

Warning Signs of Relationship Breakdown

One of the most useful recent research findings is the work which has identified the early warning signs of deterioration of an intimate relationship. Based on these signs, researchers have been able to predict with a very high degree of accuracy (about 90%) which relationships are likely to end within a few years. This information is crucial in accepting when your relationship is in serious need of more attention or help.

Dr. J. Gottman and colleagues at the University of Washington have found that there are four specific signs of deterioration of an intimate relationship. In order of increasing danger, they are listed below:

Criticism - instead of merely complaining, the person attacks and blames their partner's personality and/or character, such as "you are a selfish uncaring person";

Contempt - feedback with the intent to insult and/or psychologically abuse the partner, such as "you are more than stupid: a total idiot ";

Defensiveness - not being willing to listen to anything your partner has to say to you, out of fear of them hurting or attacking you; and

Stonewalling - ignoring, avoiding and distancing from your partner.

References: Gottman, J. M. (1993). A theory of marital dissolution and stability. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7, 57-75; Gottman, J. (1999). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. Crown Books.

Dr. H. Markman and Dr. S. Stanley at the University of Colorado have also identified four warning signs of deterioration:

Escalation of negativity during the couples' interaction - an increase in complaining and criticism;

Invalidation of each other - not making attempts to understand each other's points of view;

Negative interpretation of neutral or positive events - when one person does or says something which is clearly meant to be neutral or even positive, but their partner interprets their intentions as being hostile or negative; and

Avoidance and withdrawal from partner.

References: Markman, H.J., Floyd, F.J., Stanley, S.M., & Storaasli, R.D. (1988) Prevention of marital distress: A longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56, 210-217; Markman, H., Stanley, S. and Blumberg, S. *Fighting for Your Marriage: Positive Steps Preventing Divorce and Preserving a Lasting Love*, 1994.

These research findings are very similar, despite completely different couples and research agendas. ***If you notice that your relationship is experiencing two or more of these signs, your relationship needs some extra help and attention.*** An ounce of prevention can save an incredible amount of emotional, financial and physical pain. Call us at (337) (315-3816) and let us show you how you can heal the resentments from the past and create a more loving, close, healthy relationship that will last a lifetime.