, it's 27). Many young people consider their first marriage a trial marriage anyway; they assume that it will end in divorce but marry anyway to have the experience. There's little social censure in being a divorcé, and the

number of divorced individuals in the single scene means that a recently divorced person has a fairly good chance of remarrying.

What forms the basis of a man and a woman's commitment to their marriage, then, if it is not their children, economic stability, God, or social mores?

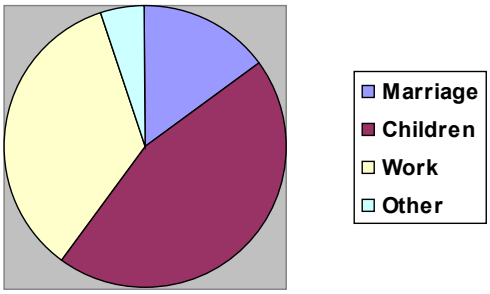
According to a 2001 study by National Marriage Project, the primary reason that young men and women want to marry is to find a soul mate: someone with whom they have a profound spiritual and emotional connection for life.

If you got married because you expected your partner to be your soul mate for life, you reflect a trend in modern society towards couple-oriented marriages, where the primary focus of the marriage is the relationship between the two people involved rather than social, religious, or financial considerations. Unfortunately, this couple-oriented focus can create huge expectations and pressures. Couples have a much lower tolerance for unhappiness than in the past. In fact, they are abandoning marriage at much lower thresholds of dissatisfaction. According to the National Marriage Project, it is estimated that over 50% of divorces now occur not because of dramatic conflicts and fights, but because of more generic, less traceable feelings of dissatisfaction, distress, and unhappiness.

Sadly, marriages that have an underlying feeling of discontentment can and often do get better over time. If couples can stick out the hard times, they find that the good times that follow are worth what came before. It's an important point that many lose sight of: happy marriages are *not* always happy. They have periods of unhappiness and conflict followed by periods of reconciliation and reconnection. The trick is to stay committed to the marriage during those unhappy times and find ways of navigating through them.

Challenges to Commitment

Modern couples have a whirlwind of duties to juggle: they may work full-time, have children to raise, and have social commitments to community service organizations, committees, or clubs. By the time you throw in commitments to family, social engagements with friends, personal hobbies, gym time, and the rest, the modern couple has very little time for one another.



Obviously, your level of commitment must be divided among a number of things, but what level of commitment should you give to each? Try drawing a pie chart with each section labeled according to the amount of time you dedicate to it. Ask your spouse to do the same. Afterwards, discuss whether the balance of commitments is healthy.

Here are some commitments that often test a couple's dedication to one another.

- **Workaholism**. This occurs when overtime, job commitments, travel, and pressure make the work relationship (*rather than the marital relationship*) the primary identity-giving relationship in a person's life, giving them their chief sense of satisfaction and purpose. If you would rather be at work than at home, or spend your leisure time with your workmates rather than your spouse, your marriage is on rocky terrain. Many workaholics can't see what they're doing. They claim that their hard work is helping keep the marriage together by providing an income. Both partners must make some difficult lifestyle changes if they are to resolve this issue.

- **Children**. As much joy and pleasure children can bring to a marriage, they also test the marital bonds by creating stressful situations. Children can pit parent against parent. Their behavior can cause a tense family environment that neither partner wants to come home to. They can demand enormous amounts of energy and leave none for anyone else.

  The child-rearing years can also be dangerous for couples because the focus of the marital unit switches from the pleasure of being a couple to raising the children. Make time for being a couple. Even if your children begrudge it at first, the happy family environment will more than make up for it.

- **Other people, usually a needy friend, parent, or family member, who requires large amounts of one partner's time**. This often occurs when parents of one or both spouses are getting older and in need of extra assistance. Spouses should *not* let anyone get between them. If your spouse resents the amount of time you spend with a needy parent or friend, you need to have a discussion and come to some sort of resolution about what amount of time would be aprpropriate.

- **Any crisis where one partner is completely responsible for the resolution of the problem, with no input or assistance from the other partner**. If a married couple distinguishes between "your" problem and "my" problem, they eliminate the crucial sense of teamwork that keeps a marriage together. If you are facing a crisis—even if it's yours alone—you must involve your spouse. A marriage isn't about going at it alone.

- **Addictions**. In this "soft" sense of addiction, an *addiction* occurs when a person spends all their time at one thing and uses it to avoid facing real-world commitments and duties. For example, your spouse may spend all of his or her spare time at the bar, on the computer, or in the garage tinkering. These activities are not a problem until they become an escape mechanism to avoid spending time with you or engaging in conversation. One common problem occurs when one spouse surfs the internet until late at night. When they go to bed, their spouse is already asleep, which increases the alienation between the two parties. Hobbies are wonderful in moderation, but they should never become your primary source of pleasure. Find activities that you can do with your spouse.

Part 6:

Growing Apart: Keep It From Happening to You

In this sixth and final part of the mini-course, you're going to learn about one of the most commonly cited reasons for divorce: "We just grew apart."

What is "Growing Apart," Anyway?

In Part 1, I told you that marriages either grow or weaken. If you put no effort into your marriage, you're not maintaining it: you're letting it deteriorate.

Similarly, all the time **you're either growing apart or growing together**. If you are not communicating, not touching, and not spending time together, then you are growing apart.

It's amazing how few people really know their spouse. Do you know who your spouse's biggest role model is? Do you know the one book or CD your partner would want to have if he or she were stranded on a deserted island? Do you know what his or her favorite color is? Do you know exactly what your spouse does at work?

Getting to know someone truly, inside and out, takes effort. Most of us prefer learning more about our own preferences, opinions, and ideas than those of our spouse. Yet a strong marriage is one where both individuals make an effort to find out what is going on inside their spouse's head. They appreciate, understand, and respect that information.

