

How to Handle a Hypercritical Spouse

By: Autumn Schulze, MA, LMFT

Do you feel like the love has been drained out of your marriage? Does it seem that no matter what you do, your spouse is dissatisfied with you? Do you find yourself bewildered and dismayed by the frequency and intensity of your spouse's criticisms? If so, then you may be living with a hypercritical spouse. Swimming in a stream of constant negativity, without drowning in it, can be challenging to say the least. But there are some things you can do to keep your head up and reclaim your joy.

1. **Listen to what they're saying and do an honest self-assessment.** Who knows, they might have some good points. Our spouses live with us day in and day out – and so, they see the good, the bad, and the ugly in us. Even if their criticisms are meant to tear us down, we can use them as a springboard for self-improvement.
2. **Make a decision that you do not need their approval in order to be happy.** Your spouse doesn't have the power to make you a miserable, lonely person – not unless you give them that power. This may require a monumental shift in your thinking. Yes, it can be depressing to feel like you've lost the love of your spouse. But, you have to decide whether you're going to live on in that depression or you're going to work to push through the pain and reclaim your life. If you are depressed, and it's severe enough that it's making it difficult for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or maintain other relationships, then seek treatment. Counseling and medication can work wonders for depression.
3. **Find healthy ways to meet the emotional needs they're not fulfilling.** Many of us marry thinking that our spouse will be the one person who will always love us, and we count on them to provide most if not all of our affection and companionship. If your spouse is hypercritical, you can no longer count on them to provide the advice, encouragement, and affirmation you need. Instead, you'll need to turn to the Lord, yourself, and other people for this kind of support.
4. **Imagine how you'd live if they weren't a part of your life.** This can help you determine the ways in which you're allowing your spouse's criticisms and negativity to discourage and inhibit you. The point here is not to fantasize about divorce, but to ensure that you keep living your life in spite of their destructive attitudes and behaviors. If you were single, would you take up a hobby, further your education, make new friends, get physically fit, or develop your spiritual life? If so, then why not do it now? Don't wait for them to get better – start living your life now!
5. **Remember the Golden Rule.** Strive to be the kind of spouse that you'd like to have. Model the kind of behavior you'd like to see from them. Your spouse doesn't have the power to make you a cold, unkind person. If nothing else, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you're living your life well and being the kind of person you want to be.

6. **Pray.** Remember, if your spouse's heart attitude toward you has soured, there's very little that you or any other person can do to change it. Only the Lord can change a person's heart. So, intercede on their behalf - ask the Lord to soften their heart toward you and to help them focus on the good in you, rather than the bad.

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