

# IS YOUR MARRIAGE NORMAL?

**8 WAYS TO TELL  
FOR SURE**

Marriage is SO easy.

Said no one, ever.

Okay sure, in theory, marriage is beautiful and amazing, and a really fun partnership. It's a chance to spend your life with someone you care deeply about, and to take on big "life things" together like setting goals, buying a house, raising children, and exploring the world.

But in reality, marriage is also hard...and sometimes very hard.

So raise your hand if you struggle to get along with your spouse sometimes. And keep it up there if you ever feel like you just can't get on the same page about everything from intimacy to finances, the kids, or even what to eat for dinner?

And if all this disagreement has ever left you wondering if your marriage is actually normal, or whether there might be something wrong, believe me when I tell you that you are NOT alone!

Think back to your college roommate or a friend you lived with. Chances are, no matter how much you liked that person, there were still stressful times, right? And THAT was just for a semester or a year or two. Now multiply that by life, plus add in all the emotions of love and having kids together, and going through all kinds of highs and lows.

It's no wonder marriage can feel like a roller-coaster!

And yet when you see other couples who seem to have the perfect relationship, it's hard not to second guess your own.

The reality is that you really can't compare your own marriage to other marriages. Every relationship is different. Everyone brings a different set of experiences, feelings, and personality traits to the table in their marriage. Essentially, it's impossible to look at one marriage and say it's normal and look at another marriage and say it's not.

Yet, there are a few perfectly normal "marriage things" we ALL go through. So here's a few ways to know whether your marriage is normal....or whether there might be cause for concern.

## 1 YOU ARGUE ABOUT FINANCES

I've definitely been through this with my husband and I'm sure you probably have too. Maybe you're a spender and he's a saver or maybe the roles are reversed—you're the thrifty one and he's not so great with finances.

Money issues can be very stressful and many of us struggle with our finances. We struggle to curb our spending, save money, or stay on a budget. We're often bringing our own personal financial history into our marriage, and we might have grown up in an environment where we had to worry (or watch our parents worry) about how to make ends meet. Or maybe your spouse grew up like that, but you grew up in a family full of abundance, so you aren't used to counting pennies. It's hard to let those feelings go.

What helps most? Talking about finances up front! Don't wait until things get out of control or you're so stressed out you become ashamed to share with your husband. Instead, calmly sit down together and go over your budget. Find ways to address each of your concerns and get them out in the open. If you need help starting your budget, there are plenty of resources out there, but the idea is to start getting it under control so it stops being a source of conflict.

## 2 YOU ENJOY SPENDING TIME ALONE

Do you ever worry you're too much of a loner? Or do you feel guilty for taking time for yourself?

As moms, wives, and friends, our lives are FULL of connections and commitments. We might feel we have an overloaded social calendar, so just the thought of fitting in one more thing (even time with our husband) seems like too much.

We all have moments where we'd rather just soak in the tub and read a book by ourselves. It's totally normal to enjoy spending time alone and even crave it, ESPECIALLY if you're surrounded by your kids all day long. You might need a break just to gather your thoughts (or simply use the bathroom)!

Make time for yourself when you can truly soak up and enjoy it—but also pencil in some quality time with your spouse. So often, we try to pack in too many activities and to-do's, leaving us burnt out and overwhelmed. Instead, try to find simple things you can do with your spouse to enjoy together, like a walk, a concert, or just a meal together one-on-one. Still, keep time open for YOU to enjoy time with yourself, too! If you're happier, your marriage will be happier as well.

### 3 **YOU DON'T TALK ABOUT THINGS (AS MUCH AS YOU'D LIKE)**

All of us feel like this sometimes. It seems like we're always talking about logistics and what we need to get done, but we're never really TALKING about the big things like life goals, plans, and what's important to us.

From my experience, women and men naturally have a pretty different set of communication patterns. Men can go on a boat or out on the golf course and spend hours together and barely talk about anything, whereas women get together and we talk like it's our last chance for conversation ever. Sometimes men just don't open up as much, but it doesn't always mean they're closed off. If I say, "I'm fine," it might mean a million different things. If a guy says, "I'm fine," it's likely he's totally fine (or he really doesn't want to talk about it). So it's always important to take communication patterns into consideration.

That said, spending time one-on-one when you can connect, talk, and enjoy each other's company really does help with talking time. Schedule some one-on-one time to reconnect with your husband. Chances are, once the logistics of the day are put aside, he'll open up a little more.

### 4 **YOU HAVE DIFFERENT VIEWS ON BIG THINGS**

None of us are exactly the same as our spouse. (How boring would it be if we were always on the same page? What would we talk about?)

