

I'M Married but Feel Alone: Addiction, Marriage, and Conflict

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**Physical Presence doesn't
automatically equal
Emotional Connection:**
Sharing a home does not
guarantee emotional
closeness.

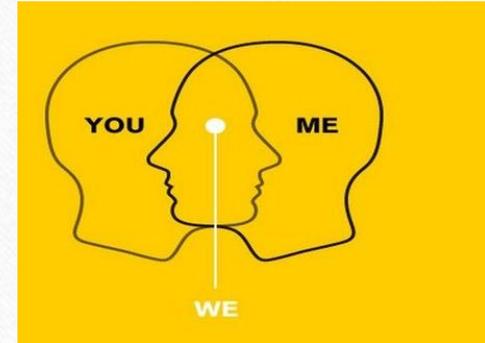
A person can still feel lonely
if they are not deeply
connected to their spouse.



I'm Me and You're You

Marriages are comprised of two individuals with their own bundles of needs, experiences, perceptions/ thoughts, feelings and lastly, baggage. Now, when combined, the question becomes- how will those variables be managed?

As drinking or drug use gets worse, it starts to take more time away from the couple, taking its toll by creating emotional distance between the partners. As a result, frequency of conflicts tends to increase.





- **How Addiction Affects Marriage**
- Erosion of trust and emotional safety
- Increased secrecy and dishonesty
- Financial strain and instability
- Emotional distance and resentment
- Role confusion (caretaker vs. partner)

- **Common Conflict Patterns in Addicted Marriages**
- **Pursuer–Avoider Cycle**
 - One partner confronts, the other withdraws
- Blame and defensiveness
- Repeated broken promises
- Escalation into verbal or emotional abuse



- **Emotional Impact on the Non-Addicted Spouse**
- Feelings of betrayal and abandonment
- Anxiety, depression, or chronic stress
- Loss of self-esteem
- Codependency or hypervigilance



- **Impact on the Addicted Partner**
- Shame and guilt
- Denial or minimization
- Fear of rejection or failure
- Difficulty managing emotions without the addiction

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- A.R.E.- Accessibility, Responsiveness, Emotional Engagement define the quality of a bond.

Questions to consider and explore-

Can I reach you? Can I share my deepest feelings, and will I be heard?

Can I rely on you to respond to me emotionally? Do I feel lonely and shut out?

Do I know you will value me and remain close? Am I safe enough to take emotional risks?

A Misunderstanding/ Problem Solving



Gottman's 4 Horsemen

- Criticism- fuels the attack by presenting as a personal attack or negative remark
- Contempt- attacking partner's sense of self to harm; impacts the immune system
- Defensiveness- avoiding responsibility, having a victim's mentality
- Stonewalling- turning away to avoid conflict, showing disapproval
- 4 Horsemen

4 Horsemen and Antidotes



Criticism



Make Requests

WHAT

Attack the **character** or question the **intention** of the other party. Different from a complaint, which focuses on the behavior.

Address the **specific behavior** without blame or attacking the person. Use "**I-Statements**" to convey emotions and needs.

HOW

"Why can't you do this right?"
"Why didn't you do this?"
*"Why do you **always/never** ____?"*

*"I know you **meant well**, but this is how your action **impacted me**. **Going forward**, I'd appreciate it if you could do _____."*

WHY (NOT)

Criticism directs attention on the **person**, not the problem. The other person is made **powerless** and is more likely to respond with **defensiveness** or **resignation**.

Requests signal that: (1) your needs **matter** and that (2) the other party **can** make a **positive impact**. **Specific** requests make it easier for them to directly meet your needs.

Paradigm of “Us”

- *Carl Whitaker*, the great marriage therapist, referred to what he and his wife shared as a “we-ness” or an “us-ness.” He noted, that if she were to die, he would not only miss her, but what they were together even more.
- The idea that “Us” is important in marriage is not typical practice in marriage and couples’ therapy. The idea that there can be a *you*, a *me*, and an *us*, is not standard thinking in relationship work.



