



**Most Common
Reasons for Divorce ...
& How to Stop Them Happening to You!!**



Most Common Reasons for Divorce ...

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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.

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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.

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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 increase 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.

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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

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“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

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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 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

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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?

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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

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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.

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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.

Monogamy Myth: A Personal

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.



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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

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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

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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, men 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?

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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.

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- 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 Spouse** (www.catchspousecheating.com).

"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."

Sarah Paul, *How to Catch a Cheating Spouse*

If you want more information on how to discover whether or not your spouse has been cheating on you, visit Sarah Paul's website at www.catchspousecheating.com.

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.

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- ☐ 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

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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.

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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

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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?

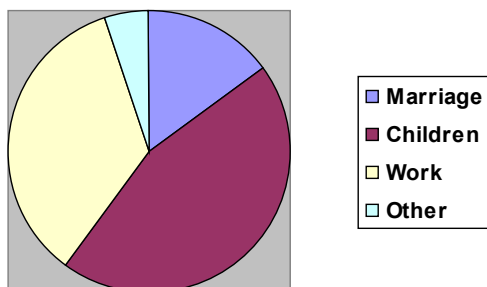
According to a 2001 study by National Marriage Project, the primary reason that young men and women want to marry is to find a soul mate: someone with whom they have a profound spiritual and emotional connection for life.

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.

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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 appropriate.
- **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

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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.

6 Most Common Reasons for Divorce ...

& How to Stop Them Happening to You!!

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 be because your partner hasn't

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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.