

A LINE ON LIFE

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Don't Marry That Person! *

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Many advice columns let you know what qualities to look for in a spouse. However, we are going to turn this around to give you warning signals for potential failure. If you — or someone you know — are planning to get married, it is important to be aware of potential pitfalls in relation to the prospective partner. Essentially we are saying, "*Don't get married IF...*"

- you don't have a good relationship with one of your parents and your prospective spouse seems to be "*just like*" your troublesome parent.
- you don't know or understand each other very well — or don't accept each other's ideas -- even though you may spend a lot of time together.
- you spend most of your time together disagreeing or arguing.
- one or both of you frequently asks, "*Do you really love me?*", "*Are you sure it's me you love?*", or some similar question. This type of insecurity tends to lead to unreasonable jealousy.
- your decision to get married has been strongly influenced by your future in-laws. Ironically many people have found themselves at the altar, having been seduced by the warm acceptance, flattery, wealth, or even cooking of a potential in-law. Remember, you are not marrying the in-law!
- you often think, "*Things will be better after we're married,*" or your partner keeps promising, "*I'll straighten out after we're married.*" The trouble may involve the careless use of money, sex with other people, violent behavior, and/or an alcohol or drug problem. Marriage usually makes such problems worse — not better — since your expectations are higher once you are married.
- your partner doesn't respect your intellectual abilities.
- your partner has traits that you hate (unsafe driving, violent temper, unclean grooming habits), and you avoid raising the issue for fear of offending your partner.
- your partner insists that you both forsake all your old friends and agree to have only those friends who are mutual.

- your partner cannot tolerate being alone and resents the time that you wish to spend alone reading, pursuing a hobby, or just thinking.
- you are not able to spend an entire day with your partner — without turning on the television — and still enjoy yourselves.
- after doing some soul-searching, you discover that you are marrying a "*sex object*." If there is little else about that person that appeals to you, the appeal of a "*centerfold*" or "*beefcake*" soon wears thin.
- there has been violent behavior between yourself and your partner, and you believe there is any possibility that it could occur again. Your partner may promise, "*I'll never hit you after we're married*," but such vows are rarely kept.
- though you enjoy some of your time together, you feel in significant ways that your partner is selfishly motivated. In other words, your partner seems to consider his/her welfare more than yours in most situations.
- you are unable to agree on where you are going to live or under what circumstances you would move -- for example, what if one of you got a job in another city?
- you are considering an intermarriage (marriage to someone of another religious faith or race) and are unable to agree on how the children should be raised — or are unable to agree on whether or not to have children. (Lack of agreement in this area is a potential problem whether or not you are intermarrying.)
- your materialistic values are radically different. For instance, couples often have tremendous conflicts because one spouse is comfortable with a modest, middle-class standard of living — but the other insists on lavish furnishings, fancy vacations, and a steady climb up the ladder of success.

This list is far from complete. Also, just because one or more of these conditions exist does not mean that your marriage will definitely end in divorce. You may still enjoy a well-adjusted, interesting married life. However, if you have several of the above conditions in your present relationship — and do not deal constructively with them — your chances of marital success are very slim.

In many unsuccessful marriages, it is not that one or the other (or both) of the spouses are bad people. Too often it is merely that they neglected to carefully examine the key elements of their relationship that will greatly influence their future lives.

**If you and your partner can't deal effectively
with the relationship problems you have now,
it probably will only get worse after you are married.**

If any one or more of the above problems exist for you, they need to be dealt with *before* you get married. If you can't successfully deal with them now, the chances of effectively dealing with them after marriage are slim to nonexistent.

* Adapted from Sol Gordon & Craig Shyder's *Personal Issues in Human Sexuality*, Allyn & Bacon, 1986, pages 28-30.