

9 Marital Bad Habits—and How to Break Them

Build a better union by putting an end to destructive patterns

By [Denise Schipani](#) Posted April 07, 2010 from [WomansDay.com](#)

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Solid marriages aren't born; they're made. But often, during the course of a marriage, bad habits—from slacking off sexually to talking trash about your spouse—are created. Are you guilty of any of these nine negative habits—and wondering how to break them? Remember that the key is communication, says [Karen Gail Lewis](#), EdD, marriage therapist and author of *Why Don't You Understand? A Gender Relationship Dictionary*.

1. Taking each other for granted. “Couples get into ruts,” says [Sherry Amatenstein](#), a marriage therapist and author of *The Complete Marriage Counselor: Relationship-Saving Advice from America's Top 50+ Couples Therapists*. “We tend to try to push our partner down like a jack-in-the-box,” she says, which doesn't give him the credit he deserves for evolving and changing.

How to break it: Talk. A lot. Go out to dinner or open up a bottle of wine and talk about the things you're interested in right now. You may find yourself surprised, and intrigued all over again, by your partner.

2. Not having enough sex. Though “not enough” will differ from couple to couple, you probably both know if you've been slacking off in the bedroom. “Problem is, when it comes to sex, many couples wait for the other to come up with some great, exciting plan, and when the other doesn't, they become resentful,” says Amatenstein.



How to break it: Make the first move. It's not a contest. Do what you have to to pump things up, whatever works for you. Amatenstein recommends getting away for regular couple weekends if you can afford it.

3. Lying about money. Whether it's taking charge of the big-picture money stuff and not sharing the info or secretly spending and hiding the evidence, lack of financial upfrontness is a habit that can wreak havoc on your emotional bond, because money is about both power and trust, says Dr. Lewis.

How to break it: Sit down for monthly (or thereabouts) money chats, discussing both long-term goals and short-term spending habits. The aim is to feel so much a part of a team that you don't want to conceal anything.

4. Not being supportive of career. Think about the last time either of you moaned that the other "was never home" or "is married to that job." Now think: "Do you really 'hate' his job, or are you resentful of the hours he spends apart from you? Or, are you feeling as though he hasn't been all that supportive of your career goals?" says Dr. Lewis. Misplaced anger or resentment can come off as lack of support.

How to break it: Tell your partner what's really bothering you. Not, "I hate your job," but, "I wish we spent more time together," recommends Dr. Lewis.

5. Trash-talking your spouse to friends. There are times this takes the form of mild venting, which among women is a form of communication with friends. "But if you do it too much, or share too much deeply personal information, it's disrespectful," says Dr. Lewis.

How to break it: Decide between the two of you what's in and out of bounds in terms of sharing with friends, says Dr. Lewis. His silly shower song? OK. His problems at work, or sexually? That's private. Keeping it so helps cement your bond.

6. Forgetting about romance. Wait, you have to *woo* the person you sleep with night after night? Short answer: Yes. While it's true that the spark fades, that doesn't mean it has to die out altogether.

How to break it: All the little things do work, like love notes and special treats. But think about things like your appearance; it seems shallow, but showing you care about yourself tells your partner you care about your relationship, too. "Spend five minutes a day just kissing," suggests Amatenstein. "And for heaven's sake, keep the bathroom door closed!"



7. Not trying new things. Remember dating? Even the least intrepid among us would try the most daring things our new paramour suggested. Why not now? It's that rut problem again, not to mention mortgage, kids and jobs. But couples "need something outside themselves that they share" to keep their bond strong, says Amatenstein.

How to break it: Attempt something new, such as ice skating or French language lessons. Or volunteer together. Even trying a new restaurant or recipe—if you do it together—can help.

8. Parenting out of sync. Kids eventually figure out how to play parents off each other, and it's easy for them if you're not on the same page. Allow them to do this and "you undermine your spouse's authority with the children, which is not respectful to him or good for your kids," says Amatenstein.

How to break it: Save "what about the kids?" conversations for times when you're alone. And show affection for each other in front of the kids, which cements your bond in their eyes.

9. Sniping at each other. Sharp talk ("There you go again, leaving the toilet seat up," or "Oh, great, another call from your annoying sister") usually masks some other problem, says Dr. Lewis. "You snap and snipe because you're angry about something else, and you redirect that anger onto something minor."

How to break it: Have regular check-ins with each other to air out problems. And try to remember that men and women use conversation differently, says Dr. Lewis. "Women talk to connect; men talk to share information." Keeping that in mind will help you be kinder to each other.

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