Growing together means sharing together. It *doesn't* mean thinking alike, or avoiding conflicts, or not having disagreements. It *doesn't* mean that neither of you ever changes. Growth, by definition, is change. A healthy marriage is one in which both people mature and change their ideas, perspectives, and plans. The trick is to share those changes openly and honestly with your spouse as they occur.

When you grow together, you share what you're thinking, feeling, and hoping for. You don't remain the same person that your spouse met. Instead, you find new hobbies, new passions, and new jobs that keep your life exciting and always surprising. Even when your new direction seems to lead in an opposite direction from your spouse, it is usually just old perceptions that makes it seem that way. Spouses can be resistant to changes in their partner, because they see it as a sign that their partner is dissatisfied with things as they are. Reassure your spouse. Whatever new direction you take, you need to involve your spouse fully and ensure that nothing will cut into your couple time. Changes are frightening, but when there is communication, honesty, and willingness to compromise at every step of the way, change can be an enormously positive thing.

Let's look at the example of Joan and Michael. For the first five years of their marriage, Joan stayed at home while Michael worked. She found herself gaining weight, getting bored, and listening enviously to her single girlfriends about their adventurous jobs and

experiences. At first, she blamed it on her marriage. Then, a frank friend reminded her that her marriage vows didn't include a promise to do the same thing 'til death do you part. That night, she told Michael that she wanted to go back to work and try a three-month subscription to a gym. He was horrified. He thought it meant that she wasn't happy with how he provided for the family, and that the only reason she could possibly want to go to the gym was to look good for another man. They had a huge argument, and Michael forbade Joan to go job-hunting. The stress in their marriage was at a breaking point.

It took the intervention of their pastor before Joan and Michael could sit down and discuss their feelings without getting upset. Joan told Michael that she needed to keep growing and trying more out of life, but that she wanted to do it with him, not without him. Michael confessed that he worried that Joan would meet someone new if she started working outside the home. Their pastor encouraged both of them to continue talking openly and honestly and involve each other as their life changed. As a result, Michael decided to join the gym along with Joan. Joan's new job gave both of them much more to talk about in the evenings, and their communication improved. Too, the extra income gave them more money to go out and do activities that they enjoyed. Ultimately, the change that Michael feared actually strengthened their marriage.

Michael and Joan learned some valuable lessons. (1) When one partner suggests a change, the other partner often feels indirectly criticized, thinking that the other person means that status quo is not be good enough. Reassuring your partner is essential during this tough time. (2) Sometimes it takes professional help (such as a pastor or marriage counselor) to get you talking about how you really feel. (3) Any change that can be undertaken mutually (such as both Michael *and* Joan joining the gym) is better than a change that can only be undertaken individually.

Are We Incompatible?

When both partners don't communicate or share life changes, they can wake up one day and find themselves sleeping next to a stranger. The question is whether those differences are enough to break your marriage apart or just right to add the spice to your marriage.

You didn't marry your partner to get a carbon copy of yourself. Chances are that the differences between you and your partner sparked your interest and made each one of you fascinating to the other. If he's artistic and you're analytic, or you're impulsive and he's rational, you are likely to be **complementary personality types** who bring out the best in each other.

Major incompatibilities involve more fundamental areas, like your values, goals, and vision for your marriage. If you and your partner differ significantly in your upbringing, the importance you place on family, and your need for and ability to express physical affection, you may have a more difficult time accepting and negotiating your differences. This is why cross-cultural relationships can be so challenging. If your partner is from a significantly different culture from your own, you will need to be extremely open, understanding, and flexible in how you approach resolving marital issues.

Here are some other areas where *significant* differences (note: not all differences are significant) can prove challenging:

- Differences in the importance you assign to religion, work, family, free time, children, and money.
- Differences in how you spend, save, and manage money.
- Differences in your ideas about whether you should have children and how many. If you have children already, differences in your ideas on how to raise them.
- Differences in how often you prefer sex and the kind of sex you enjoy.
- Differences in your bio-rhythms (such as whether you're a morning person or a night owl).
- Differences in your expectations about gender roles.
- Differences in the types of friends you enjoy.
- Differences in how you prefer to spend your spare time.

If you are at the point in your marriage where you think that you and your partner have become completely incompatible, it is worthwhile to invest in a marriage counselor. Counseling is much cheaper than a divorce and provides a neutral environment where both partners feel comfortable opening up and examining their true feelings.

The Importance of Reading Your Partner

After living with someone for a long period of time, we learn a lot about their moods, their facial expressions, and the subtle nuances of communication that a stranger would not be able to pick up. All of us know that nonverbal communication is much more powerful than the words we say, but in a marriage situation partners tend to play a "war of words" rather than realizing what's *really* going on.

Try the following game. At least six times during the day, look at your partner and try to guess what emotion he or she is feeling. Don't base your guess on his or her words. If possible, pick a time when neither of you are saying anything. Notice his or her lips: are they clenched, relaxed, upturned, or tight? Notice the eyes: are they narrowed, focused, sleepy, open? Notice clues in posture (stiff, slumped, relaxed) and how he or she holds his or her arms (crossed in front, loose at sides, on lap). Compile a list of your partner's emotional expressions in your mind so that eventually you'll be able to tell how your partner is feeling just by looking at him or her.

By reading your partner's mood before he or she says anything, you'll develop a more intimate bond and move closer to the marital "mind-reading" that long-term couples develop after years and years together. You'll be able to respond to your partner's moods in an appropriate way rather than expecting your partner's mood to match your own.

