

In or Out? What to do about a troubled relationship

“For better or for worse, in sickness and in health.” These words are echoed in wedding ceremonies by thousands of happy couples each year as they tie the knot. These words imply that there may be hard times during a marriage. So why do we often expect marriage to be a fairy tale? The truth is, most marriages experience ups and downs. In one survey, thousands of people were asked if they ever seriously thought their marriage was in trouble. Over 34% said “yes.” Fortunately, 92% of these respondents also said that they were glad they stayed with their partner.

There are various issues in life that have the potential to cause problems in romantic relationships, such as life transitions (births, deaths, marriages), drugs, alcohol, gambling, or pornography addictions, retirement, unplanned pregnancy, infertility, or family problems. Many problems couples experience are minor and can be resolved quickly. However, when one or both partners consider the issue to be serious, or if it is a longstanding problem, it may be necessary to seek help.

What are the signs of being in a troubled relationship? There are two extremes. The first extreme is when both partners are in withdrawal—a habitual avoidance of conflict. In this type of relationship, couples have serious problems that are not discussed. In fact, little fighting occurs because partners avoid one another as much as possible. In addition, there is little physical or emotional intimacy. The marriage is like a “cold fish.” The second extreme is when couples stay in constant conflict with one another. In this situation, issues quickly become escalated. Small issues, such as taking out the garbage, can become the source of an argument that results in partners lashing out at one another and possibly threatening to leave or get a divorce.

If you or someone you know is in a troubled relationship, remember that troubled relationships can survive and improve. While some consider divorce, most people who stay together are glad they did. Researchers have found of those partners who were once very unhappy in their marriage, 2/3 of them reported that they were very happy five years later. Thus, the key to overcoming a troubled relationship is commitment.

How do you improve your commitment? You must develop and maintain a long-term view. Remember your marriage vows? In those vows, there is a commitment to stay together until death. Assuming that you are not at risk of any imminent danger with your partner, remember and honor that commitment. Renew your dedication to your partner. Find ways to serve and honor your spouse. Look for the good in what your partner says and does, and then comment on these positive attributes. Read a relationship education book, take a marriage course or go to a weekend intensive retreat with your partner.

If your partner does not want to improve the relationship, remember that it only takes one to make a difference. Changing the way you act can influence the way your partner

acts. You cannot change your partner, you can only work to change and improve yourself.

For information regarding upcoming marriage events, please visit www.marriagemississippi.com

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