

Subject: Victims of Spousal Abuse

Hi Tony,

This week's letter comes from a husband in crisis that is the victim of an unhappy and frustrated wife. What do you do when your wife is lashing out at you, and is on a path of destruction that could cost both of you the marriage? How do you break this pattern of behavior without issuing an ultimatum? How do you reach out to someone that seems set on pushing you away?

Spousal abuse is an increasingly visible issue in modern marriages, and contrary to perceptions, a large part of it involves women abusing men. I have provided this email to illustrate the reality and possible treatments of spousal abuse and anger management.

Hi,

Thanks for your course and emails, I am finding it really helpful coming to terms with what's going on in my marriage.

My wife and I have been married for 19 years this July, and for the last 4 years, we have been really struggling to connect as a couple. It's almost like she has changed and there are times when I get the feeling that she resents me, maybe even hates me.

We are both highly-skilled professionals, so have a substantial combined income and what most would consider a comfortable lifestyle, to the point that my wife is now able to retire early. We have a nice home, and my wife has gone without nothing, including expensive clothes, jewellery, vehicles, regular spa treatments, and the like.

The problem is that despite this, she seems really unhappy. We argue a lot, she doesn't like going out with me, she prefers the company of her girl friends, and she flirts openly with other men when we are at parties together.

I have tried talking to her about it, but she doesn't want to know. She refuses to see that there is a problem, even if her friends and mine can see that something is definitely wrong. I just don't understand how someone who has everything can be so unhappy and self-destructive. It's really affecting our marriage, and I'm increasingly scared that it's getting out of control.

Lately she has been violent towards me. Throwing cups, hitting me, scratching me, and yelling when she doesn't get her own way. I just don't know what to do about it. The woman I fell in love with and married is hopefully still there, deep down, but this violent person that she has become recently scares me.

She has no control over her moods, and her anger seems almost

explosive. She gets hysterical at even the smallest thing. Last week the housekeeper left finger marks on a bathroom mirror and my wife screamed at her. Her reaction seemed completely out of proportion to what had happened.

I was ten minutes late picking her up from the gym, and she stood on the side of the road and screamed at me, threatening to divorce me if it happened again. I couldn't help the fact I was stuck in traffic, but she wasn't interested in an explanation.

I'm worried that if I can't get through to her that things are going to get worse, and to be honest, I don't know how much more of this I can take. We have two children, both grown up and left home, but nothing they say seems to get through to her either.

What do I do? Do I slip Valium into her drink, do I call a doctor for a house visit, or do I have her forcibly restrained and admitted to a counseling facility?

I miss my wife. I don't hate her, but I am scared of her. I just don't know what to do. Please help.

Here is my reply:

Hi there,

Thanks for your email.

Immediately I can identify that your marriage is in serious trouble, and is fast reaching breaking point if something isn't done about it. You seem to have been very patient and supportive thus far, but my fear is that if this continues, you are either going to retaliate or leave the relationship.

One thing is certain: The violence that has pervaded your marriage is both inappropriate and unsustainable. What it tells me is that your wife is deeply unhappy with something in her life, and her failed efforts at controlling it are manifesting itself as violence towards you.

Have there been any significant changes in her life in the last few months? Has she changed jobs, changed routines, undertaken some life change, or new friends, hobbies, or pastimes? Has a friend or family member died?

Often bouts of mood swings or depression are triggered by significant life events, when people struggle to adjust to change. This is called situational depression, where your wife may be trying to cope with what is happening to her and formulate an appropriate reaction or response. For many, it's the death of a friend or a family member, a job loss, a change in living

circumstances, menopause, or stress related to money problems.

I can safely assume that it's not a money problem, but it could be a reaction to some other kind of change or influence. If it's not a significant life event, is it an alcohol or drug addiction? You mention in your email that the violent behavior is relatively recent, and it may be something that has developed over the last 4 years that you have been struggling to connect. Without actually seeing her and undertaking a more substantive analysis, I can't say with any certainty what the cause of her violence is, and whether it is drug or alcohol related, but either way it is indicative of a deep underlying sense of unhappiness.

Does your wife have an active social network? Would any of her friends be able to shed any light on possible reasons for your wife's change in behavior? Sometimes friends are far enough removed from the relationship that they can notice things that may not be immediately apparent to you. Your wife may have also disclosed something in discussion to them that may provide some clues to causes and triggers of her mood swings and subsequent violence.