The ability to recognize your partner's emotions without verbal cues will help you meet your partner's emotional needs in a way that would be impossible if you just went by what your partner said. Often, your partner will say one thing but be feeling another. This is not because your partner is lying to you; it may be because your partner wants to deny his or her feelings to him- or herself. It may also because your partner hasn't

recognized that emotion in him- or herself. Don't make the mistake of believing that you know your partner better than he or she knows him- or herself, but do use your instincts wisely to be there more fully for your partner.

If you think that your partner is worried, upset, or tense, set the stage for your partner to feel comfortable sharing with you using the techniques you learned in Part 4. Tell your partner that you noticed they seemed tired or upset and ask them if they want to talk about it. If they don't, that's okay. Just remind them that you're there in case they feel like talking about anything.

If we ourselves are tired or upset, sometimes the last thing we want to do is notice that our partner is tired or upset, too. Our own emotions can make us blind to the emotions of our partner. That's why it's so important that you develop the skill of "reading" how your partner feels. Once you become accustomed to doing it, you won't be able to turn your new "eyeglasses" off. You'll read your partner's feelings whether you want to or not.

Mid-Life Crises

A mid-life crisis occurs when a person reaches middle age and suddenly rethinks the priorities and life decisions that they've made thus far. They may make a complete and drastic change in their life, swinging 180 degrees from who they were before, in an attempt to take advantage of the second half of their life before it's too late. They may feel a desperate panic to discover something they think they've missed and, as a result, give up everything they've achieved thus far—stable job, marriage, family—for an amorphous "something" that they think they can't get with the life they have now.

Many marriages end during this time. Affairs skyrocket as spouses seek reassurance that they're still physically attractive. It is a trial for any marriage, and navigating through it will require all of the communication, love, and intimacy skills you possess.

Understanding what is happening is the first goal. If your spouse can recognize that he or she may be struggling with a mid-life crisis, your spouse has taken the first step towards minimizing the damage that the crisis can cause. I recommend personal counseling at this time so that your spouse can discuss his or her priorities, regrets about the past, and how he or she envisions the future.

Being flexible and playing along with your spouse's need for novelty may help. Suggest lifestyle changes that will satisfy your spouse's need for a change in priorities without abandoning your marital lifestyle altogether. Allow your spouse to talk openly, even if what he or she says is critical of the life you have shared together. The more your spouse can share his or her thoughts and feelings, the closer he or she will feel to you as the only one who understands what he or she is going through. Although this will be a difficult time for you, it is even more difficult for your spouse, so be understanding.

There's no "magic bullet" for keeping marriages together during the mid-life crisis, but the stronger and healthier your relationship is before it hits, the more "armor" you have to protect it.

What Does It Take to Stay Together?

A strong and healthy marriage requires effort, dedication, and commitment. If you're really serious about making the investment, there's no better way to start than by getting the information you need to save your marriage. This mini-course has given you an idea of some of the places where you can start, but if you're *really* serious about saving your marriage, you need to take action. That's where the information contained in my book, **Save My Marriage Today!,** can help.




SAVE MY MARRIAGE TODAY!
Powerful Secrets to Rescue Your Marriage!
DIVORCE HERE

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Amy Waterman, Andrew Rusbatch & Unica Design Ltd

savemymarriagetoday





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A Message… From Us to You

You've read the statistics on how many new marriages end in divorce. You've watched more and more couples live together instead of marrying, because commitment will "change" their relationship. You've wondered if it was possible to have a healthy, satisfying, long-term relationship anymore. Is the concept of marriage just plain outdated, now that it's so easy to slip a ring on one minute, and throw it away the next?

We don't believe so. In this book we're going to show you why. We believe that most problems in a marriage aren't caused by lack of love or irreconcilable differences. Most marital problems are caused by ineffective interpersonal skills, such as miscommunication and poor conflict resolution, and being negligent when it comes to establishing priorities.

Your marriage is only as strong as the investment that you make in it. If you're willing to let conflicts slide … work gain priority … intimacy fade away … then you're willing to throw away your marriage.

But if you want to put your marriage at the top of your priority list, learn how to resolve conflicts rather than make yourself feel better, and cope with crises as a team, then your marriage will defy statistics! It's a choice that *you* have to make.

In this book, you're going to get two perspectives. Andrew is going to give you the low-down from a guy's point of view. Amy is going to tell you like it is from a female's point of view. Each chapter, you'll get a fresh outlook on how marital problems look to men AND to women.

Though we have different approaches to solving the things that go wrong in a marriage, we agree on one thing: the first step to solving any challenge is acknowledging that there's a problem, the second step is talking about it, but the MOST IMPORTANT STEP is acting to fix it!



In this book we give you some sample problems that married couples experience. Then, we offer you some theoretical background to understand it. Finally, we give you exercises so that you can apply what you've learned. All the good intentions in the world won't save your marriage—but changing your behaviors, the way you respond to situations, and the things you say will!

This book can change your life … but only if you decide to use it.

"Thinking is easy, action is difficult;
to act in accordance with one's thoughts is the most difficult thing in the world."
Goethe





Chapter 1. Introduction

In purchasing this book, you've taken the first step in the long journey of rebuilding your marriage. But before you begin the life-changing material ahead, take a few moments to think about what you want out of the chapters that follow. Ask yourself: Why did you purchase this book? Did any specific incidents or feelings lead you to look for material on saving a marriage? Is it your marriage that needs saving, or is it a loved one's?

If you came to this book seeking to save your own marriage, you should be congratulated. You've made an important breakthrough in recognizing that there is a conflict in your relationship that you can't resolve alone. Many people find it easy to see what's wrong with other people's relationships, but we often struggle when it comes to identifying the problems in our own. The day you realize that your marriage isn't perfect is the day you open yourself to taking action to improving it.

