



HOW TO RESOLVE **CONFLICT** IN YOUR MARRIAGE

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***“Why does a woman work ten years to change a man’s habits
and then complain that he’s not the man she married?”***

- Barbara Streisand

Has the romance and passion gone out of your marriage and given way to “companionship”? Are you afraid that both of you might find other people more attractive? Chances are you’re reading this because you know the answer.

The purpose of this book is to share with you what accomplished marriage counselors have to say about defusing the conflicts in your marriage. After all, you vowed to love each other for a lifetime, through all of the ups and the downs, right?

THE REALITY OF MARRIAGE

According to marriage counselors, the major reason for the failure of marriage is the blind idealism that shrouds the reality of marriage. People are conditioned to believe that marriage is the solution to all their problems; that marriage involves sitting on a beach in the moonlight, holding hands at the movies, and seeing their beloved as the most beautiful and immaculate being in the world.

But when couples marry, other important concerns such as bills, mortgage, and dirty diapers enter the picture and suddenly romance flies out of the window.

In fact, those little idiosyncrasies that you found so appealing about your spouse have turned into irritants. What’s more, your partner may expect you to look after the kids, keep the house neat, cook sumptuous meals, be great in bed and even make some money. You may think you can’t do all that at once, and you’re right.

You expect your spouse to lend a helping hand in the kitchen, and at least once in a while, volunteer to look after the children. Naturally, according to you, your spouse should automatically remember your birthday and your

wedding anniversary, refrain from leaving dirty clothes around, and take you out dancing after work – but most often it doesn't work out this way, does it?!

The real question is: ***Do we expect too much from marriage?***

“The bonds of matrimony are like any other bonds – they mature slowly.”

- Peter De Vries

THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIP

Marriage requires constant effort. A good marriage is built on the unshakeable foundation of compromise, compassion, and loyalty. It demands that you're true to the vows you took together.

Friendship is important. If you're friends when you get married, you can remain friends. ***Good friends support each other and help each other grow*** spiritually and creatively. Growth requires both gentleness and firmness, even harshness at times, but the ultimate motive must be to help each other grow.

“If there is such a thing as a good marriage, it is because it resembles friendship rather than love.”

- Michel de Montaigne

SOME TIPS TO KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE FRESH

Ask yourself whether you really know each other. Or have you confused sexual compatibility with “happily ever after”?

Try these positive actions to get to know each other better and still keep your marriage fresh:

- ▶ If the zing has gone out of your sex life, reignite it. Do something new together in bed.
- ▶ Pay attention to your appearance. Refrain from showing your partner a sloppy version of yourself, dressed in a worn-out outfit, unshowered, with your hair unkempt. No matter how familiar you are with each other, you can still be the sex symbol you used to be before you got married.
- ▶ Go on a vacation together, just the two of you. Travel to a romantic getaway and ***allow the sunrise to breathe more warmth into your relationship.*** Run barefoot on the beach. Indulge each other with a sensual aromatherapy massage.
- ▶ Open up and talk to each other about your challenges without losing your temper. Talking about these issues is extremely important, but try doing it in a peaceful, beautiful setting when you're both relaxed.
- ▶ Do the things you used to enjoy doing together in the beginning of your relationship. ***Remember the personality traits that initially attracted you to your spouse.*** It might be that these qualities are still attractive, but it's you who has changed.

“In every marriage more than a week old, there are grounds for divorce. The trick is to find, and continue to find, grounds for marriage.”

