

Are You Trapped in This Toxic Cycle in Your Marriage?

To pursue marriage success, we must address one of the major roadblocks—the lack of intimacy. There is a dynamic I have repeatedly seen sabotage a couple's intimacy that I call the emotion-based relationship. These marriages are characterized by chaos, lack of follow through and multiple inconsistencies in several areas of the marriage including the disciplines in raising children.

There are two types of emotion-based relationships. The first is what I call the “benign” form. The second form is “malignant,” yet treatable. I would encourage you to walk through this section even if it doesn't apply to you, because most will know marriages or relationships that function this way and it can help to better understand why.

There is a couple I've known for several years who live in another state. They have two children and are very active. Their house is always in total chaos, and there are clothes in piles everywhere. They are constantly kept so busy that getting together with them is difficult. They have no time to date, and their systems of intimacy, dating and finances are always in a state of flux. They never really seem to get momentum in their relationship but always are going around the same cycle of chaos.

This is a benign form of an emotional-based system. In this system no one is intentionally trying to be difficult, nor does one mean the other any harm. They simply can't seem to get it together.

A couple like this will try therapy but only continue doing their homework for a short period of time. When asked about why they didn't follow through with it, they rarely can come

up with any tangible reason.

The whole notion of practiced consistency or principle-based thinking totally eludes them. Their decisions are made emotionally as their schedule changes constantly simply because of a desire to change and do something else. At that point, they are unable to remember previous commitments and totally miss events they had planned.

They mean no one harm, and often, couples like this are pleasant and fun to be with at least when things are going well with them. There is no structure to their lives.

Progress is slow in a marriage or relationship with the benign form of emotional-base system. Trying to get them to commit to a discipline of connecting is difficult. When they get into a system for a few weeks, they feel closer than ever, but they eventually stop, and then their relationship deteriorates again.

The reason for the deterioration is that this couple's emotions dominate the decision-making process. If they feel like doing something, they do it, and if they don't (even if it is the right thing to do) then they just don't do it, period.

The '60s culture has given rise to a generation that has bought into in a lifestyle that practices, "If it feels good, do it." The concept of restraint, principles and accountability are not in any of the decision-making processes.

This type of an emotional-based system wreaks havoc on intimacy and sex, since intimacy building is much more than just make-up times after a big fight. Intimacy for a lifetime is much more than just fleeting moments of discipline. It's much more like a result of a lifestyle of discipline. Intimacy is relational wealth that accumulates over a lifetime of invested consistent behavior. Intimacy like wealth doesn't

just happen. It is painstakingly planned and worked for and achieved along the way while two hearts are consistently being open and available to each other.

A couple within an emotional-based system will honestly find it difficult to change. Even the benign structure meets disciplined changes with great resistance. The chaos within this system gives the couple a great distraction from the lack of structure in the relationship. Crises appear from out of nowhere, such as when one or both person's needs are not being met, and stress appears in the relationship. Plans for the future are avoided, a flat tire just happens—and the cycle of the emotion-based marriage starts over once again.

The malignant form of the emotional-based system is willful. In this marriage, not only do the spouses make their decisions based upon their emotions, but they also refuse instruction, information or connection from anyone. They are bent on doing what they want, regardless of the results. If they want to neglect their spouse for days or weeks in order to punish them, they will. If they want to make a financial decision regardless of the consequences, they will.

This type of selfishness at the cost of others becomes toxic. The intimacy within the relationship is inconsistent and even volatile. Anger or silence is used to control the spouse and other family members as well. You know you're in a relationship like this when the major goal of the family is to keep this spouse happy.

The malignant form of an emotional-based marriage can sometimes be a result of several undiagnosed forms of emotional disorders. Sometimes addictions are present such as an addiction to work, alcohol, drugs or sex. If an addiction is causing this system, medical literature supports that there is a lack of emotional maturity in an addict of any kind. For these issues to be resolved, professional help may need to be involved.

Other times, a spouse may have a mood disorder called bipolar. This disorder seems to show up where the husband or wife has days of happy, motivated, clear thinking and is actually fun to be around. Suddenly out of the blue comes one to three days of down, moody and irritable behavior where nobody in the family can do anything right and a “why bother” attitude creeps into the atmosphere of the home. After a couple of days, they again go back to the cycle of emotions changing again. This can keep a marriage or relationship in a toxic form of an emotional-based system.

If it is the malignant form, and there are no addictions or mood disorder present, may be simply a heart attitude that suggests, “I do what I want, and if you don’t like it, leave.” Often if the husband or wife states their needs for intimacy, this person states the spouse is needy or weak. It feels as if they can’t or won’t let the spouse in.

If you’re reading this and it feels as though you are in a malignant or toxic emotional-based system, you probably will need professional help to get you to the other side of intimacy with your spouse so you can have a successful marriage. Real problems need to be addressed.

The emotional-based system can become a major roadblock to sex and intimacy. If you are unsure if your marriage is an emotional-based system, look over the questions below. If you answer yes to several of the following, it may be that your marriage is an emotional-based system, which can make it more difficult to be sexually successful.

1. Does your marriage and family life feel chaotic most of the time?
2. Does it feel as if there is no consistent spiritual and emotional connection with your spouse?
3. Does money get spent regularly without anyone really knowing where it all went?
4. Does it appear that you don’t have long-term retirement

plans you're working toward?

5. Does it seem that some things never get done?

6. Does it seem unclear how decisions get made within the relationship or marriage?

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