Warning Signs of a Future Breakup

Research has identified a number of factors that predict with a high degree of accuracy, the impending end of a relationship. The more often any of these are present in a relationship, the more likely the relationship will fail.

Harsh Startup
How you begin a discussion has a huge impact on how it will turn out. A “harsh startup” refers to beginning a conversation with sarcasm, criticism, or contempt directed at your partner. These are conversation killers, and pretty much guarantee that the conversation will not be productive.

Try using a “soft startup” instead. Discuss the particular problem without accusations or personal attacks directed at partner.

Pervasive Criticism
Remarks that include attacks on partner’s character or personality. Attacks (and counterattacks) make a relationship unsafe for conversation.

Talk about the specific complaint you have, without attacking the person or character of your partner.

Contempt
Conveying lack of respect or admiration for partner, including sarcasm, name-calling, disrespectful body language, mockery, hostile humor, and demeaning comments. These kinds of communications typically reflect long-standing negative thoughts about the partner, and are the worst kind of poison to a relationship.

Instead, try to remind yourself regularly of your partner’s positive qualities. Nurturing fondness and admiration of one another is one of the best antidotes to contempt.

Belligerence
A form of contempt that displays aggressive anger, containing a threat or provocation.

Defensiveness
Denying responsibility for being part of the current problem, making excuses, cross-complaining, defensive body language. These kinds of communications tend to just escalate the conflict.

Stonewalling
Tuning the partner out by emotionally withdrawing, physically distancing self from the partner, acting as if couldn’t care less what the partner is saying, or in general being as impassive as a “stone wall.”

The happiest couples with the most stable relationships treat each other with respect, and share power and decision-making with one another.

Failed Repair Attempts
Repair attempts refer to anything a partner tries to do to de-escalate a negative interaction (e.g., respectful humor, an apology, suggesting a time-out, offering a hug, etc).

Repair attempts tend to be more successful if the couple has a strong friendship.

References


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