

# Stress Bytes Newsletter

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

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## “WHEN STRESS BITES, BITE BACK!”

THE NEWSLETTER OF ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.  
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### Matters of the Heart: Marital Bliss or Abyss?

What if someone could predict with 94% accuracy whether your marriage would succeed or fail? Wouldn't you want to know how they did that? John Gottman, Ph.D., noted researcher, author, and founder of “the Love Lab,” has done so. His 30 years of research found four factors that signal the health of a marriage and four ways of interacting that suggest your marriage may be in trouble.

To do your own unofficial “state of the union” address, start by telling a close friend or writing out the story of your dating and courtship. Do you tend to remember it positively or negatively? This doesn't mean that you ignore the struggle or hard times in your history, but notice whether your current perspective on those times tends to be generally positive or negative. A positive recollection is a very good sign of marital health.

Next, look at your sense of “we-ness vs. I-ness” as you recall your history

and describe your marriage. In telling your story, do you more often describe what “we” did versus what “you” or “I” did? Couples in long lasting marriages view their relationship as a joint venture and see themselves as a team.

If you get really brave, get him talking about your early relationship. Does he speak fondly of you? Does he take pride in who you are and what you do? In lasting marriages, it is clear that he likes you, as well as loves you, and that he is proud of who you are. Second, note what he recalls about your dating and courtship. For happy couples, the more detail he remembers, the better. If he doesn't remember or is sketchy about the details, this may not just be forgetfulness, but a sign of trouble.

Finally, learn to identify styles of interacting that lead to trouble in the long run. For example, in an argument or discussion, do either one of you retreat into stony silence? This signals to the other that you are withdrawing and refusing to interact

with them in a meaningful way. If either spouse refuses to communicate, the marriage is in danger. If you just need a temporary break to cool down and pull your thoughts together before finishing the discussion, this is reasonable and more likely to allow you to respond instead of react. Make sure you tell your spouse, “I'll be back!”

Continued on Page 2.....

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Matters of the Heart: Marital Bliss or Abyss? 1—2

Quiz: Is there enough love and respect in your marriage? 3

4

Quiz Scoring

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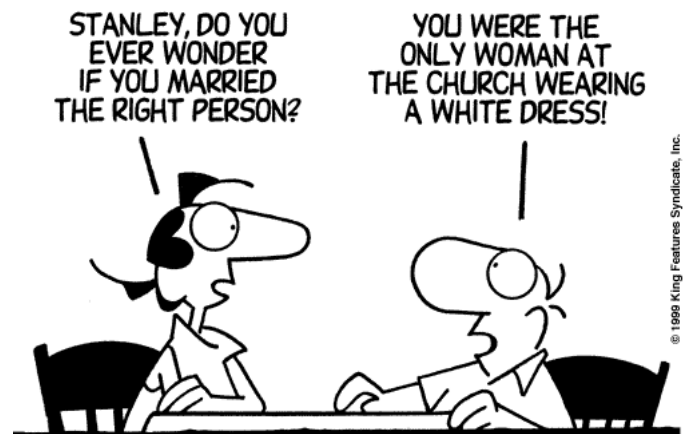
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## Marital Bliss or Abyss....continued

Defensiveness is another sign of trouble and tends to “throw gasoline on the fire” in an argument. If you bring up a complaint to your partner, do they continually deny responsibility? Make excuses? Answer a complaint with a complaint? Distract attention from themselves by accusing you of something unrelated? Stop listening and keep repeating themselves? Whine? Or sit there with a false smile, what I call “doe in the headlights” look that signals underlying anger or fear? Partners that respond with empathy and validation of your complaint, even if they disagree with your point, are showing you respect.

Do you ever get the feeling that your spouse hates you? If so, you’re experiencing contempt, another warning sign of marital trouble. Contempt shows up in a marriage as hostile humor, mockery or ridicule, insults, name-calling, and the infamous eye roll. If your partner consistently exhibits these behaviors, run for the Yellow Pages and call a skilled marital counselor. You’re in big trouble. If it is early in your relationship and you are tolerating this kind of behavior, you need to ask yourself why you are allowing this to continue and you need to call it to their attention as being unacceptable.

