

Don't Wreck Your Marriage!

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Readers have been enjoying this series on what every couple should know about how to save their marriage. Take a peek at what marriage therapists wish they could say to couples long before they ever show up for counseling: “There are certain things you can do to wreck your marriage and certain things that you can do to keep it strong and fulfilling.”

Marriage Wrecker

Ignore Your Past. Many of us come from backgrounds of abuse, trauma, loss, abandonment, mental illness, addiction or divorce. Life has dealt some of us a tough hand. Here's the deal: You had no control over the kind of soil you grew up in as a kid. Thankfully, you do have control over the kind of plants that grow out of your life now. Many of us are destroying our present relationships with those we love the most because we have unresolved issues in our past. These issues cloud the lenses through which we see life.

Because some of these things can be so painful to deal with, most of us wander off into the world of “coping.” People will often try everything to ease the pain they feel inside just to avoid dealing with the real issues. Examples of coping:

- Over-eating (or under-eating)
- Watching TV for hours
- Shopping
- Over-working
- Using substances
- Internet pornography and affairs
- A compulsion for success, recognition, or accomplishment
- Anything to an extreme, just to avoid “feeling,” even healthy behaviors

Marriage Saver

Deal With Your Stuff. You will be happier, your family will be closer and your marriage will be stronger if you deal with your past. You are shaped by your past. The events and people of your life, for better or worse, have made you who you are. Without knowing it, many people wreck their marriage and repeat the same harmful patterns they were brought up with unless they take the courageous steps to change those patterns. Along the way you may need to take some practical steps:

- If you struggle with an addiction or two, admit it and seek treatment and support.
- If you experience the mental torment of depression or anxiety, help yourself and your family by talking to a doctor and investigating possible treatments and/or medications.
- Exercise and a healthy diet can make everything look better, including you!
- Develop a spiritual life; it helps you realize the universe revolves around something greater, higher, and larger than just you.
- Make laughter a daily practice. You can emotionally lighten your load if you learn to find the humor in life. A good laugh allows us to bond with other people and ease our loneliness.

A Word of Hope. When people deal with the interior of who they are, it can be tricky, a bit messy and sometimes painful. However, we rarely meet a person who has taken this inward journey and regretted it. The journey has transformed them. In the words of Dr. Rachel Remen, they have become “good medicine” to the people around them. These folks have a winning ability to help themselves and other people face life's challenges with love and courage. They have learned “It is Okay to not be Okay.”

As you come to terms with yourself and your past, find some friends for the journey. Here's what “good medicine” people look like:

- They know and understand pain by heart.
- They're not afraid of it.
- They won't look down on you or judge your “mess.”
- They are grateful to “pay it forward” and help a fellow traveler.
- They aren't shocked when they hear about your “secrets.”
- They can help you see the light when all else is dark.

Price Pritchett said, “Change always comes bearing gifts.” Perhaps the biggest gift change might bring to you is a wildly successful and passionate marriage. We sincerely hope that change will bring you such wonderful gifts that we will never have to meet! Well, at least not professionally.

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