

Unhappy Marriage: The Process of “Falling out of Love”

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The Unhappy Marriage: The “Falling out of Love” Process A Marriage and Family Therapist outlines the 3 stages

In this article I will outline the 3 steps of an unhappy marriage that most of us, actually everyone that I’ve encountered, go through as we “fall in love” and then fall “out of love.” At the end of the article I will explain why it is crucial for you to grasp and even welcome this process.

First, a relational law states that relationships of emotional investment are either moving forward and getting better or are headed in reverse and getting worse.

Unfortunately most marriages or relationships of emotional investment are headed in reverse. All you need do is realize that the divorce rate hovers at 50% and 9 out of 10 report being unhappy in their marriage or relationship.

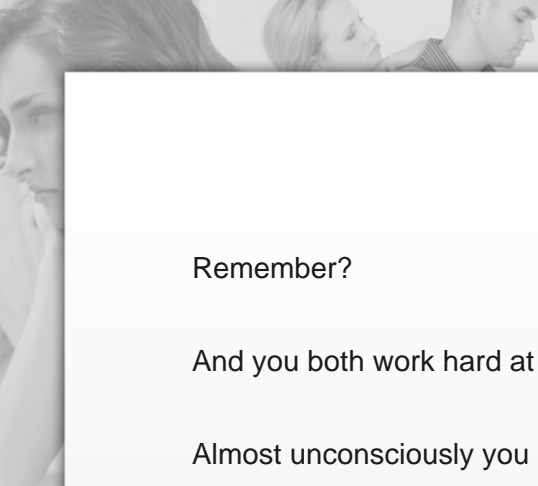
Here’s what happens in your relationship to generate an unhappy marriage.

Step #1: You Fall in Love”

You meet Mr. or Ms right.

It feels terribly wonderful.

You think about them almost constantly; you can’t wait to see them; you get the butterflies. The touching sends a shiver down your spine, the conversations, and the texting goes on and on... you are in heaven.



Remember?

And you both work hard at being there for the other.

Almost unconsciously you do what you KNOW they will just love. You speak their language. You try to fit. You let them know what you appreciate and what you absolutely LOVE about them, over and over.

There are various factors which fuel the powerful feelings of being in love.

A Marriage and Family Therapist will tell you that you each have personal needs that at an unspoken level guide what you attempt to elicit from the other. You need attention and, the other picking up on your personal need system, gives you attention. You need validation and you receive validation. You need to be appreciated and presto, appreciation spews forth. You need to succeed and your successful acts are honored. You need to be cared for and you receive care.

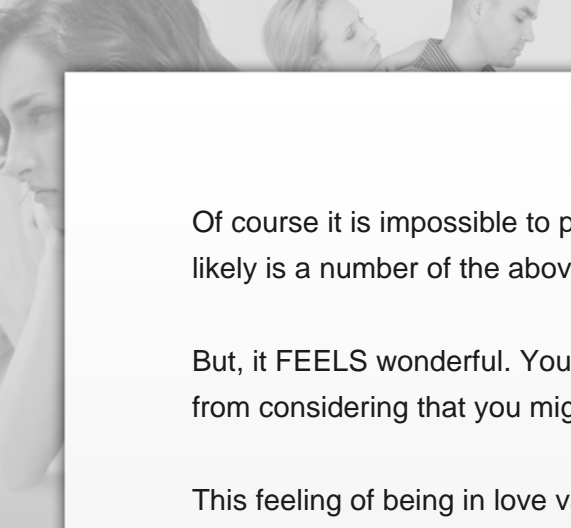
Some couples report: it's almost as if the other can read my mind. I don't have to say or do anything; the other is there FOR ME!

The sexual component may be powerful. A heightened sense of sexual attraction oozes. The physical beauty, the smell and the touch are longed for and become magnets.

The other may represent, beyond your awareness, an image or archetype of what you've always dreamed you wanted in another person. You may remember dreams or images of THIS person. And now that other is there, for you!

Again, beyond your awareness, the other may significantly fulfill a family of origin script. The other seems to seamlessly enter your life. The other speaks and acts as if they belong. It's as if the other has been there for a long time.

You may view the other as a "soul mate." It's as if destiny or the spiritual realm suddenly provides you with a partner. You wonder or perhaps believe that the relationship was preordained long before you actually met.



Of course it is impossible to pinpoint the origin of this falling in love phenomena. In reality it most likely is a number of the above factors and maybe other factors not mentioned here.

But, it FEELS wonderful. Your world feels alive and you truly FEEL in love. You are far removed from considering that you might one day have an unhappy marriage.

This feeling of being in love varies from person to person and from couple to couple, depending on your personal need systems and the interplay of different factors.

The word was sometimes passed around when I was in college a few years ago that so and so was at college to get her MRS degree. Perhaps she was looking for a particular type of man who would follow a specific career. She was there to get that man, and that future.

Falling in love meant finding the right person. The 'feeling' of being in love was less important. Or, others feel the 'biological' clock ticking and are looking to begin a family. Being in love means finding another who shares the same goals and values.

