



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY

(A Division of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy)

"Helping with life's most precious relationships"

Avoid the Top 10 Marriage Zappers

written by : [Marion Goertz, DMin, RMFT](#)

As a child, I used to wonder what happened to the couple after they walked off into the sunset at the end of a Hollywood movie. As an adult, I know that sunset strolls and happy endings take lots of hard work and planning. Here are 10 life situations couples may face...post credit roll...and some ideas about how to keep the music playing!

Fighting Fatigue: Careers, children, caring for aging parents and on it goes. Life's responsibilities take every ounce of creative energy that we have, often short-changing our couple time. Five fatigue busters: Good nutrition, proper rest, adequate exercise, recharging social times as a couple and grounding spiritual practices.

The Battle of the Budget: Stretching finances, unforeseen expenses, different perspectives on money and power differentials can all cause feelings of hurt and insecurity. Be responsible and be fair. If necessary, involve an objective third party to help establish and monitor a mutually workable budget.

Failure to Honor: Our primary relationships are about as healthy as we are. Shaky self esteem, poor physical fitness, depression, untreated illness and unrealistic expectations can sometimes lead to poor coping mechanisms like addictions and even affairs. We have the right and the responsibility to take good care of ourselves, our partner and our relationship. As needed, seek the best medical and emotional care that is available.

Friendly Invasions: As an adult, your new, chosen family needs to be your first priority and demands your strongest loyalty. Does your spouse take second place to other people in your life? Who gets your time, your energy and therefore your respect? A healthy and undivided home, surrounded by appropriate boundaries, allows for the greatest enjoyment of friends and extended family members.

Words that Wound: While differing opinions are necessary in healthy relationships, criticism, hostile humor, avoidance and dismissal will surely poison even the most committed unions. As you talk to or about your spouse are you building strong connections through your words, your facial expressions and your body language or demolishing your own happiness? Do yourself a favor, love your spouse!

Erogenous error messages: Unrealistic expectations, previous abuse and lack of creativity can stifle even the most ardent of lovers, causing distress, disappointment and disconnect. Good sex happens when two people discover ways of being intimate that feel mutually satisfying and safe. Great sex is assured, over a lifetime together, when we are open to really knowing and being known by our partner. Talk and listen more about what both of you are feeling, thinking and wanting in this important area of your relationship, the doing will follow.

Right on time: Like clockwork, life brings change...kids, careers, mortgages and menopause. You're in this together. Do your homework, make healthy choices and maximize couple time to draw on the resources you both bring.

Losses and Grief: Loved ones, job or home. Often there are people and things in our lives that we weren't quite ready to let go of, leaving us bereft, confused and in pain. Give the gift of unhurried listening to your partner. Help them hold their questions and their pain. Don't try to fix them, just love them with your gentle, healing presence.

Mediocrity and More of the same: Forgetting to invest, to be playful and spontaneous. Take turns being creative. Celebrate every chance you get! Meet at unusual times and places, an afternoon matinee or an unscheduled coffee break. Go to bed earlier as often as possible. Bring home a balloon, a card, a flower, a bag of your buddy's favorite candy. Give coupons for backrubs and special intimacies.

Blast from the past: Previous wounding, unresolved conflict, unforgiveness. Time seldom heals all wounds. Sometimes our best, most intimate selves are held hostage by fear, sadness and anger over old bruises. Minister to your wounds, expose them to the light of truth, talk them through, accept what can't be changed, change what can. Soothe your soul and be free to invest new love and joy in yourself and your partner.

Everything we do or neglect to do registers on the barometer of our love life. While we often can't predict stormy weather, we have more control over the amount of sunshine in our relationship than we think. Applied logic, humor and liberal doses of good will support life-affirming connection with our partner and remind us that we're not alone. How are you doing? What do you need to change individually or together to maximize intimacy and minimize disconnect?

Two basic couple check-in questions: *How are we doing? What do you need from me right now?* Ask them regularly and respond sincerely. We both have primal needs to feel connected, accepted and loved. Times of playfulness and spontaneity are just as important as times spent together for stillness and healing. Above all make regular deposits of good will in your relationship account through kind and affirming words and actions. You'll need the accumulated collateral when life threatens to drain your relationship resources/assets!