

Stay Happily Married

A resource for married couples.

Creating a happy marriage is possible and this site is dedicated to providing resources to help couples who want to stay together. By providing information about qualified marriage counseling, we hope to encourage couples to get the help they need. The site also features articles, other websites, books, and workshops which offer the tools needed to create happy, lasting marriages.



Avoiding Infidelity

This is Episode number 32 of Stay Happily Married, "Avoiding Infidelity."

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. We are glad you could be with us. I have on the phone line with me Dr. Betty Phillips. Dr. Phillips is a psychologist and counselor from Pittsboro, North Carolina and she holds a doctoral degree, a Ph.D., in psychology from Harvard University. I should say that with my Boston accent but you don't want to hear that. She's certified by the National Register of Psychologists and she specializes in relationship and marriage counseling.

Now, I always find it interesting when we're talking to a psychologist to note whether they've been married or not and whether it's gone on for a while. Dr. Phillips is married. She has grown children and so apparently she knows some things that are working out for her. Welcome to the show, Betty. I'm glad you could join us.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Thank you, Lee.

Lee Rosen: You know, we see a lot of marriages end at least partly due to affairs by one spouse or the other. I mean, I just feel like that's an issue that I'm dealing with just all of the time in our practice. I assume you're seeing a lot of that in your practice?

Dr. Betty Phillips: Yes. I am, Lee.

Lee Rosen: And any sense of -- when folks are coming in for marriage counseling is it the exception or is it the rule that there is an affair going on?

Dr. Betty Phillips: Actually, it's the exception. And that's great because a lot of people who are dealing with affairs incidentally go straight to the attorney instead of starting at the beginning and trying to revitalize their marriage, which is what we always recommend. And I work a lot with couples and I talk and write about prevention and early intervention and so a lot of couples do come in for counseling for what I can call a tune-up. And they might have, say, six sessions. They might do some homework, do some reading, and then call me back and say, "Everything is better." And I say, "Great."

Lee Rosen: Right. That is great. Now, you have practiced how long?

Dr. Betty Phillips: Oh, my goodness. I don't even say. I got my Ph.D. in '67.

Lee Rosen: Wow.

Dr. Betty Phillips: So with grown children you can assume I'm "mature."

Lee Rosen: Have things changed over the years with respect to infidelity? Do you feel like when you're talking to people that you see different things now than you did years back or are we all sort of the same?

Dr. Betty Phillips: I think there is a difference because more people are spending time in the marketplace; both spouses work. There's just more stress. There's less emphasis on family. There's less emphasis on talking around the dinner table. The children are with the Game Boys and the parents are working late on their e-mails or their work at home. And so there's not as much family solidarity and so there's more family disunity. And then I'm going to talk a little bit about what happens in the workplace and how workplace and friendships become affairs. So that is a major difference that I see now.

Lee Rosen: So many more families where both spouses are working. There are just so many more opportunities for affairs to take place.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Interesting. Now, I'm curious, we want to talk about avoiding infidelity.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Right.

Lee Rosen: So is that more about pushing off people that are making approaches or is it more about keeping your marriage strong? How do you look at that?

Dr. Betty Phillips: It's about both.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Yeah. It's really about both.

Lee Rosen: Right. Okay. So let's jump into this. We do a lot of these programs and I've heard a lot of good information about making marriages work. And one of the things that I hear over and over is that when there are these arguments that people have -- maybe they're yelling at each other about who didn't take out the trash, I guess. That's the one that I hear about at home is, "Why haven't you taken out the trash?" That those kinds of arguments are not really about the trash, that they're really about I guess the relationship.

And are affairs the same thing? Are they really sort of symptomatic of something else that's going on? Is it more about sex or other issues in the marriage? Is that where the affairs are coming from?

Dr. Betty Phillips: I'd like to address that question in several ways. Mostly they're not about sex, and there are a few exceptions which I'll address in a minute. But most couples do marry for keeps and they marry for the long run and they're very happy; they intend to honor their marriage vows. They do then encounter a number of issues, which include chores like taking out the trash and sex in marriage and also money and parenting and in-laws.

But they still feel like -- and they should, in my opinion -- try to resolve those areas inside the marriage. So even if they're having sexual incompatibilities, they work with their marriage partner or work within the marriage.