Finally, does your spouse criticize and attack you verbally (or physically) when upset about something you’ve done? The difference between complaint and criticism is that criticism is personal. It’s an attack on you, not a focus on the problem. You become the problem. A clue that you’re hearing criticism are the words “you never” and “you always.” Unrelenting criticism can erode the foundation of a marriage and drive your spouse away. On the other hand, can your spouse make complaints about specific behaviors and problems, put it out on the table, discuss it calmly, and together you come to a satisfactory resolution? If so, keep him!

In learning the signs of a healthy marriage and the warning signals of marital distress, you can do preventative maintenance on your relationship. Remember, a healthy relationship requires work, which starts with self-awareness. If you get stuck, professional help is available.

“Your heart is not living until it has experienced pain...The pain of love breaks open the heart, even if it is as hard as a rock.” - Hazrat Inayat Khan



**“I do so share my deepest emotions with you!  
Hungry and tired are my deepest emotions.”**

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KNOW WHO MAY BENEFIT  
FROM IT.**

## Quiz: Is There Enough Love and Respect in Your Marriage?

Answer “yes” or “no” to each of the following statements, depending on whether you mostly agree or disagree.

1. My spouse seeks out my opinions. YES NO
2. My spouse cares about my feelings. YES NO
3. I don't feel ignored very often. YES NO
4. We touch each other a lot. YES NO
5. We listen to each other. YES NO
6. We respect each other's idea. YES NO
7. We are affectionate toward one another. YES NO
8. I feel that my partner takes good care of me. YES NO
9. What I say counts. YES NO
10. I am important in our decisions. YES NO
11. There's lots of love in our marriage. YES NO
12. We are genuinely interested in one another. YES NO
13. I just love spending time with my partner. YES NO
14. We are very good friends. YES NO
15. Even during rough times, we can be empathetic. YES NO
16. My spouse is considerate of my viewpoint. YES NO
17. My spouse finds me physically attractive. YES NO
18. My partner expresses warmth toward me. YES NO
19. I feel included in my partner's life. YES NO
20. My spouse admires me. YES NO **Scoring on Page 4.....**

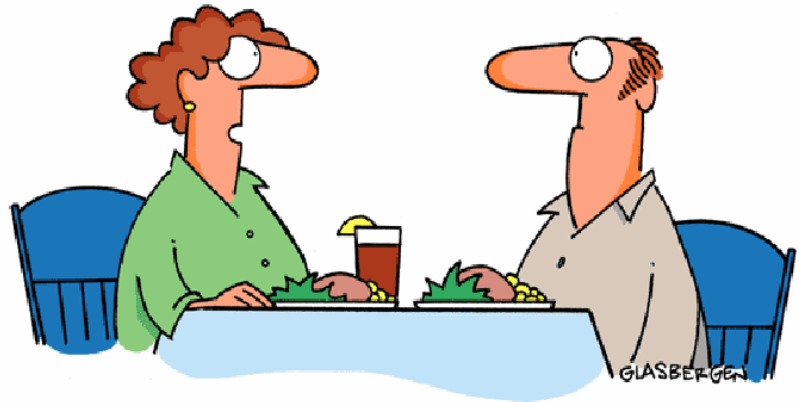
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***The Stress Doctor is IN!!!***



**“This is the nicest conversation we’ve had in weeks.  
Let’s not spoil it by talking.”**

**ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.**

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### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

**THE KEY TO LASTING MARRIAGES IS A COUPLE’S ABILITY TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICTS THAT ARE INEVITABLE IN ANY RELATIONSHIP — NOT HAVING A “WE NEVER FIGHT” ATTITUDE.**

### **Quiz Scoring for**

### **“Is there enough love and respect in my marriage?”**

If you checked “Yes” to fewer than 7 items, then it is likely you are not feeling adequately loved and respected in your marriage. You need to be far more active and creative in adding affection to your relationship.

If you observe long-term marriages you will see a lot of love and respect in the form of eye contact, facial expression, affectionate gestures, flirting and bragging on the other partner. When conflicts arise they are able to give careful consideration to each other’s viewpoints.

This quiz appears in John Gottman’s book “Why Marriages Succeed or Fail...and how you can make yours last.”