

Marriage Milestones

EARLY DISILLUSIONMENT or the x-year itch



It used to be called the 'Seven-year itch' but has recently been named the 'Four-year itch'. In fact it can happen at any time in the early stages of marriage. It may be linked to the coming of a child or it may not. It may involve a third party or it may not. In most cases people enter marriage meaning their promises. So what is happening?

TELL-TALE SIGNS

Several things creep up unawares. They do not happen suddenly but one day there is a realisation that things have changed and not for the better. We did not realise we were losing it until we had lost it.

- Excitement is one thing that goes. It gradually seeps away. Then one day the sad truth dawns – we are no longer thrilled to be in each other's company. Boredom sets in. She is boring. He is boring. Life is boring (except for the twinge of excitement felt when that person who works at the other end of the office catches your eye).
- Things begin to irritate. Sometimes the very things we found attractive at first are now a source of annoyance. Tempers get shorter. Sulks and withdrawals get longer.
- We begin to realise that we do not trust each other. We want our own bank accounts. We want our own space.
- Sexual bankruptcy raises painful questions. What is it all about? That which seemed to promise so much is never enough.
- We are tired and whereas before we made an effort, we do not bother now. We do not seem to be able to find time for each other anymore.

He thinks – We're married now. It's all downhill from here.
Can I really face this life-sentence?

She thinks - Does it have to be this way?

No!

WHAT HAS CAUSED IT ALL TO GO SO WRONG?

One reason is that we probably had too high expectations of each other in the first place. Early in the marriage we each made an effort; now we each expect the other to do so. Before we made our commitment we put effort into our times together. .

We went to a bit of trouble because we were (maybe unconsciously) trying to impress. Now we think there is no longer any need to put in the effort. The result of each adopting this attitude is going to be obvious.

But what makes us stop bothering? Reality begins to assert itself. The filters that used to remove the negative things have dropped off. We now see each other as we really are and we do not like what we see!

We are no longer getting the personal satisfaction we had been led to expect so we lose interest.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

There are some practical changes we can make if we are prepared to take a long term view.

- **We must make time to listen to each other.** If we fail to do this we will not get anywhere. We must discover each other's needs. We must be willing to compromise on our own desires.
- **Remember the things we used to enjoy doing together and go back to doing them.** Make a real effort.
- **Learn to accept each other** as we really are and not as we wished we were.
- **Reject the outside pressures** which tend to raise our expectations to unrealistic levels.
- **Resist the lie** that says that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. When you get there it is not.

If your idea is to get as much out of the marriage as you can, then frustration and disappointment will be the result. Surprisingly, if your aim is to do your best for your spouse, then you will find it will work best for you. Putting husband or wife first is the biggest favour we can do ourselves.

FINALLY

Most of us will have the car serviced regularly (if only for the MOT). What about marriage? Just as a car that is neglected is more likely to breakdown on the road, so is a neglected marriage more likely to end in divorce. How about giving your marriage a service?

To meet this need various marriage enhancement courses have been produced. **See the page "Marriage Enhancement" on the Marriage Resource website www.marriageresource.org.uk** . These courses are usually either provided by organisations on a residential weekend or a midweek break, or on a series of weeknights usually by a local church, both for their members and for non-members. These courses are designed to make any marriage better, whether or not there are problems. Do give your marriage a service – the benefits last for years!