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TEN WARNING SIGNS OF A TROUBLED MARRIAGE

*By Patricia B. Ball
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After the honeymoon phase, couples often find out each other's idiosyncrasies that drive them nuts. That's normal. What is not normal are affected ways of treating each other that develop over time. Here are some common warning signs which, if heeded, can avert heading to divorce court:

You get preoccupied with someone or something other than your spouse. This can mean a baby, a paramour, your job, bad habits – any number of things that takes time away from the one you married. If you feel like you're going astray, or if you rarely think about your spouse, turn around and make an effort to devote more time to your marriage.

You engage in conflicts that include personal attacks. You may feel overwhelmed with household responsibility and say to your mate: "Why do I have to do everything around here? Can't you lift a finger to help?" The focus is on criticizing the other, not truly asking for help to complete a task. Practice communicating what you need to do, and solicit help. Your spouse is much more likely to help if you ask in a sincere way – not with a tone of condemnation.

You pay less attention to what brought you together. It's easy to let your personal appearance slide. It takes effort to look good, stay in shape, and focus on your partner instead of yourself. Marriage is give and take: each party should give 100% and take 50%. Remember to take care of yourself in order to project the confidence you need to run the business of your marriage.

There is less intimacy in the relationship. You touch less. You don't hug and kiss for no reason anymore. Sex is perfunctory. There is no more just cuddling and holding each other. If you and your spouse are in this situation, someone needs to make the first move. If the overture is rejected, you must communicate what you're feeling, and what you're trying to change. The more you and your mate can talk about intimacy, the easier it will be to *be* intimate.

You keep secrets from each other. Not that your partner needs to know where you are, what you're doing, and with whom you are spending your time *all the time* – but beware of hiding money, or chatting with an old flame surreptitiously, or having a separate life with friends or others. This breeds distrust, and trust is lacking in *all* divorce cases. Neither one of you is the child of the other, so act like adults and treat each other like adults. You don't need to keep secrets.

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**“A Good
Mariage is the
Union of Two
Good
Foregivers.”
Mark Twain**

You lose interest in each other. If you and your spouse go out to dinner together and you don't converse – or worse – you end up on your iPhones – trouble is in sight. We are bombarded every day with micro-second images that grab and splinter our attention. If you want to talk with your mate, or anyone else for that matter, turn the electronics off. Look at the other person's face, their eyes; smile, and say something sweet. It will likely be reciprocated.

You don't have mutual goals for the future. You may have idealized notions about living happily ever after. Your partner may not look beyond next year. Couples who have common interests generally have common goals, but goals take time and effort to reach. It's always a good idea to talk about where you see your future together in 5 years, 10 years, 20 years. If you and your spouse are both working toward your mutual goals, it is likely you will stay together.

**“If you tell
the truth, you
don't have to
remember
anything.”**

You can't manage money. You never analyze your total income and your total expenses on a budget. It's easy to live it up on credit cards, but if the balance is not paid in full routinely, your credit card turns into perma-debt. Budgeting is difficult and it does not feel good, but it is necessary for your mutual peace of mind. If only one spouse is concerned about staying on a budget and planning for your financial future, then take charge. The worst thing you can do is ignore it.

Mark Twain

You let bad habits control your life. This can mean excessive gambling, drinking, abusing drugs, spending wildly – the list is endless. Take a thorough and searching stock of your bad habits, and if they are rushing headlong to excess, get some professional help and stop the bad habits in their tracks.

You don't respect each other. Respect comes in many forms that you can improve upon: be polite; appreciate the other; listen to your spouse without interruption; admire your mate; compliment your spouse on the many little things they do; give credit where credit is due; give each other enough space to let individuality develop.

**“Wisdom is
the Reward
you get for a
Lifetime of
Listening
when You
would Rather
Have Talked.”**

I'm a divorce lawyer and I know how to get you divorced, if that is what you really want. But I believe in marriage more than divorce. Before you embark down the path of dissolving your marital relationship, really work on winding back to when things were good between you and your spouse. It is not a one-way street, and it's not easy. If it doesn't work, at least you will know you gave it your all to make it work.

Mark Twain

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