For some it's "just time" to find a mate, get married and begin the next chapter in life. The next chapter is the thing to do.

You come together with your personal need systems that are flamed with reciprocity and you bring together your images and ideals that seem to coincide.

Oh sure, you pick up on some qualities that begin to raise a red flag, but it's a little flag and it's not blowing strongly in the wind. No big deal. You are certain your love for each other will conquer all.

You fan each other's inner flame and keep it burning hot and bright.

And, life goes on. The relationship moves ahead.

For some reason, you can't quite fathom, the intensity, passion, and all consuming excitement begins to fade. The flame turns to an ember.

And, then the little things begin to irritate, just a tad, but you pass them off.

Can you remember what it was for you?

What were some of the first triggers that ever so slightly pushed your button?

Step #2: The beginning of falling out of love: the reality of differences.

You loved her spontaneity and fun. It fit perfectly your image. But now it seems a little chaotic, flighty and annoying.

You loved his strength and confidence. He was there for you. You felt safe. But now it seems a little contrived, he's more aloof and seems uncaring and insensitive.

You loved the long conversations as you shared dreams and hopes, but it seems that now you wonder what to talk about. You drive in the car together in silence.

What happened to the dreams and shared ideals?

You begin to notice the unhappiness in your marriage or relationship.

You long for the touching and intimacy but they seem to occur with less frequency and intensity. The relationship begins to feel old and familiar. The shivers down the spine are gone.

You feel a little colder, more distance, more frustration; or the arguments emerge and become somewhat heated.



It seems more difficult to be together, to enjoy the times and to relish seeing the other.

It's not bad, but it's a little disconcerting. What happened to that loving feeling? Are you falling "out of love?"

Step #3: The Deja vu cycle continues to erode the love.

You make a statement and your partner responds with words or body language that is negative.

- It may be critical.
- It may dismiss you.
- It may be demeaning.
- It may be a glance.
- It may be a word.
- It may be quiet.
- It may be loud.

But, you know you are not being responded to in a way you want. Your personal needs which at one point were responded to with intensity and consistency now seem ignored.

You begin to doubt the love. You feel the distance, and in feeling the distance you feel less sure of yourself, less safe, more fragmented, more irritated, more frustrated, less appreciated, less desired and less loved.

Negative thoughts and feelings stir within you. You now have an unhappy marriage.

Your feelings get in the way and you respond negatively or react.

You become critical.

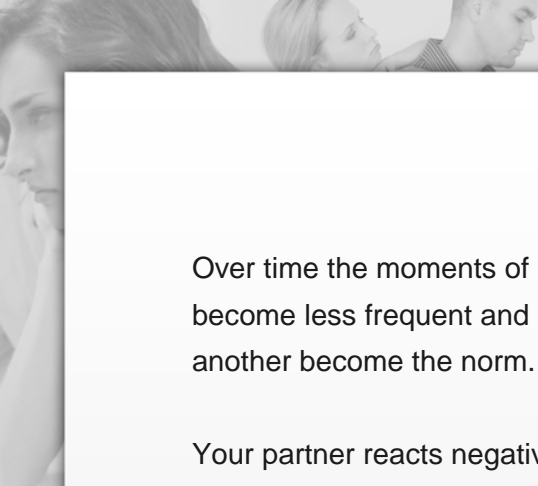
You say, “why can’t you, or why won’t you... ?

You implore the other to change.

You wonder what you are doing wrong? Where did you go wrong? What’s wrong with the relationship? Why are you ‘falling out of love?’

And then you hatch a plan to get back to that loving feeling. If I do this, then the other will do that? If only I do this, then the other will do that?





Over time the moments of passion and intimate warmth, the laughter and at ease conversations become less frequent and less intense. The moments of frustration and the reactivity to one another become the norm.

Your partner reacts negatively to your reaction.

You respond negatively to his negative response to your negative reactivity. And... on and on.

The cycle has a grip that controls you and the relationship. You think, “Here we go again.” And in saying that, you want the cycle to end, but come to believe you have no power to stop the pernicious cycle.

And, the two of you, over a period of time discover a way to end it: one usually walks away. And in a few days or perhaps weeks here you go again...

And, try as you may, you cannot extricate yourself from this cycle.

The frustration, distance, emptiness, anger and hurt build over the months and years. You realize you have “fallen out of love.”

Your relationship is in reverse. Each month, or each year it disintegrates into the solitude of distance, the constant frustration or the chaotic noise of recycled conflict.

Perhaps you are sick and tired of your marriage: perhaps extremely unhappy. Perhaps there is a crisis and you know something **MUST** be done. Perhaps you have been through this old familiar cycle in another relationship and want something different.

Something **MUST** be done, you think.

And now you are here.

Take a deep breath!

How to Reframe the Falling out of Love process.

Let's pause and look at some key factors in this "falling in love" and "falling out of love" process. These are some considerations as I reflect on my years as a Marriage and Family Therapist:

1. Please know you are not alone if you despair the fact that you have "fallen out of love." I dare say that 80% of the couples I've worked with since 1981 have one person in the marriage or relationship who believe the marriage is in deep trouble and are unhappy because s/he has "fallen out of love," wants to recapture that "in love" feeling or now doubts the validity of the relationship because "love" no longer is present.

