

Growth In Marriage

In courtship, two people are presenting personalities they've tailored to fit the moment. When their "masks" come off, the marriage really begins. A husband-and-wife team--Judith Barnard and Michael Fain--identify five specific areas, which they call challenges, where problems are likely to arise and need to be understood.

First, they write in the August Reader's Digest, you need to feel secure about yourself. A common problem occurs when one insecure person looks for a mate who will provide strength; that person may be looking for the same quality. The authors call this "two people standing on weak knees." Intimacy can be blocked by the partners' separate insecurities.

Second, as the masks come off, you need to understand your partner well-warts and all. The warts may be difficult to accept, but the process is essential. "The more we expose ourselves without damage at the hands of our loved ones, the more trusting we become and the easier openness becomes," Barnard and Fain counsel.

Third, often quite unsuspectingly, couples bring to marriage expectations based on their pictures of their parents. "The real challenge is to fit only those bits and pieces that were good in our parents' marriage into the picture puzzle of the new family we are creating," the authors advise.

Fourth, psychotherapist Marilyn Morris has this to say about sexuality--another possible area of conflict in the marriage: "It is essential that a couple talk about what each of them enjoys, what each dislikes, and especially about what each of them wants sex to be, not only for pleasure but also as another vocabulary in a caring relationship." The solution, once again, is communication.

Finally, there is the matter of roles--who will do what--within the family and at work. Experts agree that while the old roles are in question, the new ones are still relatively unformed. In doubt, couples will tend to revert to stereotypes. "Couples usually find that growing up does not come automatically," the digest concludes. "They must work at it but this kind of growing up--taking responsibility and sharing more fully-- makes for more happiness in the end."

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