

INSURMOUNTABLE MARITAL PROBLEMS THAT LEAD TO DIVORCE

Observations on marriage from a divorce professional

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An affair is thought to be the most common insurmountable problem in a marriage. This may be true, but an affair is more often a *symptom* of underlying issues in the relationship. As a divorce professional, I have heard thousands of explanations as to why a marriage ends, but they usually follow along certain themes. An affair is the top and most obvious layer of difficulty that indicates these deeper issues exist.

Partners Cease to be Partners. A) When one partner feels like the parent of the other because he or she believes the other is immature, irresponsible, untrustworthy or selfish, the marital dynamic will eventually crumble and destroy intimacy and sexual attraction for both people. One or the other partner eventually tires of the dynamic and detaches. There's often no turning back from that detachment. It's important to recognize these feelings or lack of connection and start marriage counseling, before the breaking point occurs. Once the emotional break has happened, marriage counseling is far less effective. It takes two to keep a marriage alive. A marriage counselor can't manufacture connection. We can enhance it, but we can't create it.

B) Domestic Abuse (a more extreme form of A). When one partner insists on dominance or superiority and the other must become passive to survive emotionally and sometimes physically, true partnership no longer exists and the relationship itself will fail. There is no "marital" dynamic. Domestic abuse may escalate and is the most serious of issues, requiring specialized help.

Chronic Complaining, Blaming and Inability to Resolve Problems. When marital problems are not resolved to the satisfaction of both people, resentment builds. Resentment erodes relationship of any kind. Bickering is a symptom of resentment and is toxic. *Needing* to be right makes communication impossible and puts the other on the defensive.

Solving a problem by discussion and compromise is much more important than being “right.” Individuals who cannot accept their own accountability in creating and sustaining their part of the difficulty are doomed to fail in relationships.

Narcissism. Everyone has a degree of narcissism. It becomes a problem when one or both partners are unable to empathize with and support the other. For example, one partner doesn’t feel well and the other competes, saying that they feel worse. Or had a harder day or were more wronged by someone. Some over-estimate their contribution to the household, without actually contributing very much, while the other carries most of the responsibility.

If one partner is carrying the financial weight and the other is taking care of children at home, there may be no true understanding of the other’s contribution. They both think the other has it easier. If this continues, neither person feels supported or understood. It can become a continuous dynamic that will kill intimacy and eventually, the relationship.

Addiction. Dr. Tian Dayton, in an article in the Huffington Post, calls alcoholism “narcissism in a bottle” (<http://tinyurl.com/lcz2am>). When a partner has a problem with addiction, the main focus of the addict is obtaining and consuming their drug of choice—rather than on the marriage and family. A person may appear quite successful to others outside the home but privately an addict calms feelings of anxiety, emotional pain, dread, shame or PTSD with drugs, alcohol or a compulsive behavior, masking the need for mature problem-solving. Issues remain unresolved. Their partners feel angry and embarrassed by the lack of consideration for others inside and outside the family.

Because the user can’t face the addiction, the damage it does and dreads giving up the drink, drug or compulsion, he or she denies it and angrily blames the partner for problems that arise. A partner may try to keep it together for awhile, and even a long time if there are children, but eventually, when there’s no recovery, the addict’s partner will ultimately give up. Once that happens, there is little chance to save the marriage. It’s like trying to revive the dead.

Obviously, it’s important to correct these issues before it’s too late. It’s difficult for couples to change long-standing relationship patterns by themselves because people tend to argue for their own points of view. Communication doesn’t get anywhere without a neutral perspective. Patterns must be recognized and interrupted. If you are the first to

recognize one of these patterns, suggest marriage counseling. If your spouse is suggesting couples counseling for both of you, don't resist, even if you feel uncomfortable about it. The relationship has a good chance of improvement if both partners are willing to look at themselves and make some changes. Although it may be difficult to seek help and really look at the situation, it's easier than going through a divorce. Don't wait too long.