They say opposites attract and this can even mean opposites on big important things like religion, politics, or disciplining the kids. These are big emotional issues that can leave us feeling upset, drained, and very stressed out.

The first thing to do is to try to empathize with your spouse and remember all the things you love about them, and why you were drawn to them in the first place. You might be surprised that some of those big things might have been the very things that first attracted you to them.

Our views on issues can change over time as well, so if your spouse has done a 180 on a big topic or if you've gone through major changes yourself, it can take a while to get on the same page or even in the same book. Give it time and understanding, and if things have become seemingly insurmountable, you may need to enlist the help of a professional to get back to a spot you can both feel good about. You might still have different views, but you can work together to

appreciate where the other person is coming from.

## 5 YOU LIKE DIFFERENT THINGS

This one's not such a big deal, but it can definitely leave us feeling a little left out when our husband would rather hang out with his fantasy football buddies or wants to watch history documentaries (and you'd prefer ANYTHING else). Guess what? Having your own interests can make your marriage even stronger! When you were first dating, you might have noticed all the commonalities you had with your spouse, but chances are, you also noticed your differences. Maybe they were really into video games or science fiction or sports. It made them more interesting to you and shaped them into who they are today.

Just like you need to make time to enjoy your personal "me time," so does your husband. Give him a chance to do the things he enjoys, even if it doesn't always mesh with your schedule. You don't have to watch football or golf on Sunday afternoons, but maybe that's a great time to do your Sunday prep for the week, while your guy has some sports time. It might NOT be the best time to schedule family photos or a trip to your parent's house. Try to take each other's interests and schedules into consideration.

## 6 YOUR PARENTING STYLES ARE DIFFERENT

Parenting styles are a little different than views on discipline (which can be a heavier issue). Sometimes we might feel like the Regulator or the Rule Enforcer and we cringe a little when our husband is Permissive, Fun Dad.

It's totally okay to have different styles of parenting. In fact, it's very normal. Moms tend to be, well, "mommyish" and dads tend to be the fun playtime, silly guy that gets the kids riled up. The kids will still be fine and you'll still be just fine, even if they eat sugar cereal while you're at your book club or they went to school in mismatched clothes while you were out of town.

The most important thing is that you communicate the whys and reasons behind your parenting styles and don't sweat the small stuff. Most of the time, your differing parenting styles won't have any long-term effects and the kids will be alright. It's okay if Dad doesn't do things the way Mom does and vice-versa.

## **7 YOU'RE LESS INTIMATE THAN YOU USED TO BE**

This one is so tough, isn't it? We might feel like our body has changed since we had kids. Maybe we put on some extra pounds over the holidays and it's not coming off. Consequently, we might feel less attractive and confident than we once did.

Combine feeling not-so-hot with general life stress—you barely get enough sleep, you're worried about different things, you both have work stress, kid stress, financial stress, family stuff. Well, it doesn't make anyone feel super sexy, does it? In fact, intimacy might feel like a distant memory.

As we get older, we just might experience some distance in our intimacy. We're not in our 20s anymore so maybe it doesn't feel as important as it once was, and yet, we all want to feel attractive. We all want to feel wanted and like our spouse still thinks we're hot.

If you're struggling to get the spark back, address the stress in your life as much as you can. In the long term, work on getting yourself to a point where you feel acceptance for your amazing “mom-bod” and all of the healthy things it can do. In the short term, spend time with your spouse and go for intimacy in other ways—hold hands, offer him a shoulder rub, hold a kiss a little longer than the usual peck hello and goodbye. You might start to feel a little more in the mood and chances are, he will too!

## **8 YOU HAVE OPPOSITE SCHEDULES**

Sometimes we might feel like our marriage can't be normal because we're on opposite schedules all the time. This can especially be a challenge if we're juggling childcare, working different jobs, or just have a lot of commitments. You might feel like two ships passing in the night. Maybe your sleeping schedules aren't even the same. He's a night owl, you're a morning person—when do you ever get to see each other?

Once again, making time to connect can be so important to keeping your bond strong. You might have to get creative and enjoy brunch or meet up for a lunch date sometimes. If you really are on totally opposite schedules, leave little notes around, pick up a special treat for your spouse, or send him a text message during the day to let him know he's on your mind. Know that this too shall pass—someday you'll be on similar schedules and spending more time together.

Marriage is hard, but it's also great—and there are always things you can do to improve your marriage right now. Every marriage is unique, so it's hard to say if things are “normal,” but there are definitely some universal challenges we all face and go through.

Keep your marriage strong by focusing on the things you really love and appreciate about your spouse. Tell him the positives and spend time together when you can. Your marriage is just as normal as anyone else's!