It's a delicate situation here, but if you were able to get a friend of your wife's to disclose some information in order to help you understand what is happening, it needn't be seen as a betrayal of confidence. As long as you are clear about your motivations, the one thing you and a friend may have in common is that you both want to see your wife happy.

I noted with interest you mentioning the fact that your wife is now able to retire early. Has she given up her job yet, or is it something that is planned for sometime in the near future? How does she feel about the thought of retiring? For many people, the thought of retiring fills them with fear, and the perception that their purpose in life, or contribution to the relationship or life in general is somewhat diminished. Is this a possible trigger for her depression and mood swings?

Is early retirement a goal of hers, or is it something you have just assumed she would like? I understand that your wish that she retire is motivated by love and a want to see her relax and live a more relaxing lifestyle, but is it what she really wants? I would encourage you to sit down with your wife to discuss your goals, both personally and as a couple. What do you want to achieve in the next 6 months? A year from now? 2 years? Are your goals compatible with your wife's goals? Are both your individual goals compatible with the relationship goals?

Talking about goals and dreams may be a way of inviting input into the relationship, and provide an avenue by which your wife can feel motivated to share her thoughts and opinions. Is she able to freely talk about her dreams in your current relationship? Your wife may be acting out of frustration at decisions she doesn't feel part of.

Either way, you need to make it clear to your wife that when she loses control and displays violence, communication is effectively shut down. When this happens, you need to disengage, turn around, and walk away. At times like that, you are being called to respond to her with love. You still love her, and you should tell her that. But also tell her that you do not love the mood swings or the violence. That has to change. Then you walk away. The longer you give her moods the attention she craves, the more set the behavior is going to become.

When she is calm and feeling more rational, invite her into discussion. Talk to her about her mood swings. How does she feel about having to yell or get violent? Does she feel she is happy or in control when she is behaving that way? What aspect of the behavior meets her needs? In what way does it help her achieve her goals?

If possible, I want your wife to examine the behavior and her goals, and see if there are alternative behaviors that will assist her in reaching her goals. Make a list of alternative behaviors and the pros and cons of each. It's also a valuable exercise in examining and considering the impact of her behaviors on others.

Another important short-term solution is to take some time away from your daily routines and have a holiday. It doesn't have to be anywhere lavish, and it's important that you are able to spend time alone as a couple. If you can think of somewhere quiet and private, a scenic retreat that you have enjoyed visiting in the past, make a booking for at least a week.

In that time I want you to remove yourself from your home and work as much as possible. Simplify your life as much as possible, so that the only decision to be made each day is what time you feel like getting up, and when you feel like eating. I have a retreat that I visit that is outside of cell phone range, has no clocks, and is quite removed from the influence of the outside world. I awake when I feel rested, I eat when I'm hungry, and I can read books, listen to favorite old albums, and feed my soul and reconnect with my life's purpose.

Sometimes we clutter our lives with things we tell ourselves are necessary, when all we really need is a roof over our head, a hot shower, and some good food. Living for a week as a couple in very simple circumstances may force your wife to see how it's possible to cleanse your life and consciousness of the things you tell yourself you need, and how pleasant a simple life can be.

Simplicity and happiness are a state of mind, but they are also a choice. Living very simply for a week or two may help your wife see how many of her stresses, the very things that make her so unhappy, are actually quite insignificant in the scheme of things. As a couple, you have a lot to celebrate. You have each other, you love her, you have your health and your children. Material wealth,

waiting in traffic, and fingerprints on mirrors are very much secondary to what's really important!

I want you to understand the gravity of this situation. The behaviors you have outlined show someone at breaking point, and one in desperate need of help. The challenge for you as a couple is to identify the source of her anxiety and find ways to alleviate the stress and modify her response to it.

I wish you the best of luck.

Until next time,

Andrew Rusbatch

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About the author:

Andrew Rusbatch is the host of Save My Marriage Today Premium Home Study Course, and co-author of the original Save My Marriage Today! e-book. Andrew has been working with the Save My Marriage Today team since its inception, helping counsel hundreds of couples through a host of challenging marital issues.

Save My Marriage Today contains 4 explosive marriage saving e-books, as well as an exclusive collection of enlightening members articles. Together, this dynamic and comprehensive Save My Marriage Today package gives couples in crisis ALL the tips and techniques that are proven to really save marriages. You can learn more about how to save your marriage at:

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