

Withdrawal in Marriage Thawing Out Your Marriage Cold War!

The Four Conflict Styles in Your Marriage – Part 2

By Dr. Kevin Downing & Dr. Peter Robbins

Researchers tell us that we can predict if a couple will divorce or remain married with better than 90% accuracy. They have identified four styles of conflict that best predict that divorce will occur. Fortunately, these four types of conflict can be eliminated from your marriage. Currently we are discussing the second conflict style with is called – WITHDRAWAL.

Some time ago I was interviewed on a radio station. I was speaking on the topic of passionate love in marriage. Lots of calls were coming in and of course the subject of withdrawal came up.

Why do we pull away in marriage... put up ‘the wall,’ turn the temperature down to sub-zero? The cold war can last for days or decades if we let it.

As I was explaining the many ways that we miss out on intimacy in marriage, even the radio station manager said to me on a break “Now I know why my wife has told me for years she feels like we’re just roommates.” (I hear that from couples every day of my life as a marriage counselor)!

Research tells us that regardless of its origin, withdrawal in marriage by either husband or wife is lethal. It destroys the oneness God intended for us to enjoy with our mate... it is the crack, the fracture point that can widen to the Grand Canyon of eventual divorce.

We find that men pull away more than women. It was previously thought that men withdraw more in marriage because they don't care as much about marriage and family relationships. The research showed that that thinking is dead wrong. Men overall do care as much as women do, but men don't have the capacity to handle conflict like women. Said another way – on a sea of conflict women float and men sink.

Not long after I had first shared these ideas with my wife Deborah, we were on a drive and we began to get into a tiff. I started pulling away from our dispute, so she asked me Kevin are you withdrawing because you can't handle the conflict or...?

OK she got me on that one!

So often we men have LFT, “low frustration tolerance”. It's not an excuse, it's something to be mindful of and work on.

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So what is the remedy for withdrawal? It's a regular time of checking in and communicating. The natural "soil erosion" of marriage is to take each other for granted and to let our marriage "investments" slide.

Do you remember when you were first dating your mate? You had to peel the phone off your ear because you had been talking for FOUR hours! That was a huge investment in your relationship. As time passes the pressures of life close in – the pressures of career, parenting, finances and so forth. It's important to carve out time, that is "make time" for your marriage. Many have argued, "That's not natural. If you have to plan it or work at it it's not genuine." My response is always, "Believe me, you don't want natural." Anything really great takes intentional effort, precise focus, prayer and lots of elbow grease. From time to time I will hear someone say to my wife, you have a really good marriage. She always says, we work hard at it.

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