

# SOURCE LINES

## Is Your Marriage Ready for Valentines Day?

**M**arry and with luck and it may go well. But when marriage fails, those who marry live at home in hell. Euripides the Greek playwright wrote these words in 408 B.C. Is what he expressed over 2400 years ago still true today? Does a good marriage depend on good luck?

**N**o one we have ever know was really ready for marriage. To some extent we all enter it with, anxiety, naiveté and a leap of faith. No marriage preparation courses or psychological compatibility tests can prepare anyone adequately for marriage. It is from the experiences of living together through everyday challenges and joys that we succeed or fail as husband and wife. No matter what one has learned or been told about marriage, making the partnership a success requires on-the-job-training – a process of learning from each other that never ends.

Still, wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to predict your own marital problems if it meant you could prevent them? John Gottman, a researcher who has studied thousands of marriages over two decades, claims to be able to do exactly that. In his book **The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work**, he explains the signs that predict when a marriage will fail and what one must do to prevent marital break-up.

**C**riticism, contempt, defensiveness and stone-

walling are the most common signs of a failing marriage. Gottman proposes that one can overcome marriage problems by really knowing your partner thoroughly, nurturing fondness and admiration, responding to each other's interests and needs, letting your partner influence you, solving problems instead of avoiding conflict, comforting one another, and creating shared meaning in the relationship. Sounds complicated, doesn't it? In this brief letter we can't give you the recipe for replacing contempt with compassion, but we can give you a chance to reflect on the state of your union.

Here is a questionnaire from Gottman's book that addresses one aspect of your marriage: *Is Your Marriage Primed For Romance?*

Read each statement and circle T (True) or F (False).

1. We enjoy doing small things together like watching TV or folding laundry. T F
2. I look forward to spending my free time with my partner. T F
3. At the end of the day my partner is glad to see me. T F
4. My partner is usually interested in hearing my views. T F
5. I really enjoy discussing things with my partner. T F
6. My partner is one of my best friends. T F
7. I think my partner would consider me a very close friend. T F

8. We just love talking to each other. T F
9. When we go out together, the time goes very quickly. T F
10. We always have a lot to say to each other. T F
11. We have a lot of fun together. T F
12. We are spiritually very compatible. T F
13. We tend to share the same basic values. T F
14. We like to spend time together. T F
15. We really have a lot in common. T F
16. We have many of the same dreams and goals. T F
17. We like to do a lot of the same things. T F
18. Even though they are different from mine, I enjoy my partner's interests. T F
19. Whatever we do together, we usually tend to have a good time. T F
20. My partner tells me when he/she has had a bad day. T F

**Scoring:** Give yourself one point for every "true" answer.

**10 or Above:** Congratulations! You are often "there" for your partner and have invested emotionally in the relationship. This strength will help you weather the rough spots along the way.

**Below 10:** Your marriage could use some improvement in the area of romance and stability. If you could learn to turn to you partner, to listen and respond to your spouse, on minor everyday matters you would find the relationship more satisfying.

This may sound obvious but: *it is best to address marriage problems before they become overwhelming*. As counsellors who frequently see couples with serious marital problems who feel like they "are living at home in hell", we often wish that they had come to us earlier. It is harder, if not impossible, to help prevent marital break-up when one partner is ready to leave.

This February 14, consider the opportunity for some preventative maintenance for your Valentine. Like your health, your car and many other things in life, marriages require more than luck to work for you. If you would like to talk with Source Line counsellor about your marriage or any other personal or work related concerns, please call us.

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