Healthy Practices

Marriage Minute: 10 Practices for a Thriving Relationship

- 1 Build a culture of appreciation, respect, and tolerance
- 2 Develop trust through sharing your vulnerability
- 3 Create time and a relaxed atmosphere to interact with your partner
- 4 Discuss expectations to avoid misunderstandings
- 5 Prepare for conflict and discuss how you will repair
- 6 Communicate effectively
- 7 Develop Rituals of Connection
- 8 Attune to your partner
- 9 Establish a regular Stress-Reducing Conversation
- 10 Accept for and give forgiveness

The Gottman Institute

Healthy Communication/ Expressing Complaints



- When you _____ it bothers me, and I feel _____ because _____.
- I acknowledge that I react by _____ because I feel afraid or hurt.
- What I need from you is _____.
- I really appreciate you listening to me. I feel more _____.
- I really feel _____ when you _____.
- What can I do differently for you?
- Down the line I hope we can be more _____.

You don't have to feel alone in your own relationship. While loneliness can feel like a hopeless situation, it can get better. By recognizing the signs, understanding the causes, and taking deliberate action to reconnect, you can rebuild the bridge between you and your partner.

Remember, relationships require ongoing maintenance—like tending a garden—to flourish. Start today with one gentle conversation and one turning towards action, and watch your connection begin to bloom again.

- How to Stop Feeling Lonely in Your Relationship
- When feeling lonely in your relationship starts to feel overwhelming, there are concrete steps you can take to rebuild emotional connection with your partner:
- Start with self-reflection to identify your specific emotional needs and communication patterns. Understanding what you're truly seeking helps you communicate more effectively with "I" statements rather than blame or a focus on the negative.
- Practice making verbal and emotional bids—small attempts to connect throughout the day. These might include sharing something interesting, asking about your partner's feelings, or offering physical affection.
- Try to recognize bids. When your partner makes an effort to connect with you, respond positively rather than ignoring or rejecting them. Bids beget more bids leading to a positive spiral of greater efforts from both partners to connect and communicate.
- Improve your communication through [active listening](#) and weekly check-ins about your relationship's state of the union.
- Create daily connection rituals, schedule regular date nights, and establish technology-free time together to foster genuine intimacy and reduce feelings of isolation.

LEARN HOW TO TURN TOWARDS

BID FOR CONNECTION	TURNING TOWARDS	TURNING AWAY	TURNING AGAINST
"Hey, can you come in here for a minute?"	"Sure, What's up?"	"In a second, I almost have this game beat."	"Can't you see I am watching the game here!"
"Did you hear about the drama with that company?"	"Yes, how terrible. What do you think about it?"	Radio Silence	"You need to get off Facebook."
"Check out that view"	"Wow that's amazing!"	"mm-hmm" – Partner does not look up from reading	"Really, you had me look up for that?"
"I'm so sick of being overlooked at work."	"How frustrating. I'm sorry they don't see what everyone else sees."	"Have you tried talking to your boss?"	"You need to build a backbone with those people."
"I feel like a horrible mother."	"Our children are lucky to have you as their mother."	"Who ever said that?"	Partner rolls eyes
"I'm exhausted."	"Anything I can do to help you feel more rested?"	"I know, me too."	"You don't think I'm tired?!"
Partner lets out an exasperated sigh.	"Are you feeling okay?"	What's the matter with you?	"Oh, here we go, now what?"
Partner looks over and pats the couch	Partner takes cue and snuggles up	Sits next to partner and plays on their phone	"Maybe if you'd clean up, we'd have time for that."
Partner comes behind you and wraps arms around you.	You embrace the hug	Continues to do the dishes without acknowledging	Pulls away - "I've got to get this done."



Paths Toward Healing

- Individual addiction treatment
- Couples therapy
- Support groups (e.g., AA, Al-Anon)
- Clear boundaries and accountability
- Relearning healthy communication

Role of Couples Therapy

- Addresses both addiction and relationship dynamics
- Focuses on:
 - Emotional safety
 - Trust repair
 - Conflict resolution

QUESTIONS???

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