The first lesson in this book is that there is no such thing as a perfect marriage. Like anything good, marriage involves commitment, hard work, and perseverance through the dark stages. You must expect to put in more than a token gesture every once in a while. You must make a small effort every single day. Marriages, like people, grow and develop. Even if things are good in your marriage right now, you must continue to take time out to connect with your partner, renew intimacy, and support one another's dreams.

What Do You Hope to Achieve?

If you expect to read this book and discover that your marriage has been saved once you put it down, you are mistaken. Reading this book should be only the beginning. Although we will suggest topics for you and your partner to discuss, strategies to resolve conflicts, and exercises to bring you closer together, we can't make you act on our ideas. Only you can take the next step.

You may be reading this book because you have a specific problem in your marriage that you want to address. Perhaps your husband watches the television more than he talks to you. Perhaps your wife greets you each day with a litany of complaints about what has gone wrong while you've been at work. Perhaps you have problem with your partner taking the side of your in-laws instead of being loyal to you.





There is always more to troubled relationships than what first appears. Marriage problems are seldom a result of one issue; rather, they are more likely a result of layers upon layers of underlying conflicts and insecurities that have led to the problems that you are having now. We suggest that you read this book with an open mind and consider any aspect of your marriage that could be improved. You may find, for example, that increasing intimacy leads to less conflicts, or that adjusting your expectations leads to greater acceptance of your partner.

Before you start the book, it would be valuable to take the time to list your goals. You need to be much more specific than "saving my marriage." This book will not help you pin the blame on anyone. We believe that all marriage problems involve both individuals. Even if your partner did something that was clearly inappropriate, your reaction to your partner's mistake could neutralize it … or make it escalate into a marriage-threatening crisis.

Goal Setting

For you to get the most you can out of this book, you need to establish for a mindset of goal-setting, with a specific outcome you'd like to focus on. Without a plan, your mind may wander, you may get distracted, and you may finish reading with many thoughts but no concrete achievements.

Your goals need to focus on a future outcome rather than the negativity of the past. In this way, you'll avoid repeating bad habits. Bad habits are ones in which negative responses (such as, "You never help me!") lead to negative outcomes (your partner feeling resistant to helping next time).

This book will help you look at your situation with fresh eyes. We don't expect you to be able to forgive and forget the past immediately, as past events in your marriage shaped the feelings and insecurities that led to your current disagreements and conflicts. Nevertheless, we recommend that you set your gaze forwards instead of backwards, towards a time in your future when you both will have acknowledged how what you did hurt one another, understood why it happened, expressed regret, forgiven, and moved on.





You Are Not Alone

Remember, too, that you are not alone. You may look around at other married couples and assume that everyone else is happy in their relationship. But we'll let you in on a secret: *Every marriage has conflicts.* The only difference between a successful married couple and a divorced one is how committed they are to dealing with those conflicts. They don't close their eyes when conflicts arise. They seek ways to deal with disagreements before the marriage gets rocky. And when they're not successful in resolving the conflict themselves, they seek help. That's what commitment means.

Most couples are not that committed. The rate of divorced couples is growing every year, as couples find themselves unable to deal with the complexity of merging two active lives, the natural dips in feelings of love, and incompatibility issues. In fact, the chance of a first marriage failing in the first 40 years is currently at around 65 percent, and the rate of divorce in second marriages is even higher.

No one ever said that marriage would be easy. But every couple will reach a crossroads where they must ask whether they want to commit to consciously connecting with each other, every day for the rest of their lives—or take the easy route of permanent separation.

Divorce isn't that easy, though. Legally, emotionally, and materially, divorce takes a large toll. There will be steep lawyer fees, the division of assets, fights and arguments, and in some cases the arrangement of custody of your children. Worst of all is the sense that the marriage has failed. When you married with such loving hope, it seems sad to wonder if it truly had to end like this.

Taking into account the sobering nature of divorce statistics and the number of unhappily married couples, chances are that at some stage in your marriage you will have some significant problems. Thus, it is especially important that you develop appropriate methods for dealing with conflicts now. Deal with small issues before they become big ones. If you diligently practice the exercises in this book, you are much more likely to save your marriage from becoming a statistic.

Healthy for Life

If you are seeking reasons to save your marriage, look no further than your own health. There are also significant health benefits to staying married. People in long-term marriages tend to experience better health and live four years longer on average.





Marriage provides a boost to the immune system, a cushion against depression, and even makes you less likely to die from causes ranging from heart disease to car accidents. Married individuals also tend to have higher incomes than single individuals, as well as being more responsible in managing their money. With so much to lose, how can you afford to throw your marriage away?

Learn Valuable Life Skills

As you and your partner learn conflict resolution, better communication, active listening, and other interpersonal skills, you will find that you will deal with people in your everyday life more successfully. The source of life happiness starts at home. Thus, when you experience fewer marital conflicts, you will find yourself in a better mood wherever you may be.

Remember: if you are serious about saving your marriage, you must be willing to see your issues and problems from a fresh perspective, and you must want to work towards a solution. So many conflicts in marriages are a result of nothing more serious than miscommunication. Misunderstandings get compounded by an inability to express feelings of hurt and resentment, let those feelings go, and *move on* with life.

Sometimes, what triggers an argument bears no relation to what the fight is actually about. Because the cause of conflict isn't clear, finding a solution can seem hopeless. Yet as you learn to resolve minor disagreements the moment they appear, you will find that the small issues will no longer fester in the back of your mind. You'll be able to let go of negative feelings. Your partner, feeling a sense of solidarity with you in the project of your life together, will feel closer to you and more open. Intimacy will flourish.

Isn't that the kind of marriage you deserve?





