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The Maladaptive vs. Adaptive Marriage Relationship

By Sandra W. Froese, Ed.D, LPC-S, © 2011

When a man and woman fall in love and decide to marry, the traits and differences that were endearing during courtship can become annoying after the "I dos." Not only do personality differences begin to wear on a marriage, but changes in jobs, educational attainment or a new status of either partner can cause tension in the relationship.

Have you found yourself in a marriage that has changed in a negative direction? A "maladaptive marriage" is defined as a relationship when the partners find themselves unequal and they are unable to understand changes in their relationship, communicate with each other, and/or adapt to those changes by resolving differences.

Here are examples of "maladaptive marriages" that are all too common in our culture:

He loses his job and plunges into depression and a lowered self image. She, on the other hand, finds that her job responsibilities have increased with better pay. The income disparity and role reversal causes friction in this marriage.

She has a college degree, but he went into the military service after high school then entered the workforce after he was discharged. He is not motivated to work toward a college degree, but prefers a job that does not demand much or cause stress. A difference in educational attainment and interests causes friction in this marriage.

He wants kids and she does not--preferring a career over being a homemaker and mother. Unfortunately, they did not discuss having kids before they were married.

Attending church has always been important to him. She did not grow up in a family that attended church and does not consider worship attendance or Bible study important. Religious differences may cause a strain on the relationship if the couple did not discuss before they were married.

He is shy and reclusive and she is outgoing and social. She begs him to take her dancing, but he has two left feet and is tone deaf. (She and a girlfriend decide to go "bar hopping" to find guys who love to dance. This is not a solution!)

He likes to unwind on weekends by playing Poker and enjoying a beer (or several) with the guys while she stays at home with the kids wondering why she stays in this relationship. (However, he takes her out on her birthday and their wedding anniversary.)

These unresolved differences begin to destroy the marriage from within. To add to the toxic stew already brewing, one of the partners may be vulnerable to having an affair to satisfy unmet needs.

Couples counseling can help reframe your "maladaptive marriage" by learning new communication tools to change the negative relationship to an "adaptive marriage relationship." If both of you are motivated to make it work in spite of differences, you can learn to appreciate each other again and grow in your relationship for lasting happiness.

For an appointment with Dr. Sandra W. Froese, LPC-S, Institute for Healthy Family of North Texas LLC, call our office at 972-569-8843 and leave a message with your name and phone number. Or, e-mail swfroese@sbcglobal.net with information about your problems and she will reply within 24 hours. For more information about our counseling services and fees, go to our website at www.texasicounselors.com. A 30-minute consultation is offered at no charge so that you can determine if Dr. Froese is the right counselor for your needs and so she can determine if she can be of assistance. Our rates are affordable.