

Quiz: Harsh Start-up: A Problem in Your Marriage?

Beth and Craig often got off to a bad start in discussing their conflicts because Beth had a habit of starting conversations with a statement of criticism or contempt. This “harsh start-up” made Craig feel so defensive that he wouldn’t listen to Beth, which made her even more frustrated and angry—increasing the chance that she’d introduce her next complaint with criticism and contempt as well. This vicious cycle was making it nearly impossible for them to solve their problems.

The following questionnaire may help you determine if harsh start-up is harming your marriage:

PARTNER A**T/F****PARTNER B****T/F**

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|-------|---|-------|
| _____ | 1. My partner is often very critical of me. | _____ |
| _____ | 2. I hate the way my partner raises an issue. | _____ |
| _____ | 3. Arguments often seem to come out of nowhere. | _____ |
| _____ | 4. Before I know it, we're in a fight. | _____ |
| _____ | 5. When my partner complains, I feel picked on. | _____ |
| _____ | 6. I seem always to get blamed for problems. | _____ |
| _____ | 7. My partner is negative all out of proportion. | _____ |
| _____ | 8. I feel I have to ward off personal attacks. | _____ |
| _____ | 9. I often have to deny charges leveled against me. | _____ |
| _____ | 10. My partner's feelings are too easily hurt. | _____ |
| _____ | 11. What goes wrong is often not my responsibility. | _____ |
| _____ | 12. My spouse criticizes my personality. | _____ |
| _____ | 13. Issues get raised in an insulting manner. | _____ |
| _____ | 14. At times my partner complains in a smug or superior way. | _____ |
| _____ | 15. I have just about had it with all this negativity between us. | _____ |
| _____ | 16. I feel basically disrespected when my partner complains. | _____ |
| _____ | 17. I just want to leave the scene when complaints arise. | _____ |
| _____ | 18. Our calm is suddenly shattered. | _____ |
| _____ | 19. I find my partner's negativity unnerving and unsettling. | _____ |
| _____ | 20. I think my partner can be totally irrational. | _____ |

SCORING

Give yourself one point for each "true" answer.

If you score under five, harsh start-up is probably not a big problem in your marriage. You and your spouse initiate difficult discussions with little criticism or contempt. As a result, your chances for handling conflict are good.

If you scored over five, you're probably using too much criticism and contempt when you talk about problems. Taking a more gentle approach will improve your ability to handle conflict together. The following exercise may help.