So then something would happen -- several things that might happen to cause them to go outside of the marriage, but sex is not usually the case, with a few exceptions and people need to watch out for these exceptions because there are individuals who have sex additions. And there are some narcissistic personalities who feel that they're entitled, and they're entitled to big screen TVs or boats, and they're entitled to sexual affairs while they're traveling, for example. And so a spouse needs to watch out for those kinds of patterns because they indicate a severe personality problem in the other spouse and that needs to be dealt with differently than

infidelity which occurs between spouses who don't have those problems.

Lee Rosen: Okay. So you have really two very different types of situations, at least two. Are your chances of avoiding an affair really pretty low when you're dealing with these sex addiction types of situations? Are those people sort of destined to commit acts of infidelity?

Dr. Betty Phillips: Well, it's that they don't much care. Sex addiction is treatable and Patrick Carnes is an expert; I'm not an expert in that area. He's written quite a few books on sex addictions so that it is treatable and you don't have to act out your desires unless you feel entitled to do so; and that's a personality disorder, not necessarily an addiction.

There are therapists who specialize in those kinds of problems and so if that kind of pattern is detected those kinds of therapists should be called upon for treatment. Most therapists do not specialize in those particular areas, however.

Lee Rosen: So with sex addiction you really want a specialist in that area.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Exactly. And a narcissistic personality the same.

Lee Rosen: How do you know -- if you're the spouse of this person what would be the signs that this is someone over in that category?

Dr. Betty Phillips: Well first, like I said, they're very narcissistic, they're very egocentric, their needs take precedence in sex and in other areas, and it seems to be repetitive.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Versus the traditional couple who is having problems, having issues, and then something happens within the marriage or outside the marriage -- as I'll explain -- but they start on the slippery slope toward an affair, not multiple affairs.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, are there signs that it's coming? You've seen a lot of people that have had affairs. Are there things that the spouses might have seen before it got to that point, patterns that emerge or warning signs?

Dr. Betty Phillips: Yes, definitely. And I want to call the listeners' attention to a wonderful, wonderful book resource. It's called *Not "Just Friends"* by Shirley Glass and it is the culmination of her life work as a therapist in infidelity counseling. And so she's really the expert and

she has put all of her knowledge into this particular book. It describes in great detail warning signs.

And by the way, I have an article on my website about warning signs and I would not go to Dr. Google and look up warning signs because if you do you'll find out that everything is a warning sign and you'll become very alarmed. So the best thing to do is really look at self-help books like Shirley Glass; she's an expert. But go to a counseling professional who is an expert, who is trained in this field. And by the way, Harvard is great but I didn't learn anything about infidelity at Harvard. It's something that's not covered in a lot of psychology or social work courses. It's something that you usually learn by in-service training, continuing education.

But once you've found a trusted professional, I would consult with them like you would consult with a doctor for a medical question or a tax specialist for a tax question. I would go with my spouse, if possible -- if both will go; sometimes they won't. Sometimes each spouse will be involved in their own therapy. But a lot of people don't know that one spouse, one husband or wife, can go by themselves because there's only person they can guarantee who will change and that's themselves. And they can make some major changes in themselves, cause their spouse to change, and cause the marriage to change.

So I would consult a professional and I would the read *Not "Just Friends."* And she describes this new trend I was talking about where people are in the marketplace having lunch, having drinks after work, and it starts to be a slippery slope and a friendship can turn into an affair without people really thinking a lot about it. So the important thing to do is to put up boundaries within the privacy of the marriage so that even if you have a friendship outside the marriage it stays as a friendship and does not enter this slippery slope where you become emotionally intimate and then sometimes - - often sexually intimate.

Lee Rosen: Right. Are there things that if you were the spouse who was not getting involved in the affair but you started to worry that, hey, this is not just friends anymore, it's headed in that direction, are there things that you can do to try and -- what would be your emergency response to your belief that things are beginning to head in the wrong direction?

Dr. Betty Phillips: Well, I would consult with someone. I would consult a self-help book, perhaps, but I would consult with someone. Not get overly alarmed, but start paying attention to what's happening in the marriage. What often happens is the marriage relationship goes on

the backburner and everything else is more important. And so people aren't really paying attention to either improving their marriage, which would be the ideal, or trying to figure out what is going on in their marriage.

Ideally they'd start to work on improving their marriage but they'd also keep their eyes and ears open because if some data is coming in -- purchases being made at Victoria Secret that are not for you -- these are real things that I'm just dealing with with current clients. Two hundred text messages to a certain number that comes in on the cell phone, you start to wonder what's going on. And so you have to look for that particular data.

But also, the other way of looking at this, is to try to improve the marriage. Try to put the marriage into the front of your thinking and, like I said, consult a therapist or trusted professional before you go to a private detective or attorney.

