

6 Types of Dysfunctional Commitment

Any discussion about healthy relationships certainly would benefit from some explanation of the most common forms of erroneous commitment. Here are the ones we most typically encounter.

1. Co-Dependent Commitment:

I will spare no emotional energy to solve problems caused by your irresponsibility; and labor endlessly until I have lost myself and everything I own for you.

Unfortunately there are those personalities that become so involved in the target of their affection that they lose themselves. That is, they become so immersed in satisfying the desires of their partner that they eliminate any of their own needs. It does not start out this way, but over time, the codependent person keeps increasing the time and energy spent satisfying the other person's lifestyle issues that they merely become almost hypnotically entranced with a vision of the partner rather than themselves. When this Co-dependent person comes into my office, and I ask them to tell me "What is going on?" they begin a seemingly endless story about their partner; usually in such rambling detail that they lose themselves in their own story and tangentially go off in directions that are irrelevant to the point they were initially intending to make. They lose a grasp of reality, misperceiving that others are interested in the story of their partner. When all is said, they have totally forgotten what started the conversation and have provided little information about what "they" need or want from the relationship.

2. Moral Commitment

God has directed me to remain married; I will be happy even if I am not; I will persevere; we will stay together because only sinners divorce or break up.

I firmly believe that relationships that have a foundation in religious beliefs tend to be stronger and more prosperous. They are more durable and resistant to the negative pressures of life. But unfortunately I have encountered clients that have superimposed their personal interpretation of moral teachings on their relationship and have redefined "commitment"—*I will spare no emotional energy to remain married; I will be happy even if I am not; I will persevere; "we" will stay together.* They painfully endure miserable relationships with a distant, removed and emotionless partner, leading anything other than a satisfying family life. They produce children that are raised in a family

environment filled with unclear, conflicting, and suppressed feelings of love, anger, and frustration. As adults, these unskilled children 'attempt' to have their own families only to learn they have no idea how to "collaborate" let alone "problem solve" -- and are often lost in their own emotional turmoil. Seldom do they realize that many of their current partner/relational issues are seeded in the subliminal teachings of their own parents.

3. Pedestal or Addictive Commitment

I cherish and admire you so totally that all my emotional energy is directed to problem solving that I may be able to participate in your lifestyle so that I can be near you.

All meaningful relationships should contain a healthy amount of admiration for the person who is loved. I want to underscore that a degree of reverence for the finer virtues of one's partner is a positive quality. Admiring someone for their greater attributes when it enhances your appreciation for the persona of the one you love is genuine and encouraged.

However, when a person is "infatuated" with the perceived, but inaccurate, interpretation of another; and manifests a strong desire to align themselves in a "committed" relationship with that person, they can create an intense, internalize attraction that overwhelms their own personal feelings of self-worth (as well as common sense and logic). In some cases, their insatiable desire to satisfy and please the other person skews their own sense of reality. And they do outlandish things to please, accommodate, or comfort their *pedestal* partner.

It is not uncommon for the pedestal partner to become disenchanted with their admirer. As they disengage the "admirer" becomes fearful and attempts to try harder. This results in the pedestal partner becoming more 'turned off'. They become intolerant to the endless gifts, generosity and favors. Ultimately the admirer tries harder to find ways to stay in the pedestal partners' life. In the worse cases, they exhaust themselves emotionally, spiritually and socially as they go to great lengths to hang on to someone that has decided it is over.

4. For The Kids

In order to save the Kids, I will spare no emotional energy to endure the problems my partner and I can not solve, at great personal sacrifice, so that I can be near the kids.

It amazes me at the number of people that “marry” because “she got pregnant”, with little or no regard to the emotional health of the relationship. Although their intentions are good, they are misguided. Years after the children are born the relationship fails because they married for the wrong reasons. Yet, as the divorcing partners struggle through the turbulence of child custody, child support, visitation rights the children become emotionally battered and torn.

