

Number One Predictor of Divorce

by

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The number one predictor of divorce...

...is the habitual avoidance of conflict.

And what's sad is the reason we avoid conflict is because we believe it will cause divorce. It's like the cartoon where the couple explains to the marriage counselor, "We never talk anymore. We figured out that's when we have all our fights."

In the beginning, we avoid conflict because we are so much in love and we believe that "being in love" is about agreeing. We're afraid that if we disagree—or fight—we'll ruin our marriage.

Later, we avoid conflict because when we try to deal with our differences things get so out of hand and our fights so destructive and upsetting that we simply shut down. After a few bad blow-ups we become determined to avoid conflict at any cost.

Successful couples are those who know how to discuss their differences in ways that actually strengthen their relationship and improve intimacy. Successful couples don't let their disagreements contaminate the rest of the relationship. While it's true that people don't get married to handle conflict, if a couple doesn't know how—or learn how—to fight or disagree successfully, they won't be able to do all the other things they got married to do. Or put another way, it's hard to take her out to the ballgame if you're not speaking. Often couples are so determined to avoid disagreeing they quit speaking.

We also need to realize that every happy, successful couple has approximately ten areas of "incompatibility" or disagreement that they will never resolve.

The divorce courts have it all wrong. "Irreconcilable differences"—like a bad knee or chronic back—are part of every good marriage. Successful couples learn to dance in spite of their differences. If we switch partners we'll just get ten new areas of disagreement, and, sadly, the most destructive will be about the children from our previous relationships.

In addition to skills for handling disagreements, we also have to learn to welcome and embrace change. When we marry we promise to stay together till death do us part—but, we don't promise to stay the same! We need skills to integrate and negotiate change along the way.

The good news is that the skills or behaviors—behaviors for handling disagreement and conflict, for integrating change, and for expressing love, intimacy, and appreciation—can all be learned. Couples can unlearn the behaviors that predict divorce—that destroy love—and replace them with behaviors that keep love alive.

There are many different courses for learning the skills. The courses are not about what kind of marriage to build—they give couples the tools to build and maintain the marriage of their dreams.

- There are courses for different stages of relationship and marriage. Couples can learn the skills at any stage—dating, engaged, as newlyweds, as new parents, or after many years of marriage.

- The courses are also effective for couples facing serious distress or contemplating divorce. It turns out that when you learn to interact in new ways, the feelings of love CAN be revived—can come flowing back. You can learn to fall in love all over again.

- There are courses designed to teach high school and middle school students the skills for building good relationships and lasting marriages—to teach them what to look for in a mate.

- There are courses to help dating couples assess the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship and to learn how to improve the areas in which they have poor skills.

- There are courses designed specifically for the unique challenges of stepfamilies.

- And there are courses for couples facing the adventures of parenting—from first baby, to adolescents, to empty nests—or for dealing with sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, domestic violence, adultery, unemployment, dual careers, and illness.

- There are courses adapted for different denominations taught in churches, synagogues, and mosques.

- There are secular courses that are connected to no church or denomination which are taught in community centers, on military bases, in childbirth classes, in private practices, or at the county courthouse.

- The courses work equally well for any long-term, committed relationship. Courses help cohabiting couples—often can give them the confidence to marry. There are also courses for committed life-partners, for gay and lesbian couples.

The courses are taught in classroom settings; think teacher, paper chart—a "driver's ed" for relationships. This is not about therapy, or encounter groups. Exposing private relationship issues and talking about problems and feelings in front of others is not part of the process.

Courses are short, inexpensive, user-friendly, and empowering.

Couples enjoy themselves as they gain mastery and become "relationship smart."

Couples also model the skills for their children which will slow the divorce rate in future generations. "Don't tell us how to have a good marriage, show us."

The courses offer couples a do-it-yourself solution.

"If you give a man a fish—he can eat for a day;

if you teach him to fish—he can feed his family forever."

The courses teach couples *how* to fish! —to solve their own problems over the life of their marriage and to meet the highs, lows, joys, challenges....the 'for better and for worse' issues—with confidence.

For more information on these and other courses, contact your Work-Life Center, 808-842-2087, 2085.