

9. Solvable. Oscar and Mary may have different philosophies about savings, but their conflict over money doesn't appear to be symbolic. Instead, it's a straightforward difference of opinion about what to do with Oscar's inheritance. For that reason, they could probably find a straightforward compromise. Perhaps, for example, they could spend half of the amount on equipment and save the rest.

10. Perpetual. Money has very different meanings to Ryan and Sarah. Since the symbolic significance of money is usually rooted in childhood experiences, it's unlikely that Ryan will naturally transform into a big tipper or that Sarah will suddenly learn to love clipping coupons. But if they work together on this perpetual problem (and especially Sarah's contempt for her husband about this issue), it will cease to be a major sore spot in their relationship.

QUESTIONNAIRE: ASSESSING YOUR MARITAL CONFLICTS

Now that you have a greater understanding of the differences between solvable and perpetual problems, it's time to categorize your own marital issues in this way. By doing so, you'll know which strategies to use to cope with them. Below is a list of seventeen common causes of conflict in a marriage. For each, mark whether it is a perpetual problem in your marriage, a solvable problem for you, or not a problem right now. If it is either a solvable or a perpetual problem, check all of the specific subareas that you think are currently troublesome.

I. We are becoming emotionally distant.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- We have difficulty just simply talking to each other.
- We are less in touch with each other emotionally.

- I feel taken for granted.
- I feel my spouse doesn't know me right now.
- My spouse is (or I am) emotionally disengaged.
- We spend less time together.

Comments:

2. There is spillover of nonmarital stresses (such as job tension) into our marriage.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- We don't always help each other reduce daily stresses.
- We don't talk about these stresses together.
- We don't talk together about stress in a helpful manner.
- My spouse doesn't listen with understanding about my stresses and worries.
- My spouse takes job stress or other tensions out on me.
- My spouse takes job stress or other tensions out on the children or others.

Comments:

3. Our marriage is becoming nonromantic and passionless; the fire is dying.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- My spouse has stopped being verbally affectionate.
- My spouse expresses love or admiration less frequently.
- We rarely touch each other.

- My spouse or I have stopped feeling very romantic.
- We rarely cuddle.
- We have few tender or passionate moments.

Comments:

4. We are having problems in our sex life.

Perpetual ___ **Solvable** ___ **Not a problem right now** ___

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- Sex is less frequent.
- At least one of us gets less satisfaction from sex.
- We have problems talking about sexual problems.
- Each of us wants different things sexually.
- Desire is less than it once was.
- Our lovemaking feels less loving.

Comments:

5. Our marriage is not dealing well with an important change (such as the birth of a child, a job loss, a move, an illness, or the death of a loved one).

Perpetual ___ **Solvable** ___ **Not a problem right now** ___

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- We have very different views on how to handle things.
- This event has led my partner to be very distant.
- This event has made us both irritable.
- This event has led to a lot of fighting.
- I'm worried about how this will all turn out.
- We are now taking very different positions.

Comments:

6. Our marriage is not handling well a major issue about children.
(This category includes whether to have a child.)

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- We have very different goals for our children.
- We differ on what to discipline children for.
- We differ on how to discipline our children.
- We have issues on how to be close to our kids.
- We are not talking about these problems well.
- There is much tension and anger about these differences.

Comments:

7. Our marriage is not handling well a major issue or event concerning in-laws or another relative(s).

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- I feel unaccepted by my partner's family.
- I sometimes wonder which family my spouse is in.
- I feel unaccepted by my own family.
- I feel my partner takes sides against me.
- There is tension between us about what might happen.
- This issue has generated a lot of irritability.
- I worry about how this will turn out.

Comments:

8. One of us is flirtatious outside the marriage, or may have had a recent affair, and/or there is jealousy.

Perpetual ___ **Solvable** ___ **Not a problem right now** ___

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- This area is the source of a lot of hurt.
- This is an area that creates insecurity.
- I can't deal with the lies.
- It is hard to reestablish trust.
- There is a feeling of betrayal.
- It's hard to know how to heal over this.

Comments:

9. Unpleasant fights have occurred between us.

Perpetual ___ **Solvable** ___ **Not a problem right now** ___

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- There are more fights now.
- Fights seem to come out of nowhere.
- Anger and irritability have crept into our marriage.
- We get into muddles where we are hurting each other.
- I don't feel very respected lately.
- I feel criticized.

Comments:

10. We have differences in our basic goals and values or desired lifestyle.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- Differences have arisen in life goals.
- Differences have arisen about important beliefs.
- Differences have arisen on leisure-time interests.
- We seem to want different things out of life.
- We are growing in different directions.
- I don't much like who I am with my partner.

Comments:

11. Very disturbing events (for example, violence, drugs, an affair) have occurred within our marriage.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- There has been physical violence between us.
- There is a problem with alcohol or drugs.
- This is turning into a marriage I hadn't bargained for.
- Our marriage "contract" is changing.
- I find some of what my partner wants upsetting or repulsive.
- I am now feeling somewhat disappointed by this marriage.

Comments:

12. We are not working well as a team.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- We used to share more of the family's workload.
- We seem to be pulling in opposite directions.
- My spouse does not fairly share in housework or child care.
- My spouse is not carrying his or her weight financially.
- I feel alone managing this family.
- My spouse is not being very considerate.

Comments:

13. We are having trouble sharing power and influence.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- I don't feel influential in decisions we make.
- My spouse has become more domineering.
- I have become more demanding.
- My spouse has become passive.
- My spouse is "spacey," not a strong force in our marriage.
- I am starting to care a lot more about who is running things.

Comments:

14. We are having trouble handling financial issues well.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- One of us doesn't bring in enough money.
- We have differences about spending or saving money.
- We are stressed about finances.

- My spouse is financially more interested in self than in us.
- We are not united in managing our finances.
- There is not enough financial planning.

Comments:

15. We are not having much fun together these days.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- We don't seem to have much time for fun.
- We try but don't seem to enjoy our times together very much.
- We are too stressed for fun.
- Work takes up all our time these days.
- Our interests are so different, there are no fun things we like to do together.
- We plan fun things to do, but they never happen.

Comments:

16. We are not feeling close about spiritual issues these days.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- We do not share the same beliefs.
- We do not agree about religious ideas and values.
- We differ about the specific house of worship.
- We do not communicate well about spiritual issues.
- We have issues about spiritual growth and change.
- We have spiritual issues involving family or children.

Comments:

17. We are having conflict(s) about being a part of and building community together.

Perpetual ____ **Solvable** ____ **Not a problem right now** ____

Check any of the specific items below that are problems within this general area:

- We feel differently about being involved with friends and other people or groups.
- We don't care to the same degree about the institutions that build community.
- We have different opinions about putting time into the institutions of community (political party, school, hospital, house of worship, agencies, and the like).
- We disagree about doing projects or working for charity.
- We disagree about doing good deeds for others.
- We have different views about whether to take a leadership role in the service of our community.

Scoring: For each of the general areas that cause you problems, count up the number of specific bones of contention that you've checked. If you've marked more than two, then this is an area of significant conflict in your marriage. For solvable problems, you'll find advice in chapter 9. But if some of your problems are perpetual, follow the advice in chapter 11 as well. No doubt you'll discover that your marriage, like most, is coping with both types of problems.

The Keys to Managing Conflict

In the chapters ahead, you will find specific techniques for handling marital troubles, whether perpetual or solvable. But first, some overall advice: