
RATE YOUR MARITAL HAPPINESS: THE MARITAL HAPPINESS SCALE

I am now going to mention some different aspects of married life. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy with this aspect of your marriage. If you are very happy, assign a number 3. If you are pretty happy, the number 2, and if not too happy, the number 1.

1. How happy are you with the amount of understanding you receive from your spouse?
2. How happy are you with the amount of love and affection you receive?
3. How happy are you with the extent to which you and your spouse agree about things?
4. How happy are you with your sexual relationship?
5. How happy are you with your spouse as someone who takes care of things around the house?
6. How happy are you with your spouse as someone to do things with?
7. How happy are you with your spouse's faithfulness to you?
8. Taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage?
9. Compared to other marriages you know about, do you think your marriage is better than most, about the same as most, or not as good as most?
10. Comparing your marriage to three years ago, is your marriage getting better (3), staying the same (2), or getting worse (1)?

For the last question, the response categories are a little different, but you still give yourself a 1, 2, or 3.

11. Would you say the feelings of love you have for your spouse are extremely strong (3), very strong (3), pretty strong (2), not too strong (1), or not strong at all (1)?

Now add up your total score. It can range from 11 to 33. Here is where your score fits with national norms for married people. The average marital happiness score is 29. The lowest twenty-fifth percentile is

27, which means that if your score was 27 or less, you are less happy with your marriage than 75 percent of married people. If your score was 32 or higher, you are more happily married than 75 percent of married people. Researchers have long noted that most people rate their marriages as happy, despite the nation's high divorce rate, perhaps because it's hard to admit dissatisfaction either to the researcher or to oneself. For that reason, a lower than average score is often a more reliable indicator of the state of someone's marriage. That is, you can accept at face value someone who indicates he or she is not so happy, but you have to assume that some people who score above average in happiness are doing a bit of wishful thinking.

From the Marital Instability over the Life Course Study conducted by Alan Booth and Paul Amato. This scale is in the public domain. Published by The Guilford Press in *Take Back Your Marriage* (2nd ed.), by William J. Doherty.

CONSUMER MARRIAGE QUIZ: IS YOUR MARRIAGE BECOMING A CONSUMER MARRIAGE?

How much consumer thinking has slipped into your marriage? Answer the questions below.

1. I (often, sometimes, rarely) compare my spouse unfavorably to others.
2. In relation to our problems, I (often, sometimes, rarely) dwell on my spouse's deficiencies; not my own.
3. I (often, sometimes, rarely) concentrate on how my spouse is not meeting my needs rather than how I am not meeting my spouse's needs.
4. I (often, sometimes, rarely) keep score: I add up when I do good things or when I think my spouse does something bad.
5. I (often, sometimes, rarely) think that my spouse is getting a better deal in this marriage than I am.
6. I (often, sometimes, rarely) focus on my spouse's defects rather than on his or her strengths.
7. I (often, sometimes, rarely) wonder whether I should have held out for someone better when I chose a mate.
8. When we have hard times, I (often, sometimes, rarely) ask myself whether the effort I am putting into this marriage is worth it.

If most of your answers are "rarely," congratulations. You do not treat marriage like a car that you can trade in when it ages and develops a touch of rust. If most of your answers are "sometimes," ask yourself whether things that you want are disguising themselves as things that you absolutely need. Try discussing your spouse's needs and wants. If three or more of your answers are "often," consumerism has severely infected your view of marriage. Do you want to be a "citizen" of your marriage, or take a "tourist visa" to travel the way of fantasy?

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WHO OWNS YOUR MARRIAGE—YOU OR YOUR KIDS?

It's easy to find reasons why your kids' needs are front and center, but if you neglect your spouse in the process of parenting, you won't be doing your kids any favors. If you read these statements and answer "yes" more than three times, you're giving away your married life to your kids and should work to set up boundaries to get back a life with your mate.

1. Five nights out of seven, your preadolescent kids go to bed whenever they want, and it's usually well after 9:00 P.M.
2. When you've finally found a moment with your spouse, even if it's in the car on the way to the soccer match, your kids invariably ask you to turn up the music, give them a juice box, or demand you hear about the latest video game, and you find it easier to listen than to ask them to wait until you're done talking with your spouse.
3. You haven't had a night out alone together in a month—and you can't even remember the last one before that.
4. The lock on the bedroom door is growing rusty with disuse.
5. Your down time as a couple is always family time, for example, spent watching a Disney video with the kids instead of listening to jazz on the deck while the kids watch the movie indoors.
6. When the choice at the moment is between talking to your spouse about his or her day, or playing ball with your kids, and you almost always choose the kids.
7. When you've finally finished driving the kids to violin lessons and swim practice and have completed that science project you just found out was due tomorrow and your spouse wants to sit down and relax with you, you just can't resist working on building Tanya's dollhouse "while we talk."