- Robert Anderson

STRATEGIES THAT DON'T WORK

Marriage Counselor Homer McDonald, who has been practicing privately for over 42 years, outlines 10 habitual strategies that misfire in his book, *Stop Your Divorce!*

Try to avoid these actions:

1. **Reassuring your spouse by saying that you're going to change.** You've probably said this before and your partner may be tired of hearing it. *Instead, let them see you accomplish the changes you've said you're going to make.*
2. **Repeating over and over again that you love and need them.** Acting needy and pressuring your partner may make them run faster.
3. **Only praying and hoping that a divorce won't happen.** It's good to hope and pray, but you must *do* something about it too – *take action to find solutions that work for both of you* to better your current situation with your relationship.
4. **Arguing or reasoning.** Trying to use logic with your partner to cause them to feel different feelings or do things differently generally doesn't work.
5. **Getting others to side with you.** This is sure to put your partner on the defensive and show them your desperation. At such a critical time, *acting desperate only makes it worse.*
6. **Acting depressed.** This may work temporarily by making your spouse feel guilty, but in the long-term it will only increase their desire to get away from you.

7. **Getting your kids to side with you.** This is an absolute no-no. Your children want to love both of you and they deserve love from both of you.
8. **Blaming your spouse and lecturing them about their lack of morals.** If your spouse hasn't realized their mistakes and personal challenges by now, they're not going to do so just because you're pointing them out.
9. **Being pessimistic.** For instance, you may say things like: "It's no use. My spouse always acts this way." Thoughts can manifest as reality. ***Instead, create a happy world for yourself and your spouse with optimistic thoughts.*** Believe that your spouse can change, but first change yourself.
10. **Exaggerating.** You may tend to exaggerate your spouse's negative points. This isn't fair to them, and they'll surely resent it.

"People are not always very tolerant of the tears which they have themselves provoked."

- Proust

8 WAYS TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

Now that you know what doesn't work, here are strategies that do work from *The Romance Factor*, written by accomplished marriage counselor Dr. Alan Loy McGinnis.

Work these strategies into your everyday patterns of thought and behavior to resolve conflicts with your spouse:

1. **Stay cool and avoid panic when your mate temporarily loses their head.** They may seem to have contradictory views and emotions. Don't we all? Some degree of tolerance is crucial for a marriage to be successful. The apostle Paul said, ***“Love is patient.”***
2. **Recognize that anger is a normal emotion.** Repressed anger can lead to extramarital affairs, diminished sex drive and many other inexplicable and unpleasant outcomes. ***Seek methods to diffuse your anger in positive ways***, like exercising or meditating.
3. **Assume the best of your partner.** Give your spouse the benefit of the doubt unless you can concretely prove guilt. Avoid letting suspicions about malicious motives spoil your relationship.
4. **Check to see whether your mate is hurt about something if they snarl at you.** It may not be because of ill will towards you. They may be reacting negatively because they're afraid of getting hurt. It's easy to confuse hurt feelings with anger. ***“Look for the injured paw before snarling back,”*** suggests McGinnis.
5. **Remember that you're not always responsible for their unhappiness.** If your partner seems unhappy, don't jump to conclusions about trouble in your marriage. Find out what's making them unhappy. It may not be you. ***Seek solutions together.***
6. **Be willing to compromise.** Drop the habit of defending your turf regardless of the situation. As Oren Arnold says, ***“In the all-important world of family relations, there are other words almost as powerful as the famous “I love you.” They are “Maybe you're right.”***

7. **Don't have a baby just to solve your marital challenges.** Many people mistakenly believe that the arrival of children solves everything, but research shows that the added stress can exacerbate existing challenges.

8. **Don't mention divorce unless you intend to go through with it.** All too often couples use the term “divorce” as a threat, whereas most of the time they’re trying to convey their seriousness. ***So, just be simple and explain why it's important to you to resolve the conflict.*** Otherwise, you might find your mate takes it to heart and stops trying.

“Never to be angry, never to disagree at all seems to most of us a sign not of love, but indifference.”

- Allan Fromme

MARRIAGE COUNSELING

You could try marriage counseling if you’re having great difficulty solving your challenges by yourselves. Most marriage counselors say that ailing relationships have some factors in common. These are:

- ▶ Money issues
- ▶ Sex
- ▶ Time management
- ▶ Child rearing practices
- ▶ The strain that may come from extended family

The trick is to know exactly where the root of your situation lies. It could even be a combination of these.

