



Marriage ADHD

Have we lost the instinct for commitment?

By Alex Dimitriu, M.D.

Marriages have always been complicated. It takes time and effort to develop trust and intimacy and the deep love that sustains a couple over many years and through the rough patches. It takes sacrifice and compromise and putting another person's wants and needs ahead of your own. These are timeless truths. Yet it seems that the ways in which marriages develop - or fail to develop - have changed. What's going on? Do we have "marriage attention deficit disorder"? Have our lives become so fragmented and our attention so distracted that we can no longer focus long enough to sustain a strong bond with a life partner?

What's up?

It would appear that that is indeed often the case. Life moves fast. We expect everything to be easy, every need to be instantly gratified, often without human interaction. Dinner is delivered to our door. Directions are spoken into our ears. Alexa answers every question.

The elephant in the room is technology. It is in every aspect of our lives, especially our social lives. Our social media selves - what we

choose to show and tell the world - become more real than our true selves. What we truly want and need is sublimated to the superficial projection of a life that doesn't really exist. The same is true of projecting an image of a perfect marriage while losing sight of the reality of two flesh-and-blood people who can't possibly live up to that image. And when our primary means of communication is the text message - with anxiety and resentment surfacing when responses aren't instantaneous - there's little opportunity for real understanding and empathy.

What to do?

Given this environment, how are we to manage our married lives? How do we develop marriages that strengthen and deepen over time, that don't fall apart at the first sign of trouble? Here are some suggestions:

- **Put down the phone!** In one form or another, social media is here to stay. It isn't necessary to delete your account or to keep those romantic photos to yourself but it is important to recognize that there's more to your relationship than professing your love to hundreds of friends. Invest time not

in posting updates but in developing real intimacy and working on the quality of the interactions with your partner.

- **Put down the phone!** Dozens of texts a day won't put your relationship on firmer footing. Make time to talk to each other - openly and honestly, with your full attention - about what matters, about hopes and dreams, about how you each feel about your relationship.

- **Put down the phone!** Don't snoop on your partner's phone. Whether or not you find something damaging to the relationship, no good will come of breaking the bonds of trust. Once broken, trust is hard to rebuild. If something is bothering you enough to tempt you to snoop, talk about it.

I don't mean to imply that technology is at the root of all marriage problems, but there is some irony in the fact that a communication device may be the very thing that is getting in the way of meaningful communication. And the only route to a lasting relationship is through meaningful communication. There is no right answer but as in everything, honesty is the best policy. In this or any other time, the only way to avoid "marriage ADHD" is through open and honest communication.

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