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Ask a Divorce Mediator: How Can You Avoid Divorce?

There are many reasons couples can be unhappy, but there's a lot you can do before throwing in the towel.

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November 2018



The societal shame at the thought of divorce has lifted. Today, unhappy marriages can have an expiration date. It was just a few decades ago that marriages would have lasted for year after unhappy year.

Today, I'm seeing couples in my practice as a divorce mediator who simply chose the wrong partner; they married in good faith and it didn't work out... but far more often, I see marriages ending for reasons that could have been averted with a little attention from both spouses. If your marriage isn't healthy for you, by all means seek the benefit of divorce—but if you hope to work through a bad patch and avoid a visit to my offices, here are some common, modern-day situations that are leading to divorce.

1. Mom ditches the stay-at-home Dad who stays home even after the kids are in school. It may not be fair or equitable, but it's happening: women are leaving the husbands they perceive as coasting on a full-time parenting gig. Resentments build.

Avoid this by: Getting a job. Men need to work, or their wives will find a man who does.

2. Fathers leave mothers who are hyper focused on their children. Dad can get to feeling like a neglected bystander. Someone else might be willing to give him more attention.

Avoid this by: Remembering that he's your friend and companion. Let him know the kids' needs are no more important than his.

3. Wives dump husbands with an internet porn addiction. The signs are there; he's no longer interested in the real world of flesh and blood humanity, and he spends hours alone at the computer.

Avoid this by: Watching to see what he's doing online and helping him reign in a porn problem... or fasten your seatbelt for a very weird marriage.

4. Someone re-discovers an old love on Facebook. Cheating almost always has to do with sheer boredom. When simply going through the motions, the job can be unfulfilling, the household chores never-ending, and there's rarely any excitement in the bedroom. Isn't there anything to look forward to? Then an old flame appears on Facebook and the faithful-but-bored spouse takes some giant steps backward.

Avoid this by: Shoving aside some of your responsibilities to make time for fun. There are no chores more worth doing than keeping your marriage and your life filled with light and joy.

5. Spouses don't fulfill all possible roles. We're all too busy these days to have the friend networks we used to have—so we look to our partners to fulfill hugely varied roles. Best friend, lover, co-parent, joint hobby enthusiast, social partner, business consultant, life financial partner, life planner—no one person should be expected to fill all these positions. Yet, we expect our spouses to be everything to us. It's unrealistic.

Avoid this by: Getting involved in your life. Reach out to others. Form secondary bonds with others that nurture and invigorate your primary bond with your spouse. Then bring your more fulfilled and interesting self home to your spouse and cherish the results!