

HE DIDN'T SPEAK TO HIS WIFE FOR TWELVE YEARS

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What happens when the bliss is gone? Do we settle into happy and contented partnerships sprinkled with passionate moments and shared experiences? Or, like the man above, does the relationship tumble down a dead end road of distance and disappointment? Divorce and marital satisfaction statistics conclude it is about fifty/fifty. There are many reasons for this such as unrealistic expectations, poor mate selection, stresses become insurmountable, as well as couples who are well suited to each other and effective face and resolve problems as they occur. This month we discuss some common habits couples develop that lead to relationship unhappiness and what to do to get back that loving feeling.

Relationship Killers:

1. Keeping a Scorecard - "You spent the rent money!" "Yay well at least I didn't flirt with Jimmy's teacher." "At least I went to the school and not the bar" "The bar is the only place I get a decent meal" It goes on and on and on. Familiar? We have all fallen into this circular death trap of blame occasionally.

This is destructive because it deflects and confuses the real issue and causes a build up of guilt, bitterness and ways of manipulating each other to feel like the bad guy. Both people spend all their energy proving the other wrong and none solving the problem. Nothing gets solved and both feel angry and mistreated.

How to change this pattern: Agree to deal with each issue and do not connect it to others unless

it is valid to do so (Such as serial cheating or overspending). Remember you chose this person with both their excellent qualities and their foibles. Accept this if you hope to improve the relationship.

2. Passive-Aggressive Behaviors - This is an indirect and usually negative way to try to control the other's behavior. For example, one partner has started to let their personal hygiene go down hill. Instead of talking with them about the reason for this change you walk around the house spraying air freshener wherever they sit. You brush your teeth after they kiss you. You make a comments like "What died in here?"

This is obviously hurtful as the person feels demeaned and like they are repulsive, weak, stupid, etc. They fear and feel confused by unexpected attacks. They feel manipulated and may end up fighting back by doing more of the very thing that bothers you.

What to do instead: Of course you will be upset with your partner sometimes. You are human and you can be committed to your partner without liking everything about them. However, it is a relationship responsibility to communicate openly with each other. Ask for what you want and be prepared to listen to their opinion. Maybe your partner is not bathing because they are depressed or ill. How would you feel if your partner wanted to change something about you? What is a loving way to share a difficult issue?

3. The Blame Game - This is blaming your part-

ner for your behavior or feelings. "I was late for work and the boss hauled me into the office this morning. You forgot to set the alarm. Again!" Blaming is a form of selfishness and leads to problems with who is responsible in a relationship. If your partner is responsible for your feelings and behavior (or you for theirs) sinister co-dependency develops. You do nothing without seeking their approval. You anticipate their needs out of fear or anxiety they will be upset with you. You forget to think about your own happiness. This leads to resentment and withdrawal. Remember your life does not revolve around your partners.

What works better: Be responsible for your own emotions and actions and expect the same of your partners. Sure, do nice things for each other. Be thoughtful and sometimes compromise if your partner is really having a tough time. Never do it out of expectation, guilt, or fear of being blamed. Be open with your partner if they are playing this manipulative game and expect self-responsibility.

These are but a few of the negative habits even healthy people demonstrate. Watch for them and address them in direct and positive ways. If bad habits continue marital therapy is a very effective way to develop strong positive relationship habits. The excellent therapists at Affiliated Clinical Services have training in relationship therapy and are but a phone call away!