

When You Have Become Roommates

Signs your marriage is in trouble

While the statistics on young couples show a third of marriages end in divorce, it may come as a surprise that the rate of divorces in mature marriage is also increasing. Subsequently, the divorce rate for over 50s has nearly doubled over the past 25 years.

Although, every marriage hits a bumpy patch at some point, the struggles in a young marriage look and feel very different than the struggles of a mature marriage. For example:

- Mature couples know everything about one another (or think they do)
- Circular arguments will come up on a regular basis (power dynamics change)

As stability and consistency replace more of an attraction based relationship, it eventually occurs to partners that this might as good as it gets. Partners may wonder if the marriage has gone stale, or reevaluate whether there is any room in the marriage for their needs and dreams.

Here are some guides to help you to you know whether this is just a bump in the road or if your marriage is in trouble:

“I love him/ her, but I’m not in love with him/ her.”

As counsellors, we hear this phrase from people who have been together for a long time. And while there’s some truth to it, it doesn’t always spell the end. The thing is that mature love doesn’t have to look like it did when we were young and were hot for each other. However, being in love is an important aspect of remaining in a happy marriage.

We’ve become roommates

This is a phrase I hear often. When couples feel like they are just co-parents or living like roommates – the marriage is in trouble. The definition of ‘roommates’ might be co-parenting, a financial business relationship or just keeping one another company, but not actively trying to improve connection or sustain the relationship.

To use the analogy of houseplants, our relationships are like living, breathing things: In order to grow and thrive, they need love, attention, and regular nurturing. A love-bond does not take care of itself on autopilot mode. However, to become roommates is a process that happens by degrees over time. It is slow enough for couples to notice it and to do something about it. Sadly, if nothing is done, the disconnection between parties can lead to feeling like strangers in a cage.

We grew apart

The dreams and aspirations that we aspire to when we first get together, are not the same as those of someone in middle-age. It is not uncommon for couples to grow apart after the children are raised – with different friends and



interests drawing attention away from coupledness. Sometimes, a dream or career that was put on hold when our children were born comes back to haunt us and needs addressing. We may suffer from a mid-life crisis, caused by life taking an undesired turn, feeling stuck or trapped in parenthood, or a need to return to who we once were.

I am not attracted to him/ her anymore

While looks may have been the attraction to our partners in the beginning, it is not the full picture of why we stay together for years. It is the combination of chemistry, admiration and intimacy that hold us together later in life. If you have tried everything to improve your emotional and physical intimacy, there may be nothing more you can do.

Living separate lives

With both parents working these days to afford a mortgage, it is easier to unknowingly build separate lives from one another. With all the family activities that occur daily, such as school pick-ups, sporting activities, careers, extended families, friends and other obligations, it can happen. Not only that, but emotional cheating is rife because there is easy access to contacting others in a secretive manner, through phone apps, private dating sites, social media and online chat rooms.

When we stop doing things together and prioritizing each other, intimacy dissolves.

Maintaining a loving, healthy relationship over the decades is definitely not for the faint-hearted. We often enter into marriage with no plan (pre-marital counselling), little relationship experience, and few tools to help us navigate things when problems, disagreements, and power-struggles arise. The trick is to take the necessary steps to mend and repair before the relationship is in serious trouble.