Exercise 1—Do Yourself

We cannot underscore the importance of setting goals enough. The process of learning and developing the skills necessary to facilitate a resolution and a rebuilding of love and trust between you and your partner will be long and difficult. At times, you may despair. You will have a stronger sense of the progress you're making—and avoid getting confused by all the feelings and emotions of the process—by focusing on clear objectives that you set for yourselves in advance.

The process of goal-setting isn't as simple as saying, "This is what I'd like to happen." Your goals for your marriage must be *attainable, reasonable,* and *measurable*.

Make Them Specific

You want to get back with your partner. You want to save your marriage. Those are excellent intentions, but they are not goals. Goals must be *specific*.

Begin by sitting down in a quiet place with no distractions and write down a list of general things you'd like to accomplish in your marriage. Write down anything that pops into your head. Don't be too worried about them just yet. We will take the time to examine them as we go along.

Some suggestions are:

- Increase the level of communication with your spouse.
- Rebuild your trust.
- Feel more loved.
- Feel more appreciated.
- Spend more quality time together.
- Be listened to by your partner.
- A more fulfilling sex life.
- To feel special.

Keep this sheet of paper. Once you decide which goals are most important to begin, write down concrete actions that you can take to accomplish each goal. For example, under "Spend more quality time together," you might write…





- ✓ Reserve a half hour after work to talk with one another without distraction.
- ✓ Reserve every Friday night for a "date" night.
- ✓ Wash the dishes together.
- ✓ Cancel conservation committee responsibilities and use extra time to spend with my partner.

Make Them Attainable

If you aren't able to achieve your goals, there is little point in setting them. Start by making the goals small and easy. As you achieve those smaller goals, you will feel a rewarding sense of accomplishment and become more confident in your ability to attack new, larger goals.

Make Them Reasonable

Remember that you cannot save your marriage alone. You will have to work with your partner to achieve your goals. If you set your goals with only your own feelings in mind, you run the risk of making them *unreasonable*. A reasonable goal will respect both of your feelings, needs, and situations.

One of the most difficult steps for two people in a marriage is to step outside their personal feelings and consider their partner as a person, with empathy for the situation they are in. Yet chances are that you know your partner well enough to know what he or she is feeling. Can you set goals that are of value to both of you, and that your spouse cares about enough to work on with you?

Make Them Measurable

Once you have set your goals, it is necessary to take the time periodically to evaluate your progress. Check off those goals that you've achieved. Consider whether the techniques you are employing are helping you towards your goals … or actually hindering your progress.

Make the time at the end of each week to sit down and look over your goals and refresh them in your mind.





- Look at each goal and rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 on how well you managed your emotions. Did you get angry or upset? If so, why?

- How close are you to achieving any of your goals? Again measure on a scale from 1 to 10. Have you made progress this week or not?

- Do you have any goals you want to change or modify? It's fine if you need to modify your goals. They are fluid things that can change to meet your circumstances.

- Do you have any new goals you want to work towards?

Review this at least once a week or as often as necessary.





Chapter 2. The Life Cycle of a Marriage

When Carol and I first started dating, it was great. Everything I did made her happy, no matter how small or stupid it was. We shared everything: the same CDs, the same opinion on movies, even the same toothbrush sometimes. It was like we were the same person. So now I think that maybe I made a mistake in wanting to get married. Everything changed. She backed away, there was stuff I couldn't do, and now I feel like everything I do annoys her. She even wants to have two separate rooms now, as if our marriage bed isn't good enough for her. It's freaking me out. Does this mean that we should get a divorce?

Mike from Providence

No!!! Relationships go through cycles, and although changes can take you by surprise, you can anticipate them using the guide below.

The Relationship Life Cycle

Just as the Bible tells us that to everything there is a season, the same holds true in relationships. Just as we go through changes within ourselves as a result of maturing, advancing in our careers, or simply being at an age where different things are expected, so, too, our relationships will evolve to reflect our new selves and changed expectations. Sometimes the transition in a relationship is relatively smooth and goes virtually unnoticed; other times, the change is abrupt and met with resistance.

There are a variety of theories about the particular stages that each marriage goes through, but the consensus is clear: no marriage stays the same from start to finish. The life cycle below is one guide to some of the changes that might occur during your marriage. Not all couples will go through each stage; some may go through the stages in a different order. The stages may recur over and over again in cycles. But the guide may help you in identifying where you are in your marriage—and prevent you from making a drastic decision about your marriage's insolvability that you will later regret.



Don't be scared of accepting change. Anticipation is often the worst part of a transition. Fortunately, for most couples, a change to the next stage of a relationship signifies strengthening rather than deterioration.

Step 1 – Romance and Infatuation

You're in love. You identify with every love poem and song ever written. You want to sing out loud and dance like nobody is watching. Your love is spontaneous and consuming, the closest and the most wonderful feeling that you've ever experienced. You're in love, and you're ready to get to the chapel as soon as you can to preserve this feeling forever.

Except, of course, that you can't. A wedding ring is no magic circle that will guarantee you'll experience the high of being in love forever. And that's okay….

This type of love is usually the first step in a relationship and tends to sharply demarcated from the other stages. When you are in this intoxicating emotional state, you tend to focus more on the similarities you both have and gloss over the differences. There is a high level of passion, and the level of sexual activity is high. Romantic expression such as public displays of affection and the giving of flowers are much more frequent and spontaneous. There is a perception among the both of you that this feeling will go on forever and that you will never have any disagreements.

This stage can last anywhere from six months to two years in some cases, and is considered the most exciting stage of relationships.

Step 2 – After the Honeymoon

It's inevitable that the honeymoon period will end. Sometimes the realization dawns on you slowly; other times, an event shatters your romantic bliss and causes you to see things from a more realistic perspective. As it does, you'll open your eyes to a few things that may have gone previously unnoticed: little habits that annoy you, incompatibilities, differences in values.

