

# Getting it together

## Don't make excuses; deal with problems

It often happens that when couples finally get some professional help on long-standing marriage problems they say: "I wish we had done this years ago."

When you ask why they didn't, the answer is they didn't know that counseling could help. Sounds simple and logical, but I don't think it's true.

The fact is that in almost every case in which help was needed "years ago" at least one of the two partners felt that need, and probably even mentioned it. But the notion met with resistance, usually in the form of an excuse or a rationalization.

In each situation, the excuse was taken as a big enough obstacle to discourage any further discussion of the subject, leaving the troubled partner to complain privately that "My wife just won't admit there's a problem," or "My husband is so independent that

he won't accept outside help when we need it."

OVER THE YEARS I've made a collection of the excuses that people use to avoid marriage counseling. And I've learned that the key to understanding them is in not accepting them at face value.

For instance, "I already know my problems. What can a counselor tell me that I don't already know?" is not just a statement of over-confidence and close-mindedness. He's not just telling you he doesn't want to be bothered by the facts.

Actually, the idea of counseling scares him. He's afraid to put himself in the hands of another person. He's afraid to loosen his desperate grip on his image of independence and ask for help. His success, his identity and his entire sense of well-being are balanced on his conviction that he can handle

his own problems. Professional help is for children and weaklings, he believes.

Then, there's the skeptic. "I don't believe in that counseling stuff," he rationalizes. And, like most skeptics, he's really scared to be disappointed. If he let his hopes get out of control, he would actually expect more from counseling than it realistically can do.

So he protects himself from the pain of frustrated rescue-fantasies with so much protective pessimism that he doesn't even give counseling a chance.

Related to the skeptic is the man who warns: "Those guys can do more harm than good." Usually, this is followed by a list of examples of couples who divorced "because of marriage counseling."

But, really, he's saying that he's afraid of the power and perceptiveness of counselors. He's afraid that he will be exposed or blamed. He's afraid to

discover that he has a more serious marriage problem than he thinks.

And, finally, there's the partner who responds to the threat of going to the marriage counselor by making dramatic conciliatory changes in her behavior or attitudes. Then she says, "But things are getting better now. So why rock the boat by going to counseling?"

Translated, this means that she is promising to be a good girl if you don't insist on putting her through the discomfort of marriage counseling.

When I think of what pleasant people we marriage counselors are, I'm amazed at how many couples use us like a threat of punishment.

WHEN YOU LOOK at each of these popular excuses for not getting marriage counseling, they seem harmless. They are just expressions of fear or caution. But, if they successfully block

By  
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improving a marriage in which love is still alive but a little shaky than one in which love feelings are buried under years of resentment, affairs have already occurred and divorce looms.

Yet, how can you know whether you need counseling if your marriage isn't in obvious, serious trouble?

The answer is that if often isn't easy. Especially if you want to be sure that you really need help. But that's not the right question, anyway.

INSTEAD, YOU SHOULD ask whether either partner feels that the success of the marriage is significantly threatened by unresolved problems and feels that marriage counseling might be needed. If the answer is yes, there should be little hesitation to make an appointment with a professional.

### Class Reunions

**GIRLS CATHOLIC CENTRAL 1958**  
The class that graduated in 1958 from Girls Catholic Central, a now-closed school that was located in the New Center area of Detroit, will hold a dinner dance reunion at Mercy College Center Sept. 30.

Graduates of other years are invited to participate as well. Those interested may call Mary Ann Riley, 642-8278, or Marcy Morro, 427-2755.

**SOUTHFIELD 1968**  
The Southfield High School class of 1968 plans a 10-year reunion part Saturday, May 13, in the Fairlane Manor at Dearborn.

The class of more than 1,000 was the largest in the school's history, and reunion planners are seeking information on members not yet reached.

Those who can tell the whereabouts of any member or would like information on the reunion plans may write to 1968 Reunion, P.O. Box 664, Southfield, 48078.

**OK PARK HIGH SCHOOL**  
A 25th anniversary party for Oak Park High School is being planned Sunday, May 21, at the school located at 13701 Oak Park Blvd.

Alumni are invited to come to the school with their families to join in the festivities. Evelyn Rosen, head of the school's media center, is collecting memorabilia including pictures, school newspapers and yearbooks for a special display that also will include current issues of the school publications.

Those interested in loaning or donating such items may call her at the school.

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