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# Habits that Ruin a Marriage

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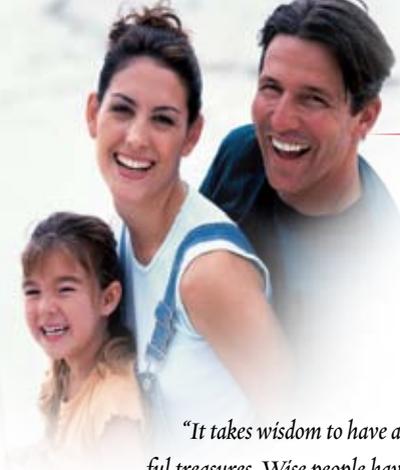
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# FAMILY TIES

## Habits that Ruin a Marriage

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

*"It takes wisdom to have a good family [marriage], and it takes understanding to make it strong. It takes knowledge to fill a home with rare and beautiful treasures. Wise people have great power, and those with knowledge have great strength" (Proverbs 24:3-5 NCV) [Emphasis added].*

**H**abits are those behaviors we acquire in life, some being intentional and many unintentional. They may not seem like a big deal in the great scheme of life; but some, even small ones, can wreck havoc on our relationships. Fortunately, we have some good habits, but we also have some bad habits!

Breaking bad habits isn't easy, especially if we have spent years honing them to perfection! The key to changing anything in our life that's not working is to first acknowledge that what we are doing isn't working. Those closest to us can often be our best sources of information; but all too often, they know they are putting their life on the line to tell us.

So, instead of waiting for your spouse to inform you of habits that are hurting your marriage, I invite you to consider if any of these might belong to you:

**Forgetting the little gestures**—In courtship couples tend to spend a lot of time and energy on doing things for their partner. Sweet gestures, like kissing her when she walks in the door, or asking him if he needs something while you're up, touching his arm or leg when sitting next to him, or saying thank you when she does something for you, no matter how big or small, leads towards intimacy and helps keep romance alive.

**Endlessly criticizing and nagging**—Finding fault with others is so easy! When we are constantly criticized, our well-being and confidence suffers. While we can justify that a reminder, or several, is for the other's ultimate good, this behavior erodes a relationship. Think of it this way: If what you are doing isn't working, it isn't working. Avoid personal attacks and criticism on the person you promised to love and cherish. It's that simple!

**Sweating the small stuff**—Richard Carlson, author of *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, struck a chord in the lives of those who read his book. Considered an expert on happiness and stress reduction, he encouraged readers to live a life de-

voted to peace, love and the betterment of humanity.<sup>1</sup> His point is that when we focus on the smaller annoyances in life, we miss out on so many big, wonderful opportunities. If you don't like dirty dishes in the sink, wash the dishes. If you don't like wrinkled underwear, fold it. If your partner doesn't take the garbage out, don't let it turn into a mountain (literally or figuratively). Take it out.

**Playing the victim game**—Never being the one at fault is so tiresome to a spouse who isn't always to blame either. Playing the victim is a controlling behavior that reaps no positive rewards. When we play the victim, our partner feels punished, which eventually erodes our relationship, and they lose trust and respect for us.

**Spending too much time and energy with others**—Having interests aside from our partner is important, but not having our priorities straight can eventually wreck havoc in a relationship. Sometimes we use our friends, our jobs or our church responsibilities as a welcome distraction from home. If you are talking more with your girlfriends, mother, buddies at work or the gym, your kids or whoever else you can reach on your cell phone, this is a wake-up call!

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Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Carlson, Ph.D., passed away on December 13, 2006, with 26 million books published in 35 languages in more than 130 countries; some were co-authored with his wife Kris, who continues to carry on his legacy. See [www.dontsweat.com](http://www.dontsweat.com) and [richardcarlson.com](http://richardcarlson.com).

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Author's Note: Some ideas for this article were adapted from [www.lifescrpt.com](http://www.lifescrpt.com).

