

Exercise: The Marital Poop Detector

David and Candace admitted that they tried to keep expectations for their marriage “realistic” as they grew older. This may have been a mistake. Research shows that people with the highest expectations for marriage usually wind up with the highest-quality partnerships.

One way to hold your marriage to high standards is to assess regularly how things are going. That way, you can detect small problems before they grow into big ones.

The following questionnaire, which also appeared in John’s book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (Crown, 1999), has proven to be a great tool for helping couples to do just that. We call it “the marital

poop detector" because it helps you to sniff out problems at the first sign of trouble.

We recommend that you think about these statements often. Check as many as you believe apply. If you check more than four, plan to discuss these issues with your partner sometime within the next three days.

1. I have been acting irritable lately.
2. I have been feeling emotionally distant.
3. There has been a lot of tension between us.
4. I find myself wanting to be somewhere else.
5. I have been feeling lonely.
6. My partner has seemed emotionally unavailable to me.
7. I have been angry.
8. We have been out of touch with each other.
9. My partner has little idea of what I am thinking.
10. We have been under a great deal of stress, and it has taken its toll on us.
11. I wish we were closer right now.
12. I have wanted to be alone a lot.
13. My partner has been acting irritable.
14. My partner has been acting emotionally distant.
15. My partner's attention seems to be somewhere else.
16. I have been emotionally unavailable to my partner.
17. My partner has been angry.
18. I have little idea of what my partner is thinking.