Predicting Your Own Divorce:
Why You Should Never Use the D-Word

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

If you want to give your marriage a chance to recover from whatever is bothering you at the moment, don't use the D-word. Don't say, "I want a divorce" in the heat of an argument. Don't use it as a punishment, a threat, a dirty fight tactic, or as a joke. When you do, you are setting the stage for that very thing to come true.

Marital partners in conflict, often use all manner of dirty fight tactics as they try to get their spouse to see things their way. Both are typically trying to accomplish the same thing, or one is trying to escape from the conflict all together by withdrawing. The words, "I want a divorce!" definitely has impact and gets the other person's attention. If you say "I want a divorce" or if you hear "I want a divorce" long enough, it loses its shock value and it becomes an idea that you get used to. It becomes real. Then it becomes a possible solution. Eventually, it can feel like the only solution.

The only times you should ever use those words is when you have deliberated long and hard and have reached the decision to really divorce. You might say, "I really mean it in the heat of the discussion," and I would argue is that what you mean is, "I am really angry and hurt and I want to get your attention, hurt you, and stop feeling this way." If, after the argument is over, you don't still want a divorce, you did not really mean it during the discussion--so don't say it.

Often only one partner will use this dirty fight tactic. And it works for a long time, to get the other partner's attention, cooperation, or whatever else might be the desired goal. Then one day, after so many arguments, so many times of using the D-word, the other partner responds with, "Ok", and they mean it.

If you are not absolutely sure that you want a divorce, don't raise the specter of it.

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