

# FamilyGrowth Reports

*By Larry E. Quicksall, LCSW*

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## High Risk Relationships

### Introduction

Sadly, every now and then, two life partners come to see me because one of them has violated their marital covenant. Either the husband or the wife has had an affair. Sometimes the affair may have been an emotional one while other times it may have sexual. In working with these couples, the statement I hear most often from the offending spouse is, "I never intended for this to happen." Sometimes this statement is made in a misleading manner, but other times it is made with all sincerity. In those sincere cases I focus on helping the offending spouse understand how they ventured down the road of high-risk relationships.

### The Spousal Relationship

All people have relationships that fall into a variety of categories. We have immediate family, extended family, childhood friends, high school and college buddies, coworkers, neighbors, friends, and acquaintances to name a few. One specific relationship that we have and need to hold dear is that of "spouse." The relationship we have with our spouse is the most valuable relationship we can have other than our relationship with God. There are things that we should *only* say and *only* do with our spouse to maintain the integrity of that relationship. It needs to be a special, sacred relationship.

### Neglect in the Relationship

Now, what happens if one spouse is not meeting the various needs of the other in their relationship? Two common examples can be a husband who never modified his bachelor lifestyle to include his wife in social activities, and a wife who became so absorbed in the lives of their children or grandchildren that

there was no place for her husband. What does a neglected spouse do at this point? Since the neglectful spouse is not voluntarily meeting the other's needs, most likely he or she will attempt to use guilt or manipulation to "take" what is needed from the neglectful spouse. Sadly, this often does not work in a positive manner and often results in the couple becoming more distant from each other.

At this point, the neglected spouse often begins looking for other people to meet their needs. Most often people will expand an already existing relationship with someone from the above-mentioned list. They may spend time helping a neighbor in the garden, going out to lunch frequently with a coworker, having after work drinks with the boss, or more frequently visiting with parents or siblings. Many of these relationships remain innocent and are valuable in meeting a neglected spouse's needs. However, if the relationship is with someone of the opposite sex, it can easily turn into a high-risk relationship.

### Starting the High-Risk Relationship

What is a high-risk relationship? A high-risk relationship is any relationship with someone of the opposite sex where we discuss issues or share activities that should only be done with our spouse. High-risk relationships can easily and innocently start, especially with a neglected spouse. Following are some examples of how such a relationship can develop.

A neglected husband takes an art class and strikes up a friendship with a neglected wife taking the same class. Following the end of the course they agree to continue to get together to work on their projects. During these meetings they share frustrations they have with their own spouses and sympathetically

listen to the concerns of the other in a nurturing way. Since this relationship is meeting their needs in such a positive way, both of them begin withdrawing from their respective spouses. They find themselves pouring more and more relational energy into this high-risk relationship that is now turning into a surrogate marriage and an emotional affair. If this relationship continues down this path without intervention I'm betting it will become a physical or sexual affair.

Another example begins with a husband who is frequently on the road due to his career. The wife is employed in a male-dominated workplace where she and the "fellas" frequently go to lunch or have after work drinks on nights her husband is out of town. One of the male coworkers pays her a little extra attention, which she enjoys, and it reminds her of how her husband used to treat her when they were dating. Over time they have lunch and drinks together without the other "fellas", and on occasion she has this coworker over to her house when her husband is gone. This friendly coworker relationship has crossed over into a dangerous high-risk relationship that will lead into a physical affair quicker than either of them will expect.

## Tips for Avoiding a High-Risk Relationship

1. To avoid the devastating consequences of high-risk relationships, I encourage couples to proactively do several things.
2. Everyday strive to understand and meet your spouse's needs. Take your marital relationship very seriously and never take your spouse's needs for granted. I believe that no one is immune to temptation, so don't force your spouse into an overwhelming dilemma.
3. Avoid risky situations by setting common sense rules. For example, if you are employed in a mixed workplace, like most of us are, don't go to lunch individually with anyone of the opposite sex. If you do go out to lunch make sure you always go in a group.
4. Include your spouse in your life even when they are not physically present. For example, frequently talk about your spouse in various

conversations and always do so in a positive manner. Keep photos of your spouse and children in your workspace as a clear sign to everyone that your marriage and family is vitally important to you.

5. Limit the topics of conversations you have with those of the opposite sex. If you are a man, never discuss marital problems with a female friend or coworker, and if you are a woman, never discuss marital problems with a male friend or coworker. An exception would be if the person you are speaking with is in the company of their spouse and you are in essence speaking with them as a couple. Of course, it is all right to seek professional counseling or pastoral support from someone of the opposite sex as long as the other person is one to follow professional ethics and guidelines.
6. If problems are occurring in your marriage, don't let them go unresolved. Deal with them immediately! If you can't resolve them yourself, then invest the time and energy in professional counseling. If you had termites infesting your home, would you simply wish them away or would you call an exterminator? Remember, your marriage is a much more valuable investment than your house.

## About the Author

Larry E. Quicksall is a Marriage & Family Therapist and founder of Christian Counseling Associates of Effingham. He received his Bachelor's of Arts degree in Psychology from Eastern Illinois University and his Master of Social Work degree from the University of Illinois. He received his Clinical Social Worker license in 1993.

Larry has worked extensively in several fields of practice including substance abuse prevention, crisis intervention, severe mental illness, terminal illness and hospice care, parental coaching, and marital growth and restoration to name a few. He is also a member of the adjunct faculty of Lake Land College where he has taught in the field of psychology since 1991. Larry is a professional speaker and trainer in the human services field, and you can view his website at [www.FamilyGrowth.org](http://www.FamilyGrowth.org).