The benefit of losing "honeymoon goggles" is that you come to know your partner in greater detail and accept her or him more truly for who she or he is. This will prepare you for an even deeper love later down the line, richened by the knowledge of all your partner's complexities.





At the time, however, it may be difficult to leave behind the fairytale of your initial romance. When you decide to live together, sharing a living space with your partner will teach you much about their personal habits and practical things that you hadn't thought about before. Your first serious argument can shatter your faith in your love. Other stage-changing events may be the decision to buy a house together, organize the wedding, plan a major vacation, or share assets or finances.

You may feel as if the shift away from your early marital harmony is your fault. You may wonder why you keep noticing the little things and allowing them to annoy you when you know that you do, truly, love your partner. Yet try thinking back to your childhood, to the time that you realized that your parents were human, too. Did it irrevocably harm your relationship with your parents? Chance are that it didn't. As you came to see your parents as human beings, with imperfections like everyone else, you gained a much deeper sense of why they'd made the decisions they'd made, why they treated you as they did, and the limits of your ability to change them. Similarly, your recognition that your partner is human and has imperfections like everyone else doesn't mean that you can't love them like you did before. It just means that what once came easy—innocent loving bliss—now requires work.

You won't be able to return to the way you both were, when you'd just fallen in love and thought that every detail of one another was perfect. But that's okay. As you learn to deal with your differences and develop ways to deal with conflict, you solidify and strengthen your bond together. This is part of getting to know each other, and the point at which your relationship becomes a marriage. Welcome to the real world.

Step 3 - Staking Your Territories

As you adjust to living together and learning more about each other, you will find that you have more differences of opinion than you thought—and sometimes the differences may be serious. As you feel each other out, assessing or asserting your opinions and values, there will be small disagreements as well as big ones. You will see a different side of your partner that you may have not seen before. While you both may be committed to the idea that relationships are about compromise, there will be times when neither of you can back down on a power struggle. You both may have much at stake, and there may seem to be no win-win option available.

This is the time in the relationship that you are both staking your turf and determining what is important to you. This can be a very difficult time. You may want your partner





to be the way they used to and wonder where your feelings of love went. Your conversations, which used to be relaxed and easy, may have become stilted and even hostile as you both feel an edge of defensiveness. You may even consider leaving the relationship or giving up on your marriage.

This is one of the most difficult stages in a relationship because it contrasts so sharply with the infatuation stage. This is when many relationships either come close to failing or do fail. Those marriages that pass through this stage and come out even stronger are those in which both partners have learned to develop and apply skills in negotiation, conflict resolution and compromise.

If you don't learn appropriate ways to deal with conflict, your relationship will never reach its full potential. You have to learn to develop listening skills so that you can understand your partner's point of view in addition to your own. You must learn to express your feelings, both positive and negative, in a constructive way that demonstrates respect. You must learn to be satisfied with the solutions that you come to together, rather than feeling that each compromise is a sacrifice.

In Chapter 4 I'll discuss ways of dealing with conflict and finding the underlying issues, as well as offer strategies that you can use to deal with anger and let negative emotions go.

Step 4 – Evaluation

After all this work, you may wonder if your relationship was worth all the hassle you've been going through. Surely, you think, it would be easier with someone else. Perhaps my partner and I aren't really right for one another after all. Look at all the other couples who divorce; they decided that their problems were irreconcilable, so how are we any different from them?

These sorts of questions are perfectly normal. In order to decide how important your marriage is to you, you may feel the need to spend some time thinking about how your life would be without your partner. During this period of evaluation, you may withdraw emotionally. You may feel flat and empty, almost apathetic, towards your partner. As a result, communication and sexual activity may diminish considerably.

It is at this stage in your relationship that you will be most tempted to have an affair. At first, you may simply seek out a confidante of the other sex to share your marital difficulties and seek advice. You find, though, that as your emotional bond with that



person grows, so does your sexual attraction. An affair may recreate for you all of the passion and intensity of feeling that is missing from your marriage. And that, quite frankly, is the danger. Even if you find that your relationship with your spouse improves as a result of the affair, your *marriage*—as a commitment to love and share your life with one person, and that person alone—will be over.

Some couples try a trial separation as a means of giving each other space to put the whole situation in perspective and think about what is important. Yet marriage difficulties can only be resolved together—not apart. The space and the removal of oneself from a negative situation can lead to a reluctance to return.

I did not respect her need for space

The best thing that each partner can do for the other in this situation is respect each other's need for space to put things in perspective, while at the same time reassuring one another that the commitment made during the wedding vows—*'til death do you part*—is still honored and true.

Above all, you should realize that while you both love each other, you are still both individuals with separate thoughts and feelings. Now is the time to celebrate those differences rather than make them an issue. You can be different people and still be in love.

In Chapter 7 you'll learn ways to reconnect with yourself and discover how spending time on your personal goals and pleasures can actually improve your marriage.

Step 5 – Reconnection

If your relationship survives all the doubts, challenges, and tests of the previous stages, chances are you'll find that your perspective has changed. You and your partner may now agree that you want to make something of your relationship and try to make it work despite what happened in the past. You both have accepted most of your differences and decided that your love for one another is enough to overcome them. Rather than looking at conflicts as threatening, you will realize that conflicts can be opportunities for growth and ways of learning more about your partner.

The biggest priority for both of you will be your relationship and your desire to make it work. You will have a newfound willingness to work with, rather than against, each other. Flaws will be accepted, and you'll be able to enjoy your togetherness while maintaining a sense of individuality.



This is an enlightening stage to go through, as it makes you more aware of your partner as a real person, an individual with real flaws and unique opinions. Your acceptance of those unique opinions, whether or not you agree with them, is an indication of how much you have grown as a person as well as part of a couple.

