

Are You Married to a Jerk?

Do you love yet dislike your spouse at the same time?

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It happens to a lot of people. You fall in love, and the [romantic phase](#) can blind you to your partner's imperfections. Unfortunately, later you may realize that your spouse is really a jerk.

You think your mate will [change](#). Or that you can help bring out the best in them. You hope that in time, the difficult aspects of your spouse's personality will go away. But in the vast majority of cases, it simply does not happen.

The result is that you may find yourself married to a person you don't like. Comments from others, such as "You should have known better," or "Didn't you see it while dating" won't help. Maybe you did miss some red flags or ignore some warnings, but that doesn't change the current situation.

Types of Difficult Spouses

- Know-it-all
- Negative thinker
- Critic
- Wishy-washy type
- Silent clam
- Bully
- Sickeningly sweet type
- Procrastinator
- Self-centered and selfish person
- Demanding mate
- Joker
- Embarrassing spouse

Behavior or personality traits that you don't like or don't agree with are not the same as [abusive behavior](#). If you are facing abuse, ask for help from a doctor, therapist, shelter, or hotline.

Coping Strategies

Personality compatibility is an important characteristic of happy relationships. The irritating habits and activities of a spouse can drive you up the wall just like the drip, drip, drip of a leaky faucet. If ignored, it only gets worse. As soon as you start to realize you are in this predicament, take action right away.¹ Don't let the resentment build until you explode.

There is hope for this situation. However, it does take honest and caring communication. Remember that you also have behaviors and traits that annoy your partner.

- Recognize that you can't change your spouse. You can only change your reactions and responses. The upside: If you change your behavior, your spouse may want to change theirs. Or you may see a different reaction than you are used to (with luck, a better one).
- **Try to focus on the positive.** Looking only at the negative behaviors in your spouse can be self-fulfilling. If you find yourself in this trap, spend one evening, one meal, or one hour looking for the positive in your mate. Then do it again. The next time, see if you can focus on the positive for twice as long.²
- **Reinforce positive behavior.** When your spouse does something you like, say so! Say it in a sincere, positive fashion. Speak to your spouse the way you would want to be spoken to, not with sarcasm or veiled criticism.²
- **Maintain eye contact when stating your opinions and feelings.** If you are going to make a statement or request, prepare it ahead of time and look your spouse in the eye while speaking. This demonstrates your honesty and openness.
- **Be straightforward and clear in your communications.** Avoid hints, veiled comments, and passive-aggressive statements. Don't make your spouse guess what you need. Ask for it directly.³

- **Make time to be alone together.** Walking together is one way to prompt a pleasant, natural conversation. Walking, especially in a natural setting, can also help both of you relieve stress.
- **Don't place blame.** It only creates defensiveness. Use "I" statements. Instead of, "You should," begin your statement with, "I need," "I want," "I feel." Focus on the behavior you would like to see changed and how it makes you feel. You are allowed to complain to your spouse. Just do so effectively to minimize the likelihood of the conversation escalating into an argument (or shutting down completely).
- **Be honest with yourself.** If you make a mistake, admit it. You can even ask your partner what changes you should make as well.
- **It's okay to set boundaries.** If your spouse's jerky behavior becomes abusive in any way, firmly state that this is unacceptable. Have a plan for what you will do if it doesn't stop.³

It can be helpful to go to couples counseling to work on your relationships together. Marriage is hard. People tend to bring their best selves to dating and then relax, sometimes into rude or mean behaviors, once married. But with effort, you can turn in a more positive direction—together.⁴

It is important to remember, however, that no one needs to remain in an unhappy marriage. If your marriage is not improving or if your spouse is not interested in changing, then consider your options to ensure your happiness.