

Five Toxins that Poison Your Marriage

by Mark Merrill

Toxic words poison, and sometimes even kill, relationships. Words like "I hate you" or "I wish I never met you" can cause irreparable damage. I confess there have been too many times when harsh, harmful words have come out of my mouth toward my wife, my kids, and others. It grieves me. I'm continually working hard to choose my words wisely.

The way you speak to your spouse and family has a lot to do with your role as a dad. Your son is learning how to be a husband from his dad. Your daughter is looking to her father to set the standards for the kind of husband she's looking for.

Here are five toxins of the tongue that we must avoid.



1. Sarcastic Words

Comments like, "The house isn't going to clean itself," or "Do I look like your maid?" seem like no big deal on the surface, but sarcastic words are sometimes just symptoms of an underlying unmet expectation that has frustrated a spouse for quite some time. They can be used as a cowardly way to "dig" at your wife.

2. Unsupportive Words

Every husband and wife wants to know that they have their spouse in their corner cheering them on. When a spouse says things like, "That's a crazy idea," or "Do you really think you can do that?", what they may really be saying is "I don't believe in you," or "I'm not on your team." Instead of saying, "That's the worst idea ever," you could say, "That's a great idea, but I feel like you would be better at this..." We should be our spouse's No. 1 fan, not her biggest critic.

3. Disrespectful Words

Respect is not something that has to be earned. It should be given unconditionally in marriage. Disrespectful comments like, "Can't you find a real job?", "I don't care what you say; I'm going to do it anyway," and "You've really been putting on weight" are insulting, offensive, and can undermine a spouse's sense of worth.

4. Comparing Words

When saying things like, "Susan would do that for her husband" or "Why can't you be more like Karen?" what you're really communicating is "You don't make the grade ... you're not good enough" as a wife.

5. Selfish Words

"I don't care how you feel, just get it done." "I want that new boat." "I need someone who really meets my needs." Spouses who care more about themselves than their spouses often start their sentences with "I." It's all about their wants and their needs, rather than their mate's.

Have any, or many, of these toxins of the tongue been injected into your marriage? If so, apologize to your spouse. Healing can only begin when toxins are removed. And in the case of verbal toxins, relationships begin to mend when couples ask for forgiveness from each other.

Be slow to speak. It's OK to be quiet, reserved, and thoughtful about what comes out of your mouth — especially when you are upset.

Make a personal vow that toxic words will no longer come out of your mouth. Putting a Post-It Note by your bed or on your mirror can serve to remind you of your commitment. Give your spouse the freedom to inform you when toxicity starts to stream from your tongue. You were created to build each other up, not tear each other down.