Step 6 - Commitment

This final stage is one in which you both finally seem to have it together. At this stage you are able to integrate the needs of your relationship into your own. You no longer need to think of your needs and the needs of your relationship as separate entities. You are both committed to this relationship and work as a team.

Your feelings of love may not be as exciting or engulfing as they were in the past, but, on the other hand, they will be warm and genuine because there are no false illusions or fantasies about the relationship. You will accept and cherish each other, with faults and all. You will face the world outside and adversity as a team with a united front.

What Is Ahead for You

These steps are by no means comprehensive, but they give you a good guide as to what emotions and phases are quite normal—even in the most successful marriages. As I mentioned before, anticipation can often be worse than reality … but, fortunately, if you are aware of what stage in your marriage you're going through, you are better equipped to deal with what is to come.

Just remember that negative experiences, emotions, and conflicts do not necessarily herald the end of a marriage. All marriages go through bad times. But bad times are often simply a transition to better times. If you don't put in the effort to pull your marriage through the rough areas of conflict, you'll miss out on the best bits ahead.



Exercise 2—Do Yourself

You will feel so many emotions as you and your partner journey through this process—both intense and subtle, positive and negative, clear and confused. Sometimes your feelings will make no sense. Other times you'll be completely unable to identify how you feel. That's where this exercise will help.

This exercise will improve your awareness of your feelings and emotions and enable you to identify them more clearly. Armed with a greater awareness of your own feelings, you will be better able to establish appropriate methods of dealing with them, as well as communicate them more clearly to your partner.

Keep a feelings diary for one week. Take a few minutes at the end of each day to write down a list of the key things that have happened over the course of your day. Opposite each event, write down what feelings or emotions you felt at the time. Some of the following descriptions might help you:

- Is the feeling a good or bad feeling?
- Give the feeling a name if you can.
- Is the feeling a big feeling or a small feeling?
- How did you respond or react to that feeling?
- What reaction did you get in expressing that feeling?
- What could you have done better?

If you feel yourself capable, use your feelings diary to initiate changes in how you deal with emotions. For example, if you find yourself blowing your top each time rush hour doubles your commute time, try bringing a cassette of relaxing music or a book on tape to occupy your mind in your car. If you come home each day to a messy house and feel your heart sink into your toes, don't vent to your partner; take fifteen minutes or as long as you need to go to a space that no one disturbs but you, such as your own office or room, and relax into your own space.

Exercise 3—Do Together

If you can, encourage your partner to keep a feelings diary as well. Every few days, when you are both calm and relaxed, come together in a non-threatening space to share your feelings. Practice talking about them in a non-judgmental, non-accusatory



way. Don't use the feelings diary as an excuse to blame, offer advice, or comment on the other person's feelings. This is just an opportunity to share.





Chapter 3. Life Isn't a Movie

When I was a little girl I always dreamed about what my married life would be like. Until recently everything was like I'd dreamed it would be. I met the perfect guy, our wedding was like a fairytale, and we set up this adorable first apartment. But then it turned into some dull version of reality TV, complete with all the nitpicking and petty jabs. I know it's pretty silly to expect us to act like we did when we were dating. But I sort of expected us to come across like couples do in the movies, all content, arm in arm, morning coffee together, that kind of stuff. Worse, I look at my friends and see how happy they seem to be. Was I just stupid to expect married life to be special?

Ann from Seattle

We all have romantic illusions of what married life will be like. It's so easy to watch a movie and imagine ourselves in a life just like the main characters, holding hands against a sandy sunset. But as we all know, it's dangerous to expect real life to end "happily ever after."

The success of a marriage isn't predicted by how high the flame of passion burns. Rather, a solid marriage is like a slow-burning fire: sometimes it sparks … sometimes dark coals hide the underlying heat … and without each partner adding wood to feed it, it will burn out.

Perfection is a Dangerous Illusion

No one is perfect. Not your spouse, not you. A relationship between two imperfect human beings will certainly never be 100% perfect. However, one secret of happily married couples is that they don't expect perfection. They know that they will always fight, always disagree, and often let one another down in the little things. But they are confident in the big things: commitment, trust, and respect.



Examine Your Expectations of Marriage

It's so easy to slide into married life. You have been dating for some time, perhaps have even lived together, and you may wonder why have a marriage certificate should change anything.

It does. Marriage is more than simply an extension of dating. It introduces a completely new dynamic into an established relationship. Suddenly, neither of you have to please the other person in order to win them over; you've already won the prize. All the energies you invested in your courtship can now be turned to other areas of life, such as your careers or home-buying. As both of you come to take your relationship for granted, you may find yourselves feeling more like roommates sharing a house than lovers sharing a life.

Married life *is* special. It is the chance to experience a higher level of intimacy than you've ever experienced with anyone before. It is the chance to learn to work in the most complete partnership you've ever known. But it may not look like what you imagined.

Did you and your husband discuss what each of you imagined married life would be like before you took your vows? He may have imagined a life of going to work each day, sitting at the television each night, and enjoying the warmth of a bed shared with you. You may have imagined morning coffee, weekends spent on long road trips, shopping to furnish the apartment together. Thus, your husband may be quite content in *his* vision of married life … without realizing that his vision isn't the same as yours.

Dreams Don't Have to Come True

nightly dinners

If you are feeling disappointed in your marriage without anything specific to pin it on, take the time to examine your old expectations of marriage. What did you dream that married life would be like as a child? Did you see yourself eating with your partner each night, or swinging on a porch in the evening? Chances are, the dreams you had of marriage as a child were quite fuzzy and nonspecific. Such dreams give you a good feeling, but they are only two-dimensional pictures of a marriage—which is always a complex and multidimensional thing.

