Warning Signs of a Troubled Marriage

From Sheri & Bob Stritof, Your Guide to Marriage. FREE Newsletter. Sign Up Now!

Red Flags in a Marriage

If you think your marriage is in trouble, it probably is. Every marriage relationship is unique, but there are common warning signs and red flags that indicate problems in the marriage.

Here are some of the more common warning signs of a troubled marriage.

- The two of you bicker a great deal.
- You are withdrawing from one another.
- You don't fight fair.
- You no longer have fun together.
- You have nothing nice to say to one another.
- You don't talk with one another about your problems.
- You don't respect one another.
- You can't agree on goals and values.
- You don't trust one another and feel suspicious.
- The level of sexual intimacy in your marriage is low.
- One of you, or both, has been unfaithful.
- Teasing has become hurtful.
- You are happier when your spouse is away from home for an afternoon, a meeting, or for a business trip.

Don't Wait to Seek Professional Help

To receive the most from marriage counseling, don't wait until your marriage is beyond repair to get professional help.

Here are the warning signs of running on empty in your marriage.

- You think you have to choose between your spouse and your kids. If you do, you are comparing two different types of love. Living a balanced life doesn't require choosing.
- Your lives are very fragmented. You spend more time running here and there and doing this and that than you spend together.
• When together you both tend to be in your own little world.
• You both find yourself easily irritated over small annoyances.
• Disagreements and misunderstandings between the two of you increase.
• Several months pass before you realize the two of you haven't had a date or planned alone time together.

What to Do When There are Problems in Your Marriage

If you have problems in your marriage that are causing conflict, anger, and a sense of betrayal, read about how you can learn to fight fairly and handle conflict in a healthy way. Forgiveness, change, rebuilding trust and seeking help topics are also covered.

Subtopics
Conflict and Anger Change Infidelity @ Spying & Other Trust Issues Forgiveness Seeking Help

How To Fight Fair in Your Marriage

From Sheri & Bob Stritof,
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The way a married couple fights can often tell psychologists more than what they fight about. If done correctly, conflict and healthy, fair fighting, can strengthen a marriage.
Difficulty: Average
Time Required: No More than 15 minutes -- at that point call a truce and set a time to discuss the issue again

Here's How:

1. Don't let little things that bother you build up until one of you explodes the issue into a large fight. That's not fighting fair in your marriage.
2. If you are angry about something and don't try to talk about it with your spouse within 48 hours, let it go. Otherwise, you are not fighting fair.
3. If your spouse doesn't want to discuss the matter, set an appointment within the next 24 hours to have your fair fight.

4. Fighting fair means you know what the issue is. Then, both of you stick to the subject.

5. Keep your fight between the two of you. Don't bring in third parties like your mother-in-law, his best friend, or your children.

6. Fighting fair means you don't hit below the belt.

7. Fighting fair means you don't bring up past history.

8. Fighting fair means no name calling. Even endearing terms and pet names can be hurtful when you are using a sarcastic tone.

9. Be careful how you use humor. Laughter is good, but teasing can be misinterpreted and can be hurtful.

10. Listen to one another fully while you fight. This includes watching body language. Look at one another while you speak.

11. Don't interrupt during your fight.

12. Fighting fair means you don't blame one another make accusations.

13. Try to use 'I' sentences instead of 'you' sentences.

14. If the two of you are not extremely angry, try to hold hands while talking during your fight.

15. Be open to asking for forgiveness and being willing to forgive.

Tips:

1. Even though it may be hard to forgive your spouse, not forgiving can cause more harm both emotionally and physically to yourself and to your marriage. Holding a grudge is letting someone else live in your head rent free.

2. Remember to not fight to win, but to fight for your relationship.

3. Conflict is not the problem. All married couples have disagreements. It's not knowing how to effectively argue that creates difficulty in a marriage.

4. Don't use the words "never" and "always" in your statements to one another.

5. Do not yell. Do not scream. Do not talk in a threatening tone.

What You Need:

- Conflict management skills
- A sense of fairness
- Putting your marriage first
- Willingness to forgive
- Ability to listen

Do You Know What You are Fighting About?

Every marriage relationship will have disagreements. The key to not allowing these fights to create hostility in your marriage or to hurt your marriage is to know what you are
fighting about, to understand why you are fighting, to know how to fight fair, and to forgive one another.

