

Commitment and effort required for rocky relationships

BY HELEN RAVENEL
MOULTRIE NEWS

What are the two primary ingredients of a healthy marriage?

Commitment and effort. It might not sound very romantic but it is true, according to Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) Kent MacEachern.

"The marriage has to be a priority and not be taken for granted," said MacEachern.

MacEachern, who has had his private practice in Mount Pleasant for 30 years, helps couples—many of which are—on the brink of divorce.

A common phrase he hears a lot is, "I love you, but I'm not in love with you anymore."

MacEachern jokingly said he would be a millionaire if he had a nickel for every time he's heard that phrase.

"Often what couples need is to find a balance between love, work and play and meeting individual, marital and family needs," he said.

Frequently, MacEachern sees couples who are one step away from divorce.

"Oftentimes marriages can be saved if they get professional help and work on it," he said.

Troubled marriages often result due to infidelity, but not all of the time.

MacEachern briefed the *Moultrie News* on why affairs happen, how to prevent them and how to work through it.

He explained that after children come, family

becomes the focus while the marriage takes the backseat.

"Oftentimes couples drift and lose connection," he added.

This can lead to affairs when emotional and sexual needs are not being met.

Affairs normally develop from friendships where two people share an emotional connection often in the workplace. If there is chemistry, it is easy to progress to the next step of being physically involved.

According to MacEachern, some people find they cannot get over the betrayal while some can if they can forgive and the trust can be rebuilt.

Statistically, men stray more than women do. But that number is beginning to even out now that more women are in the workplace.

MacEachern regularly hears from clients, "if he/she cheats on me, that would be it."

But when it comes down to it, that is often not the case. "Oftentimes an affair is a symptom of a problem within a marriage—although not an excuse," MacEachern said.

The real underlying issues include emotional and sexual needs not being met, anger, and a couple not having fun anymore. When the focus of the marriage is on child-rearing, the husbands especially, can feel abandoned.

"When one is not getting attention at home, he/she is vulnerable," MacEachern said.

"The marriage can be worth fighting for especially if children are involved."

- Kent MacEachern, LMFT

Three kinds of affairs

MacEachern explained that there are three kinds of affairs: romantic, circumstantial and sexual addiction.

For the romantic affair, this is the "full blown love affair."

The husband or wife no longer feels in love with the spouse.

"This is the most difficult to end," MacEachern noted.

The second type is the circumstantial affair where the person may be fairly happy in the marriage and never thought he/she would cross the line.

However, due to the circumstances such as having too much to drink or being in a compromising situation, he/she succumbs to the temptation.

The third type is the sexual addiction affair where there is no emotional involvement and oftentimes the person has multiple affairs with more than one partner. This person needs professional help for his individual problems before change can take place in the marriage.

Affair proof a marriage

When asked if one can affair/divorce proof a marriage, MacEachern said, "yes, don't wait until you have big problems; be proactive."

There are things couples

can do to improve their marriage. For example, churches often offer marital enrichment programs like "The Marriage Course" which is offered at his church, St. Andrews.

In the marriage enrichment program he uses in his practice, MacEachern teaches communication skills and the five love languages which include: physical touch, gifts, encouraging words (praise, appreciation, flattery), quality time together and acts of kindness.

Couples give and receive love in different ways; everyone has different preferences. He or she needs to discover what is needed and then express it to the partner.

MacEachern explained that avoidance and unresolved issues are the biggest indicators of divorce.

If couples do not talk about issues such as finances, how they spend their time, or sex, to name a few, then the problems only get worse.

MacEachern has seen it time and time again. When people start changing their behavior, the thoughts and feelings can follow.

MacEachern recommends the couple to start spending time together and have fun like they used to do.

He often asks the couple,

"when is the last time you went out on a date?"

Oftentimes couples can't even remember so he advises the couple to go out together and to not talk about money, kids or work.

"Couples look at me like I'm crazy and ask, 'then what are going to talk about?' he said.

MacEachern said that he asks them what they talked about and did before kids, mortgage payments and laundry came along?

MacEachern advises couples to look at the marriage itself as an organism with needs.

"If you don't feed it, water it, it dies," he said.

MacEachern sees love as a verb. Feelings follow actions and behaviors.

He said, "women are more emotionally aware and nurturing, but men can learn to meet emotional needs in their partner and children."

There is hope

There is hope out there for couples who have had a spouse commit adultery.

"The marriage can be worth fighting for especially if children are involved," MacEachern said.

In many cases, couples who recover from an affair can have a better marriage than before—after getting help.

"This can only happen if trust can be rebuilt and they work on improving the relationship," MacEachern clarified.

"Often couples begin to talk about things they didn't talk about before," MacEachern said.

"It is sad that many cou-

ples don't try counseling because many marriages can be saved," he said.

There is a common misbelief that once the loving feeling is lost, it can never come back.

MacEachern pointed out that the loving feeling can indeed come back, even after infidelity.

Until the betrayed spouse can forgive he/she will stay in a state of bitterness and unhappiness.

In the case of an affair, the trust has to be rebuilt and this can take a year or more.

"The person who has torn down the bridge of trust has to rebuild it," MacEachern advised.

According to MacEachern, the couple needs to address the issues in the marriage that were present prior to the affair. The couple must find out why the spouse was unhappy with marriage and what caused him/her to stray.

MacEachern said that many people who have gotten a divorce say they wished they hadn't and regret not working through their problems.

"I approach most problems with couples as solvable if they are willing to work on improving the marriage. It just takes a commitment and effort," said MacEachern.

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Kent MacEachern