Our culture idolizes the being "in love" state. It's what's supposed to happen when you marry. It's supposed to continue and hold the marriage together. For many it's the basis for an affair (I've fallen "out of love" with you and am "in love" with someone else.) And, the betrayed spouse often attempts to rekindle that "love" and bring the relationship back into balance.

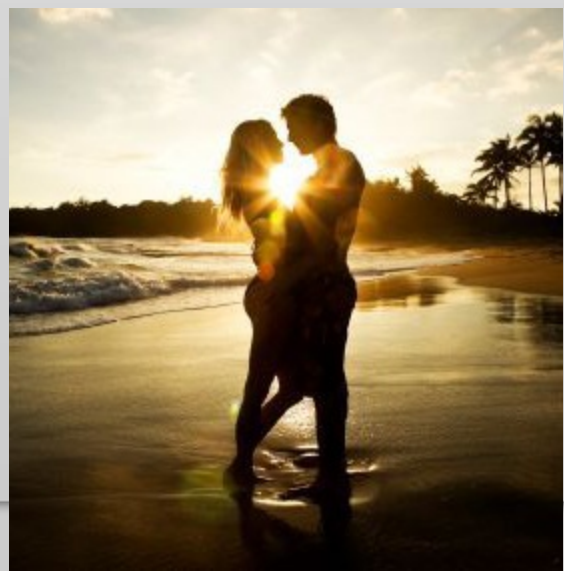
Losing that "loving feeling" often precipitates a crisis, or at least raises questions about the validity of the relationship, frequently for one of the partners.

2. You don't truly want to go back to recapture that "in love" feeling. Much of "falling in love" is mirroring back to your significant other what seemingly pleases, coincides with preconceived images or meets powerful personal needs, as I alluded to above.

Underlying the mirroring are some processes that will not serve a relationship in the future. For one, mirroring means you give your personal power to the other person. Your eye is often focused upon the other, wondering whether or not the other is pleased, is happy, and is satisfied with what you do. You lose focus of your standards, your values and the personal and unique goals for your life.

Participating in the creation of that "in love" feeling means you are on your best behavior. You look good. You speak well. You present your good side. You work to keep the good feelings going. Energy is expended to perform in ways that keep this good feeling love alive and well.

3. Give thanks for "falling in love." Yes, "falling in Love" is a great gift. It's the spark and often the





lightning bolt that brings you together. You don't just "fall in love" with anyone!

"Falling in love" is a gift!

Remember this gift with delight, not regret.

Instead of, "It is so sad we lost this!" move to "I'm so glad we had that!"

Remember what it was like. Make a list of all the great moments. Talk to your partner about those moments. Find ways to celebrate those moments.

4. Remember, and remember this often: "falling in love" is just the beginning. Move beyond the fairy tale ending, "and they lived happily ever after."

Your marriage is not complete or finished with the "falling in love" process. "Falling in love" is not meant to be the state of your relationship until "death do us part."

There is more, much more.

5. A new and powerfully wonder chapter opens to you once the "falling in love" feelings fade. You are offered the opportunity to move your relationship to a deeper and far richer state of joy.

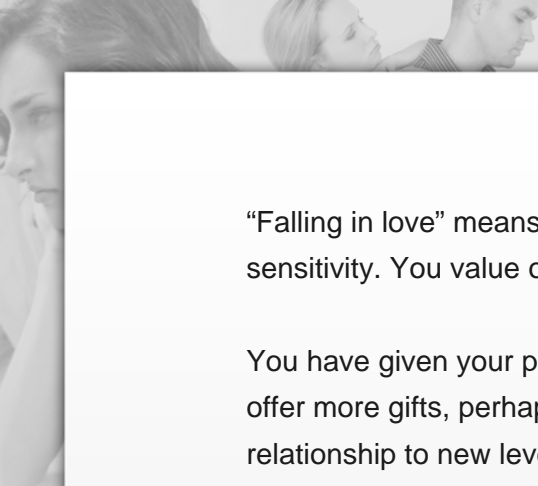
Rather than allowing the red flags, the differences, idiosyncrasies and triggers to disturb, view them as an opportunity to learn more about your partner. Applaud the differences, for much more awaits you.

Discover how your differences become your strength.

Enable each other to experience their profound lovability and desirability, IN SPITE OF their foibles and defects.

The next chapter calls for you to be YOU! No performance is needed. You need not try to make love happen. Love happens with your partner because you are merely you.

6. Give yourself credit for "falling in love."



“Falling in love” means you have the capacity to tune into someone else. You have sensitivity. You value others. You can care. You can give.

You have given your partner a great gift, this “falling in love” gift. And, now you are ready to offer more gifts, perhaps of a different nature, but gifts, nonetheless, that will propel your relationship to new levels of acceptance, understanding, personal freedom, intimacy, passion and unbounded joy.

Go for it! Find your Happy Marriage or Relationship!