If you and your spouse have fallen into a pattern of fighting over the same issues over and over again, you need to ask yourselves three questions:

1. Why do you fight?
2. Do you even know what you are fighting about?
3. Is this an issue we will never resolve?

What Married Couples Fight About

- Chores
- Money
- Kids
- Sex including pornography
- Infidelity
- Communication
- Time including time spent on the computer
- Jobs
- Recreation
- Neatness
- Annoying habits
- Jealousy
- Past history
- Substance abuse
- Pointless or silly issues
- Inlaws

Why Married Couples Fight

- To win
- To vent
- For control
- To release stress
- To get closer to spouse
- To clear the air
- To resolve issues

Negative Behaviors Resulting From Unfair Fights in a Marriage

- Withdrawal
- Silent treatment
- Avoidance
- Distance
- Meanness
• Demanding
• Pouting
• Breaking promises

Negative Feelings Resulting From Fights in a Marriage

• Ignored
• Unloved
• Hurt
• Anger
• Hopeless
• Insulted
• Worried
• Abused
• Useless
• Unwanted
• Unimportant
• Put down

What You Can Do

• Take responsibility for what you do or don't do.
• Fight fair.
• Listen to one another.
• Don't try to be a mind reader.
• Clarify what you think your spouse is saying.
• If you need to cool down, take a time out.
• Be open to compromise.
• Know when to agree to disagree.
• Don't fight to win. Fight for your marriage.
• Forgive one another.

Top 10 Conflict Resolution and Communication Skills

From Your Guide, Elizabeth Scott

Conventional wisdom (and research) says that good communication can improve relationships, increasing intimacy, trust and support. The converse is also true: poor communication can weaken bonds, creating mistrust and even contempt! Here are some
examples of negative and even destructive attitudes and communication patterns that can exacerbate conflict in a relationship. How many of these sound like something you’d do?

1) Avoiding Conflict Altogether:

Rather than discussing building frustrations in a calm, respectful manner, some people just don’t say anything to their partner until they’re ready to explode, and then blurt it out in an angry, hurtful way. This seems to be the less stressful route—avoiding an argument altogether—but usually causes more stress to both parties, as tensions rise, resentments fester, and a much bigger argument eventually results.

2) Being Defensive:

Rather than addressing a partner’s complaints with an objective eye and willingness to understand the other person’s point of view, defensive people steadfastly deny any wrongdoing and work hard to avoid looking at the possibility that they could be contributing to a problem. Denying responsibility may seem to alleviate stress in the short run, but creates long-term problems when partners don’t feel listened to and unresolved conflicts and continue to grow.

3) Overgeneralizing:

When something happens that they don’t like, some blow it out of proportion by making sweeping generalizations. Avoid starting sentences with, “You always…” and “You never…”, as in, “You always come home late!” or “You never do what I want to do!” Stop and think about whether or not this is really true. Also, don’t bring up past conflicts to throw the discussion off-topic and stir up more negativity. This keeps you from solving things and perpetuates conflict.

4) Being Right:

It’s damaging to decide that there’s a ‘right’ way to look at things and a ‘wrong’ way to look at things, and that your way of seeing things is right. Don’t demand that your partner see things the same way, and don’t take it as a personal attack if they have a different opinion. Look for a compromise or agreeing to disagree, and remember that there’s not always a ‘right’ or a ‘wrong’, and that two points of view can both be valid.

5) "Psychoanalyzing" / Mind-Reading:

Instead of asking about their partner’s thoughts and feelings, people sometimes decide that they ‘know’ what their partners are thinking and feeling based only on faulty interpretations of their actions—and always assume it’s negative! (For example, deciding a late mate doesn’t care enough to be on time, or that a tired partner is denying sex out of passive-aggressiveness.) This creates hostility and misunderstandings.

6) Forgetting to Listen:
Some people interrupt, roll their eyes, and rehearse what they’re going to say next instead of truly listening and attempting to understand their partner. This keeps you from seeing their point of view, and keeps your partner from wanting to see yours! Don’t underestimate the importance of really listening and empathizing with the other person!

7) Playing the Blame Game:

Some people handle conflict by criticizing and blaming the other person for the situation. They see admitting any weakness on their own part as a weakening of their credibility, and avoid it at all costs, and even try to shame them for being ‘at fault’. Instead, try to view conflict as an opportunity to analyze the situation objectively, assess the needs of both parties and come up with a solution that helps you both.

8) Trying to ‘Win’ The Argument:

I love it when Dr. Phil says that if people are focused on ‘winning’ the argument, “the relationship loses”! The point of a relationship discussion should be mutual understanding and coming to an agreement or resolution that respects everyone’s needs. If you’re making a case for how wrong the other person is, discounting their feelings, and staying stuck in your point of view, your focused in the wrong direction!

9) Making Character Attacks:

Sometimes people take any negative action from a partner and blow it up into a personality flaw. (For example, if a husband leaves his socks lying around, looking it as a character flaw and label him ‘inconsiderate and lazy’, or, if a woman wants to discuss a problem with the relationship, labeling her ‘needy’, ‘controlling’ or ‘too demanding’.) This creates negative perceptions on both sides. Remember to respect the person, even if you don’t like the behavior.

10) Stonewalling:

When one partner wants to discuss troubling issues in the relationship, sometimes people defensively stonewall, or refuse to talk or listen to their partner. This shows disrespect and, in certain situations, even contempt, while at the same time letting the underlying conflict grow. Stonewalling solves nothing, but creates hard feelings and damages relationships. It’s much better to listen and discuss things in a respectful manner.