

How to Handle Marital Issues Without Hurting Your Kids or Parents

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Human beings are social creatures who rely on connection to thrive. However, when it comes to marriage, it's important to remember the adage: "Keep your parents and children out of your marriage." While it may be tempting to vent to those closest to us in times of conflict, doing so can negatively affect our relationships and loved ones. Children, regardless of their age, should never be caught in the middle of marital strife. Being in the middle puts them in an untenable position, constantly wrestling with where their loyalties lie. Regardless of how much empathy they may have for their parent's situation, they also love their other parent, which can create feelings of guilt and confusion. It is not appropriate to put children in a "no-win" situation.

Using parents as a sounding board for marital grievances is similarly ill-advised. Parents will always take their child's side and view any harm done to their child as a personal affront. Any injury to you by your spouse hurts your parent, creating tension and animosity between your spouse and your parents that may never entirely dissipate, even after resolving the presenting conflict. Becoming insiders to your relationship can lead to strained relationships for years or even decades.

Confiding in someone not directly involved in your relationship might be the best choice. A trusted friend, your clergy-person, or a professional counselor are all excellent options. These individuals can provide an objective perspective on the situation and offer guidance on how to move forward. If you don't have a confidante, writing about your feelings in a letter or journal can help you collect your thoughts and identify precisely how you feel. After careful editing, sharing the letter with your spouse may be appropriate. Many people find it quite helpful to write two letters--one with all the exclamation points and anger, and the other version after

rereading and cooling down--an edited version with the vital information without the emotional acting out.

This method can create dialogue opportunities in a safe and controlled environment. If this method does not feel safe, or you believe your spouse will not be receptive to your feelings, consider seeking professional help. Bottling up your emotions can lead to passive-aggressive behavior, explosive outbursts, and other destructive expressions of anger and hurt.

Not taking your marital problems to the kids or mom and dad is generally advised, but exceptions exist. In cases of abuse, reaching out to someone for help is imperative. Help is available. Your resources may include parents, a friend or neighbor, a domestic violence shelter, or the police. Abuse is not only physical violence - it can be verbal or emotional behavior that generates fear, stress, and emotional trauma. If you are afraid to talk to your spouse about your feelings, that could be a telltale sign that you should seek help.

It's important to remember that while we rely on human connection to thrive, there are certain situations where it's best to leave loved ones out of the equation. Children and parents are not appropriate sounding boards for your marital grievances. Instead, confide in a trusted friend, clergy-person, or counselor to work through your feelings and identify the best path forward.

You probably know whether your relationship needs communication skills or whether YOU need protection from abuse. Get the kind of help you need.

**Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-7233**

\$2.95

This is a digital download available immediately.