Sometimes the pain of divorcing is so intolerable they decide to “stay together for the kids”. In a twist of logic, and at great personal dissatisfaction, these parental partners stay together “for the kids” under the illusion that they can benefit the child by continuing to play the role of loving “father” or “mother”. Ironically, they demonstrate in their role of “husband” or “wife” that it is normal to be emotionally distant and removed. Either they don’t recognize it is part of their responsibility to their children to Role Model healthy emotional relationship, or deny that responsibility. They fail to give value to the impact of their “modeling” a loving collaborative relationship to their children. They mistakenly believe they can better their children by “sticking-it out” and avoid addressing the interpersonal issues between themselves.

Marriages that are maintained “for the kids” fail to realize that they are teaching their children unacceptable guidelines in maintaining a relationship. Later the parents are shocked to witness their own children pick less than worthy mates. The “For the Kids” parents pass on to their children a dysfunctional style that the children role model later in their own relationships. In a mistaken and inadvertent twist of illogic, the cold, tolerating, removed parents teach their children to seek out and marry partners that are cold, tolerating and emotionless.

5. Phase of Life Commitment

I am getting too old to be alone, and have decided that it is time to spare no emotional energy in problem solving to develop a collaborative lifestyle so that I have a partner.

My mom told me one time, “when you are young you give it away, and when you are old you buy it back.” She was humorously referring to our own lack of appreciation for life when we are young. In our youth, we have not yet acquired the wisdom to know that the decision made today cannot be re-done. Many times we put off long-term relationships in favor of successive short-term goals related to education, career or other personal goals.

Mate selection is difficult for a person aspiring to find “the right” partner. After all time is limited, and opportunities to meet “new” people are scarce. People are often isolated to work, education, or other responsibilities. Throw into that the endless maintenance chores of health and home -- and it is quite possible have 10 years pass with little notice. However, birthdays accumulate and the awareness of time passing often smacks a person in the face like a cold bucket of water when they are looking at their own birthday cake with “happy 30th” spelled out in bright red icing! Now the once tender inner voice is screaming “Oh my God you’re 30 and still not married!!”

I can’t generalize about the merits (or demerits) of this type of relational commitment. To be honest, the motivation to “be married” does not always reflect the motivation to “stay married”. There are as many successes as failures. Just understand that at times people find themselves extremely motivated to find the “right” person when they begin to worry about being alone, and the prospects of “not” finding a mate. Remember, there is the right person out there for you. Short sighted decisions to marry for the wrong reasons only make matters worse, and do not change the pain of a dreadful divorce.

6. Commitment of Convenience

You make me so comfortable that I usually spend very little emotional energy in problem solving because my lifestyle benefits from your lifestyle. .

This type of relationship is so evident that movie comedies have been written about it. “How to Marry a Millionaire” is one that we recollect. There is the ongoing Mis-perception by many that Money + Prosperity = Harmony/Happiness . I have found that children raised in economically challenged households are raised without many of the material pleasures of life. I say this because of the large number of Commitment of Convenience relationships I experience through my personal practice. These clients reflectively elaborate about how difficult life was and how impoverished their existence was “before I fell in love with XYZ.” These people frequently become so immersed in the glut of material possessions, that they lose their sense of direction. They begin to realize there is a difference between being “a part” of a grander scheme versus “apart” (separated) from their inner desire for having a healthy loving emotionally intimate relationship.

A person can only live so long using “material possessions” to give them status/meaning. Eventually, they find themselves unsatisfied and restless. Money and

possessions cannot satisfy your God given desire to use your talents to the fullest of your abilities. Self-worth is not related to Net-worth, and when people mistakenly pursue Net-worth over Self-worth they are often experience a loss of self as they find themselves unhappy and disconnected. Living a life of abundance does not mean that has to be material wealth/prosperity. We are emotional creatures that strive for love, affections and meaningful relationships. Happiness is grounded in love, commitment and meeting the emotional demands of those we care about.