Those dreams served their purpose then. They encouraged you to visualize an adult role, practice partnership skills, and seek healthy relationships. However, now that





you are married, you need to create new dreams that are based on the individual with whom you have fallen in love … and preferably shared by him as well.

Creating Marital Goals

Do you feel that your husband and yourself are on the same wavelength in terms of where your married life is going? Many marriages fail because husbands and wives lack a sense of shared purpose. They married because they were in love, but aside from those loving feelings they didn't work on creating a higher meaning for their marriage. As a result, when they fall out of love, the marriage ends.

Successful marriages involve more than just a common feeling of love for the other person. Successful marriages *go somewhere*. Each spouse understands the other spouse's dreams, understands how their personal dreams fit into their shared dreams and values common goals.

Dream constructively by creating your own marital goals. What can you imagine your spouse and yourself doing in five years' time? Ten? Be specific. Imagine more than simple things like making a home together or helping one another through the aging process. Do you imagine yourselves traveling? Having a child? Moving to the countryside? Starting your own business? Becoming more physically active?

Be Realistic

Now ask yourself whether those dreams are realistic. Does your spouse share similar goals? Do you travel well/work well together? Do you have any financial or other kinds of limitations that would prevent you from reaching those goals?

Dreams that cannot possibly come true are *not* a sound foundation for visualizing a marriage. For example, if either your or your spouse is unable to have children, it will only make you unhappy to imagine biological children as a necessary ingredient for the perfect marriage. A more realistic dream would be to raise a child, as you could then look for other options such as adoption or foster care.





Share with Your Spouse

Now, share your ideas with your spouse and ask him what his dreams for your marriage are.

When your dreams are:

1. mutual,
2. involve participation from the both of you, and
3. can be acted upon,

they are much more satisfying … and you'll be able to do more than just wonder why your marriage isn't like that fuzzy, golden-tinged ideal in your head.

Now Act

Thinking about your marriage is the first step; talking about it is the second. Now, you are ready for the third and most exciting step: acting on what you've learned. Making plans and sharing dreams won't create a sense of marital purpose unless you *do* something about them.

When you and your spouse work together towards a shared goal—even something small like eating a healthful meal three times a week, or working through the exercises in this book—you create a sense of *marital unity*. You act in concert with one another and feel a common sense of accomplishment. You can learn more about your partner by working together in this way than you could have in a weekend of conversation … and you'll learn valuable partnership skills.

As a result, you'll stop gauging your marriage against an ideal in your head and start gauging it against the goals that you both set together.

Resisting Unhealthy Expectations

You'll always compare your marriage to the married couples that you see around you. Yet it's important to remember that when you see someone else's marriage, you are only seeing the surface. The couple that you thought was so happily married, that seemed so much in love, may be divorced by the end of the week.





Don't jump to quick conclusions and judge your marriage too harshly. Learn to identify unhealthy expectations through asking yourself if they fall into one of the following categories:

1. You can't clearly identify what you expect to yourself.
2. You want your partner to change into who you'd like him to be rather than accepting him as he is. (This does not include specific *behaviors* that you'd like him to change.)
3. You want your marriage or your partner to be like someone else's.
4. You want an instant transformation.
5. You know that your expectation is impossible.
6. Your expectation includes the word "always" or "never," as in*: "We will never get angry at one another," "I will always be happy,"* or, *"He will always take the garbage out."*

Maintaining Healthy Standards

The following expectations are normal and necessary in a marriage.

1. That your spouse will respect you.
2. That your spouse will not betray your trust.
3. That your spouse will enjoy seeing you happy.
4. That your spouse will not intentionally hurt you physically, psychologically, or emotionally.
5. That your spouse will be committed to your relationship and its health.

Dreaming of the Marriage You Have

Even if your marriage is not ideal—and whose is?—chances are that there are many things that are wonderful about it. Now, your job is to change your ideal to match your circumstances. Think about how your marriage is already great … and how it can be better. Focus on small, specific, achievable steps, like reserving one night a week to go on a "date" with your spouse, or avoiding any negative comments towards one another in the first half-hour after coming home from work.

In time, you may find that you *did* have the perfect marriage after all … it was just hidden under unhealthy expectations.





Exercise 4—Do Yourself

Complete the following sentences with as many words and phrases as come to your head:

- "When I was younger, I thought marriage would be like…."
- "I always thought that married people would do lots of _____ together"
- "When I look at other married couples I see…."

Exercise 5—Do Yourself

Think of the most "perfect" married couple you know. What do you like and/or admire most about them?

Think of the least "perfect" married couple you know. What do you like and/or admire least about them?





Exercise 6—Do Together

Answer the following question by ranking the characteristics in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 10 being the least:

What is the most important aspect to making a happy marriage?

His Ranking	*Quality*	*Her Ranking*
_____	Communication	_____
_____	Compatibility	_____
_____	Frequent sex	_____
_____	Fun activities done together	_____
_____	Identical personalities	_____
_____	Lots of time spent together	_____
_____	Romance	_____
_____	Same values	_____
_____	Shared decision-making	_____
_____	Shared responsibilities for maintaining the home	_____
_____	Tolerance	_____
_____	Being seen by others as an ideal couple	_____

Exercise 7—Do Together

Make a list of the activities or small moments that each of you enjoy now that you are married. Make sure to be specific. For example:

…unlocking the door and hearing your spouse rattle about the kitchen
…when your partner makes you a cup of coffee or hands you a cold drink without your asking
…the feeling of your partner's warm body next to you as you sit together
…the sounds your partner makes when he/she is content.



SAVE MY MARRIAGE TODAY!

End of "Preview" Chapter...

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