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IS YOUR FAMILY OF ORIGIN HURTING YOUR MARRIAGE?

Parents and other family members hurt your marriage only if you let them. Here are some questions to help you determine whether this is happening. Answering “yes” to more than two of these questions might mean that there is a problem. Answering “yes” to more than four means you should take a serious look at where your adult loyalties lie. Answering “yes” to eight or more means you’d better find out if your old room at your parents’ house—or your spouse’s room at his or her parents’ house—is still available.

1. Is the subject of many of your arguments, or your most difficult arguments, how the in-laws treat you or the number of demands they put on your lives?
2. Do you find yourself keeping secrets from your spouse about conversations you’ve had with your family?
3. Do you find yourself blaming your spouse’s minor faults on his or her parents’ poor childrearing practices?
4. Does one of you complain that the amount of attention paid to, or time spent with, your respective families is unequal?
5. Do you find yourself trying to preempt invitations from in-laws by making plans with your own parents for holidays and other events without consulting your spouse?
6. Do you feel pressured to agree to plans with your own family without checking first with your mate?
7. Do you find it very difficult to say no to requests from your parents?
8. Do you find it easy to say no to requests from your spouse’s parents?
9. Do you celebrate all holidays and special occasions at either your parents’ or your spouse’s parents’ home?
10. Do you feel as if your spouse never sets limits on his or her parents’ demands, even when it’s clear that they are unreasonable?

If you are concerned about your responses to some of these questions, here are some things you can do to protect your marriage and still maintain loving contact with both of your families.

- If you are in an argument with your spouse about one of your families, avoid retaliating with an attack on the other's family.
- Try not to say anything critical of your in-laws' personalities or family traits that your spouse has not already mentioned. Don't be an eager critic of your in-laws, or you will stir up defensive loyalty in your mate.
- The blood (or adoptive) relative should generally take the lead in setting limits on his or her family. Don't make your spouse the bad guy with your family, and don't become the bad guy with your in-laws.
- If you complain about feeling controlled by your in-laws, there's a good chance the problem is that your spouse is being wimpy with them. Assert yourself with your spouse and insist that your spouse do the same with your in-laws.
- If you feel caught in the middle between your spouse and your family, get out of the middle by seeking an understanding with your spouse, and then having a united front with your family. Staying in the middle means being disloyal to your spouse. Battle it out first with your spouse until you reach a solution you both can live with. When you are setting limits on parents who are expecting too much or acting unfairly, concentrate on stating what you want or expect, over and over if necessary, and stay away from why their entire approach is "wrong."

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ARE YOU ON THE VERGE OF AN UNNECESSARY DIVORCE?

When divorce leaves the realm of “it couldn’t possibly happen to us” and creeps into the domain of “maybe that’s what I will have to do,” the idea often gains a tragic momentum of its own. Unfortunately, if you’ve reached this point, the pain and fear you feel may be enough to blur your perception of reality and your judgment about the best course of action for you and your marriage. Some couples don’t take the warning signs seriously until it feels too late. If more than three of the following statements describe you, drop everything and make a commitment right now to put off any decision or actions to dissolve your marriage until you get real help.

1. You’re beginning to claim that you and your spouse were really never in love, yet your friends and family say you were crazy about each other when you got married.
2. You say your spouse never pays any attention to you and never makes an effort to spend time with you, yet somehow you’re busy—with work you brought home, with volunteer meetings, with dinner or a drink with friends, with helping your child with homework—every evening of the week.
3. These days you dwell mostly on your spouse’s faults and failings but if pressed to describe the type of person your spouse is, you would use terms like “fair,” “dependable,” “responsible,” and “kind.”
4. You say your partner can’t be a good spouse, but is a good parent. You rule out the possibility that someone who can be a good parent might also be able to learn to be a good spouse.
5. You begin your usual long litany of complaints about your marriage to your mother or a friend, but for the first time the response is “Maybe you’re right to think about divorce,” and you find yourself speechless as well as surprised to feel a little hurt.
6. You say you’re determined to be “done with it” and get on with your life, but you’ve canceled appointments for an initial consultation with a divorce lawyer.
7. You make constant declarations that you want to work things out with your husband, but your once-benign fantasies about having an

affair are beginning to take shape in reality—a work colleague asks you to lunch, an e-mail correspondent turns flirtatious, or you are pleased that the guy you play tennis with is getting divorced.

8. You say that you crave emotional connection, but when your spouse is unavailable, you watch television instead of calling a friend. You may not be such a great emotional connector yourself.
9. You feel as if you've tried everything and despair that anything will ever get better, even when you know your spouse is trying to change.
10. You know you will have trouble explaining to your children, now and in the future, why you ended the marriage. You are not sure that ending the pain you are in now justifies the pain that they will be in later.

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