Lee Rosen: I get the sense that people know they're having trouble, they know things aren't the way that they want them to be, but it takes them a very long time. You have an article on the Stay Happily Married site, something you wrote a while back that you say that people wait six years from the time they start having problems in the marriage before they go and they talk to a counselor. It would seem like, gosh, that six years is prime time for an affair. That's I guess when it's happening. Does that make sense?

Dr. Betty Phillips: Yes. That's when an affair can be starting, when the marriage goes from the foreground to the background and it's on the backburner. The couple is -- during the beginning they don't want to look at the problem so we have the term "denial." So, "We're fine," there's no problems, they don't want to look at it, and denial and fear. They're afraid of admitting there's a problem, they're afraid of knowing what's going to happen, and they're afraid of therapy. They don't have any idea what's going to happen when they walk in to a professional, close the door and the professional says, "Tell me your deepest secrets."

So they're afraid and so they don't take the steps to find out. They put on their blinders and go on during the six years or longer, because six is an average. But people like me and you are trying to sound the alarm and say, "Come in early."

Lee Rosen: Right. Do something.

Dr. Betty Phillips: My article was "Treat Your Marriage Like Your Teeth." You see your dentist every six months to check your teeth. Not that you should

see a therapist every six months, but early intervention is the key here.

Lee Rosen: Now, I guess some folks will just assume, "Things aren't working for me at home and things will be fine if I just move on to another relationship." They have that sort of grass is always greener thing. And so I guess they figure an affair is no big deal because they're going to leave anyway.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Yeah. Or they may see it as a big deal but they believe this is the better path. And most of them actually believe that, that the grass is greener when they're involved in the affair because the grass does seem pretty bright and pretty green, high romance, nobody's taking out the trash, nobody's arguing about who's going to do the laundry or pick up the towels from the bathroom floor, children crying at night. That doesn't happen. So you're back in the foyer that you had when you first met your spouse, which unfortunately you've forgotten about.

When I have couples in for marriage counseling the first thing I ask them is, "How did you meet and what attracted you to your spouse?" And sometimes they go, "Uh --" it takes them a while.

Lee Rosen: Right. They've forgotten all that. Yeah.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Exactly. So they're all involved in this high romance. And what they don't realize is that most end very unhappily. Most affairs are not reality, that the grass is not greener. It's definitely not true that if the marriages do dissolve -- marriage/marriages, but sometimes people have multiple affairs if they're partners are married. So there's kind of a double-double-cross there. But that if both those marriages end and the affair partners become involved in real life a lot of them end unhappily. And those few who do get married, 75 percent of those marriages end in divorce. So the grass is definitely not greener, although people believe it for some very human reason.

Lee Rosen: Right. No one ever wants to hear that it's not likely to work out. I see just so many people coming in to get a divorce and they are just convinced that they're going to end up happily married to the person that they've been having the affair with. And it almost never happens. That is just not the way it goes down.

Dr. Betty Phillips: You're right. It almost never happens. And if they do get married it's pretty unhappy.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah. They get married and for us it's almost like you're guaranteeing another divorce for our practice when they run off and marry the person they were the affair with. It's just a matter of time.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Exactly. You may as well sign them up.

Lee Rosen: Right. "While you're here we'll give you a deal on your second divorce if you'd like to go ahead and sign up," yes. It sounds horrible but it's what I've seen over and over again and it's interesting to hear you confirm it from your perspective. Very interesting.

The one thing you mentioned in your last answer, you talked about the whole euphoria that you get in a new relationship. And all these folks had that feeling when they got married and involved with the person that they're married to now before the affair. Do you think that the difficulty of -- obviously there's a transition where you go from that euphoric state to a more mature relationship where things sort of settle down and some of that initial excitement is lost. Are there people out there that just can't live without that mad passionate thing happening and that leads them to an affair?

Dr. Betty Phillips: Yes. There are people who are addicted to risk-taking, impulsive behavior and so forth, which is not most people. Most people, what happens is they do go through this transition which I was writing about. In fact, my latest article that I just sent in is about the need for premarital counseling, either before the marriage or right after the nuptials, to teach the couple some life, love, marriage skills that they can use because it's a whole skill set in learning how to have a relationship. Most people don't even realize that.

In fact, during the euphoria stage if you ask them what the divorce rate is for marriages they say, "Well, about 50 percent." And you say, "How about yours? What is the prediction for yours?" And they say, "10 percent."

Lee Rosen: Oh, right. Yeah.

