

# Campaign to keep marriage rosy

Most marriages start out with unrealistic expectations that this will be a bed of roses, and never disintegrate into a field of battle.

With the passing of the years, ideally the two partners become a little more realistic and develop a more solid foundation for their lives together than a mere bed of roses and build a satisfying relationship that survives past the early starry-eyed years.

However, for some people the bed of roses gradually reveals its prickly thorns, and some couples realise the idea of marriage as a bed of roses isn't all it's cracked up to be. Even if a marriage is not travelling too well, the mention of separation can come out of the blue for the partner who hasn't initiated the idea.

In most marriages that strike problems, people get to a stage where the differences that attracted them to their partners have turned into a problem.

Partners spend a lot of time and energy trying to persuade each other to give up differences and become just like them. Spending this energy on trying to make big changes usually doesn't work.

You married the person because they were different, and they have pride in that difference and are likely to meet your efforts to change them by being hurt, or angry or just by tuning out.

The answer is not to try to change the partner, but to learn how to accommodate those differences and "sand off" the rough edges. You are not going to be able to make major changes in personality, values or style.

For some people, "fine-tuning" just doesn't work. The partner has to change significantly, or there seems no future. So as time goes on, differences become intolerable and the dissatisfied partner loses hope that the relationship can be fulfilling for them.

Meanwhile, their partner is still dismissing the difficulties as just the normal ups and downs of a relationship, or suggests that it's not the marriage that's in trouble, but the partner who has a problem and he or she should get help.

Finally, when the person who feels there is something wrong with the relationship gets to the point where they feel the problems can't be solved, they withdraw, spending more time with other people and/or getting involved with other interests and people.

This point usually comes a couple of years after the problems first surface, because people don't give up easily on their relationships. The crunch time comes when that partner says one morning that they want a separation. This news hits their partner like a ton of bricks. He or she is likely to say something like "Why didn't you tell me it was such a big problem?".

He or she often then suggests they should go to counselling to try to save the marriage, but sadly for the partner who has decided to separate, the offer comes too late. It is important to note that the warning signs of deep trouble in a relationship will have been there for some years, but were ignored.

The message to take from this is that if your partner has been telling you there's a problem, take it seriously – get some help to sort out the problems before you become another separation statistic.

The truth is we usually have chosen our partners well. Everyone has relationship problems at some stage, but if you can't sort these out yourselves, get some help before they drive you apart.

Hopefully, both of you can still achieve most of the relationship dreams of your early days together.

## Survival tips

- **If one partner says something is wrong with the relationship, don't dismiss it as "his or her problem"- it's "our problem"**
- **Don't assume that a big problem is just part of the normal ups and downs of a relationship: Listen seriously and think, "What can we do about this?"**
- **If you want to save your relationship. Get some professional help when your partner first says there is a problem.**