

Michele Weiner-Davis

How to Prevent MARRIAGE BURNOUT



If your marriage is approaching the burn-out stage, you can still do something about it—if you act soon enough.

Here are the warning signs of a troubled marriage—and how to reverse negative patterns and restore the love you once felt toward one another.

WARNING SIGNS

• **Chronic resentment.** When unhappy couples argue, they make up on the surface, but angry feelings linger.

• **Lack of humor.** Happy couples laugh a lot. They're able to see the ridiculousness in tense situations and defuse them. Unhappy couples reserve laughter for everyone but their mates.

• **Significant change in the way you interact.** For one unhappy couple, a sign of impending burnout might be that they're arguing more often—or more angrily—than normal.

For another couple, the fact that they never argue when they used to discuss everything intensely might be a sign of marriage burnout.

• **Cynicism.** In a healthy marriage, spouses give one another the benefit of the doubt.

Examples: If one person comes home late without calling first, the other might think, *Traffic must have been terrible.*

In a burned-out marriage, when one spouse brings the other flowers, the person receiving them will likely suspect the other of feeling guilty about something.

STOPPING MARRIAGE BURNOUT

• **Make the relationship a priority.** It's easy to let marriage take a back seat to work, kids, hobbies or community obligations. Couples grow comfortable in marriage and automatically assume

a spouse will always be there. Many busy people nurture their marriages only after they take care of everything else, which is a mistake.

Allotting prime time for your marriage must not be an afterthought. Pencil appointments into your date book if that's what it takes to meet your spouse for lunch or dinner during the week.

• **Don't hide your feelings.** For some couples, keeping anger to themselves or resorting to snide comments seems less threatening than coming right out and clearly saying what is bothering them.

Partners aren't mind readers—and disappointment is inevitable if feelings aren't discussed openly.

However, it is also essential to choose your battles and avoid making issues out of every irritant.

• **Share positive experiences.** When spouses drift apart, it may seem impossible to come up with things they will enjoy doing together.

Exercise: Think back to a time when you both felt more passion, energy and involvement. Ask yourself what you enjoyed doing together in those days.

Start by doing some of those things again. Don't feel you have to make a big production out of the event. In fact, an expensive vacation to Paris to relive good times is probably less productive over the long run than rediscovering simple, everyday pleasures.

Examples: A couple I know took walks after dinner. Another hired a sitter and just went for drives together. Getting out of

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Michele Weiner-Davis, MSW, a marriage and family therapist in private practice in Woodstock, Illinois.

She is author of *Change Your Life and Everyone In It* and *Divorce Busting: A Step-by-Step Approach to Making Your Marriage Loving Again* (Fireside/\$12 each). Her home-study audiocassette course, *Keeping Love Alive*, is available by calling 800-664-2435 (\$49.95).