

A Satisfying Marriage, Your Choice?¹

By Timothy D. Evans, Ph.D., Guest Writer

Marriage is the most difficult and demanding of all the life tasks. Marriage asks more of its partners than does any other relationship. It's the most demanding and yet we are prepared less for cooperating with another human being and what could go wrong than any other relationship.

When we recognize something is wrong in the marriage, too much time goes into diagnosing the symptoms, which makes matters worse. To compound the problem, we mistakenly believe that we are not responsible for the way we feel. It is always someone else, events outside ourselves, something chemically wrong with the brain, or my partner needs to change the way he or she behaves towards me. This is known as external control psychology and the number one reason for divorce.

Contemplating divorce is one of life's most challenging experiences. Spiritually and emotionally both partners are drained. Their families, children, and friends experience helplessness and agonize with them. To ease the blow, often the couple will seek a trial separation. One of the partners may move back in with a parent or takes a small apartment. Separation is preparation for divorce and this is not what helps a couple resolve their differences.

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When there is severe alcohol or drug abuse, divorce may be the only solution. Under these circumstances, divorce is an honorable way out of a miserable situation. No therapist suggests that a couple tolerate a miserable or abusive situation.

However, most marriage therapists admit to a bias. They believe in marriage. They believe it is a lifelong commitment. If the marriage is built on a solid relationship than it can often be recaptured and nourished through therapy. A competent marriage therapist will make it difficult for the couple to get a divorce. This is particularly beneficial if the couple do decide to end the marriage. They will know they did everything possible to work out their differences, and improve the situation.

Couples should be aware the anguish of divorce lingers for a long time and liberation is not instant. A couple that could not cooperate in marriage now has to cooperate in divorce. To be happily divorced they must stop all external psychology. Failure to do so means they move from an unhappy marriage to a miserable divorce. If they can learn not to control each other, they can actually have a reasonable divorce.

When therapy, for a marriage becomes the intervention, feelings of worth can be restored. While therapy does not guarantee resolution, it is the first step towards being healthy.

The initial step in therapy should focus on getting the couple to stop fighting. This means stop all external control. To do this, you must learn how not to use the Seven Deadly Habits of external control psychology. These are stereotypical habits almost all of us choose to use over and over again without considering the misery they create on

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others. These are, **criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing,** and **bribing or rewarding for control.**

If you want to immediately improve your marriage, make a choice not to use these habits for four consecutive days. If you have been practicing any of the Seven Deadly Habits and especially **criticism**, stop it for four days. This includes contemptuous facial expressions, bringing up the past, or reminding, no matter how “nicely” presented. This is not to be done to change your partner’s behavior. You are changing your behavior because it is the decent and reasonable thing to do.

If you would stop all grousing, you will not only feel better about yourself, but you will reduce the tension between you and your spouse. This is a choice that will develop a friendly and supportive atmosphere. It is the first step to rebuilding your marriage, just as the first step to dieting requires you to eat less and exercise more.

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