However, if drug and alcohol abuse or physical and emotional violence are involved, your marriage definitely needs help. Until these grave issues are resolved, you should find a place to go where you and your children can be safe, away from your spouse.

“Where there’s marriage without love, there will be love without marriage.”

- Benjamin Franklin

WHEN COUNSELING COULD MAKE IT WORSE

Note that if your relationship is in serious trouble, marriage counseling might bring up issues that make the current situation worse. Couples' counseling is based on the presumption that both partners are capable of dealing with their feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and shame without blaming each other for causing them.

The result is that couples sometimes go home arguing over thorny issues that have been brought up during counseling sessions.

However, if you are both willing to work on your relationship and to approach situations with an open mind, marriage counseling may be very beneficial and help you find the solutions you seek.

HOW TO CHOOSE A MARRIAGE COUNSELOR

Much depends on the quality of your marriage counselor. Do your research before you hire one. The best way to find a good counselor is through the recommendation of friends who have been satisfied with the service they received.

When you find one, interview them beforehand to see if you share beliefs that are important to you and your spouse and if their counseling philosophies coincide with what you're looking for.

For example, if you're a strong Christian, you'll most likely be more satisfied with a counselor who advocates solutions based on your Christian faith.

A survey that attempted to gauge the effectiveness of marriage counseling published its findings in the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*:

- 94.3% of couples said they would return to the same counselor.
- 93% said the counseling helped them deal more effectively with problems.
- 96.9% said they would recommend their counselor to friends.
- 97.1% found the sort of help they wanted.
- 98.1% thought the services were good or excellent.
- 91.2% were happy with the amount of help they got.
- 73.7% thought the behavior of their children had improved
- 63.4% said their physical health had improved.
- 58.7% said the performance of their children at school had improved.
- 54.8% said they found it easier to function at work.

“Almost no one is foolish enough to imagine that he automatically deserves great success in any field of activity; yet almost everyone believes that he automatically deserves success in marriage.”

- Sydney J. Harris

If you decide to give marriage counseling a try, consider these tips:

Begin as Soon as You Can

The duration of the therapy depends on the severity of the deterioration in your relationship. Sometimes all you need to save your marriage are a few sessions (normally once a week) and sometimes you may need several months. That's why experts suggest that you waste no time in seeking out a counselor once you realize you may be in need of one.

Are Joint Sessions Advisable?

It's common to come across couples who cannot make up their minds about marriage counseling. They fear that airing their hostile views will only create more conflict.

This can, indeed, happen, but ***perseverance can still help you win.*** Take the case of Bob and Mary. Three marriage counselors in a row gave up on joint sessions because they always ended in heated arguments that the counselors could not control.

However, by the time the couple got to their fourth counselor, they were able to say things they had hesitated to tell each other before. The counselor's office seemed (at times) like a safe place to express themselves without any fear of rebuttal. The counselor was very firm about the "rules" they had to abide by, and one of these was not to interrupt each other or react aggressively.

As a result, Bob and Mary were able to eventually work out some solutions to their challenges.

And the moral of the story? Marriage counselors sometimes find it difficult to control joint sessions, unless they are skilled and experienced. But joint

sessions are undoubtedly necessary, because everything must come to the surface – the positive as well as the negative – if there is to be resolution.

Spiritual Counseling

Some of the finest counseling can come from a spiritual source, especially if the couple is dedicated to a spiritual path. Many marriages have been saved on religious grounds. What matters is to find a compatible spiritual counselor, just as it's important to find a good match in any type of marriage counselor.

***“A religion that takes no account of practical affairs
and does not help to solve them is no religion.”***

- Mahatma Gandhi

You really *can* resolve conflict in your marriage – even serious conflict – if you and your partner both are committed to positive changes. If you can't work out your differences yourselves, consider outside help. Trust your intuition. If you and your husband are both devoted to your relationship, you *will* find a way.