Dr. Betty Phillips: I don't know if they've ever been to a statistics class or not. They really believe that because they're in love everything will be fine. And of course it won't and they are subject to the same statistics as everyone else when the euphoria starts to fade.

And what I was just talking about, about the pressures of daily life, right now -- especially right now -- take precedence and you don't pay attention to your spouse or you don't pay attention to keeping what I call the "love bank," make deposits in your love bank. And

you really need to do that every day. Every day you ignore your spouse is a day that your marriage starts to go down the tubes because a marriage must be built on fondness and admiration. Your spouse must be your best friend in a lot of ways. I mean, you can have other friends but your most personal, private, intimate friend needs to be your spouse.

Well, how do you build that friendship? You build that with every day spending time with that person. It doesn't have to be all day. It doesn't have to be every night go to bed at the same time. It doesn't have to be having dinner together. It doesn't have to be having coffee in the morning. But it really should be one of those things where you build those skills.

A lot of marriage counselors feel like anger management/conflict management is the skill to be taught. And of course we do teach that skill but it's empty, it's useless, unless you have that -- what you call mature, committed, long-term relationship based on fondness and admiration. That is why you want to get over the conflict.

Lee Rosen: Right. Got to be motivated.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Yeah. Otherwise you just practice and then give up.

Lee Rosen: Right. You know, just listening to you I will bet you have gotten a lot of marriages back on track. It really sounds to me -- you have a very wise perspective on all of this. And I'm sure a lot of that just comes from experience of dealing with so many couples.

Dr. Betty Phillips: And maturity.

Lee Rosen: Maturity. That's right. Well, it's inspiring to know that there are people out there that can help us to get over these difficulties and to make things work. And I love what you say, that you don't need to run to a divorce lawyer's office; you need to go in and get some help and you can make this work if you'll give it a try. It just sounds like you've had a great deal of success with that.

Dr. Betty Phillips: And then when it doesn't work, they know for sure. And I do make referrals to attorneys and I do say, "Well, spend this time gathering the data, trying to improve your marriage. If it doesn't improve, well, this is time well spent."

Sometimes people say, "I've just wasted a year or two of my life trying to improve my marriage." And I say, "No, no. It's time well

spent. Now you know for sure if this is going to work," because all marriages don't work.

And attorneys who offer mediation, conciliation, settlement are very -- and sometimes you have to be aggressive in the courtroom to defend your client; I understand that. But some marriages do need to end and so the attorney definitely plays a role there.

Lee Rosen: Well, I suspect the kind of folks that are listening to this show who are interested in making it work, that their marriages are going to work, that they're predisposed to make it work and they're going to put the energy and the effort into it. And I don't think everyone always knows what's out there and what the options are so I think you've done a great service to them by filling them in on what is possible, and so I appreciate that.

Dr. Betty Phillips: Well, thank you. And as I would say, I appreciate what the attorneys do also, and especially the move to mediation and conciliation when possible. It's not always possible, but when possible it makes lives and they're children's lives a lot happier and better adjusted.

Lee Rosen: Well, thank you, Betty, for taking some time and being with us today. I really appreciate it.

Dr. Betty Phillips: You're welcome, Lee.

Lee Rosen: You know, it's always better to stop a problem before it happens than to try and deal with it after the damage has been done. And my hope is that this show helps you, that it inspires you to avoid some of the common mistakes that lead to affairs and that ultimately result in the end of the marriage. And Dr. Phillips I think really makes it clear that we can do things to get back on track and to make things work and we don't have to fall victim to some of these thoughts and actions that take place. We can get ourselves back on track and make our marriages work and be much happier.

A special thank you to Dr. Betty Phillips: for being with us today to talk with us. And if you would like more information about Betty's practice, she has a great website. She mentioned some of the articles that are on the site and I think you will find it to be a valuable resource. We'll put a link to it in the show notes at StayHappilyMarried.com but her site is BettyPhillipsPsychology.com. And also, if you'd like to get up with her by telephone she can be reached in Pittsboro, North Carolina at (919) 967-1860. And lots of information that you can get from her about her services and the things that she can do to help you.

Thank you so much for listening in today. I hope that we have given you some information that will help you and will make your marriage work. We would love to hear your comments about this show or any of the other episodes. We really appreciate the feedback; we get a lot of it and it helps us to figure out where to go next and how to do this job better because we want to do everything we can to help you make your marriage work. Our comment line is (919) 256-3083. We also have an e-mail box for the show at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the web at stayhappilymarried.com. We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at (919) 256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.