

From Lovers To Roommates

Most couples in a monogamous relationship that find themselves in love and committed to going forward in life together are pretty sure two things won't ever happen.

One is that they won't ever get a divorce, because they are too in love and could never imagine themselves being with anyone else.

Two, is that they or their partner or spouse would never have an affair, because they probably have an agreement, that if either of them is so unhappy, they would talk to each other and resolve what ever is contributing to that feeling of wanting to step out, despite being in a monogamous couple relationship.

In my counseling and coaching practices, I often encounter couples that feel they have become roommates or are like siblings and are no longer romantic partners or spouses.

There are many reasons for this, but in general, it seems to be a result of growing apart as a couple, due to their emotional and sexual connection eroding over time.

It is the growing apart to the point of feeling hopeless in the couple relationship that can lead to an affair, a divorce or resigning to live as roommates instead of romantic partners or spouses.

Sometimes partners or spouses will indicate they love each other, but are not, in-love with each other in the way they used to be earlier in their couple relationship.

This may signal to them and to their partner or spouse that the romantic couple relationship is over or that something needs to bring the romance back.

It might precipitate them coming into couple's therapy or coaching sessions to assess what can be done.

Often, there has been ongoing stressors, conflict, emotional or physical absence, and in general, neglect of the couple relationship due to a number of life events.

This includes having children, household responsibilities, financial issues, significant life events or transitions, demanding jobs, continuing formal education, too many social, recreational or civic activities, as well as, other factors making for a busy lifestyle.

This is a significant contrast to when they first began to date and had prioritized regular time together before children or they became consumed by life's responsibilities.

We know that most early relationships are very exciting and mysterious due to sexual attraction and bonding chemicals flowing through the body, as potential partners desire to spend regular time together to get to know each other and enjoy each other's company.

If there is a strong enough attraction and engagement, their emotional and sexual connection is further developed by regular attention, affection, communication, time together and love making.

Developmentally, we know that at some point in the couple relationship the affection and sex may die down a bit, but can continue to play an important role in the couple relationship with the right amount of attention and engagement with each other.

However, if the couple does not maintain the right amount of emotional accessibility, engagement and responsiveness over time, there can be distance, disconnection, conflict and polarization.

Romance and sexual desire can become dormant for periods of time or may disappear all together.

Often when I see couples where this has happened, they are not fully aware of the impact of their life experiences on their couple or marital relationship.

For some couples, it is too late, too much or too little has happened with respect to their connection as a couple, leaving them feeling their relationship is no longer meeting their emotional or sexual needs.

For others, who are still motivated to assess and see if they can, again, have a more meaningful romantic couple relationship, I often remind them that the affection and desire they once had for each other may only be dormant and possibly could be revived.

Loss of desire, in your couple relationship can be common and may come and go depending, on the status of your emotional connection and sexual intimacy.

As a couple's relationship evolves or matures, it also needs regular time and effort to keep the desire alive.

Life stressors, boredom, anger, frustration, conflict, worry, anxiety, depression, fatigue, chronic pain, lack of communication, lack of attention, lack of affection, lack of touching, lack of empathy, too much criticism, as well as, other factors can kill desire in your couple or marital relationship.

Clients often ask me what is the biggest thing that gets in the way of desire and maintaining a healthy bond in their couple relationship.

My short answer is life with lots of responsibilities and too little time to care for the couple relationship.

If this has happened in your couple or marital relationship, what can you do?

First, discuss it with your partner or spouse to see if they feel the same way.

Second, identify what you would each like to be different in your couple relationship related to your emotional connection and sexual intimacy.

Third, identify the contributing factors that have gotten you to the point of becoming roommates instead of romantic partners or spouses.

Fourth, problem solve on your own or with the help of a couple's counselor or coach regarding how to become more emotionally connected or sexually intimate.

Fifth, prioritize your couple relationship again, in terms of regular time together to talk, hang out, go on dates or have adventures together and express your feelings, affection, touch and love to each other on a regular basis.

As you do this you may begin to feel your connection as a couple coming alive again.

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