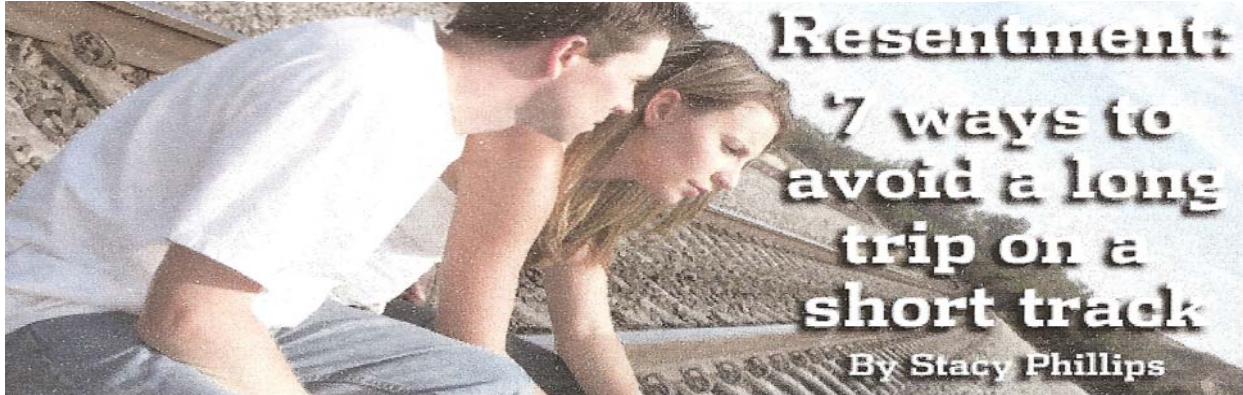


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## How to Guard Against Resentment-Buildup with Your Spouse

Here are 7 tips to prevent your spouse from walking out over burnt toast.

BY STACY PHILLIPS

The result of many breakups stems from resentments that build between couples—spats or nonverbal hassles over "little things" that have been accumulating for some period of time. I have clients in my office day-after-day who bear their souls and vent their feelings of complete and utter frustration over those minor issues—the ones that eventually added up and drove them to finally call it quits.

While many people assume that relationship breakups are due to serious infractions over betrayal, money issues or falling out of love, many more are precipitated by resentments over time. I refer to this "condition" as the "Burnt Toast Syndrome," a metaphor for a person throwing up their arms one day over something seemingly trivial such as your spouse burning the toast as the catalyst for walking out the door.

Resentments do not have to build. Couples do not have to accumulate a boatload of aggrieved feelings over time if they are wise enough to employ preventative measures that stave off grudges. My suggestions for such measures include the following seven tips.

**1. Observe irritating habits early on.** Don't let those "little things" about your spouse rub you the wrong way. For instance, does he insist on putting the ski rack on top of your car instead of his, causing a scratch or two? Does she talk on the phone incessantly while you are out on a date together? Early on in a marriage, when many couples are madly in love, it is normal to overlook those things that bug one another. But, if you do observe a deed, action or word that sends you up the wall, be aware of what you can tolerate and what you cannot.

**2. Talk it out.** The minute you begin to feel resentment toward your spouse, whether it is over them squeezing the toothpaste in the wrong way, burning the toast when one is in charge of breakfast, removing the throw pillows from their side of the bed only, taking time to wash their laundry and not yours—ask for a quiet time to check off your list of grievances. Doing so early on can prevent discord that might build.

**3. Be upfront about what bugs you.** Whether it is the beginning of your marriage or renewing old vows, let your mate know what bothers you. Do you resent having to keep the household budget in line while your partner spends recklessly? Are you always the one having to manage what needs doing around the house—the chores—while he opts out to play golf? Let your spouse know ahead of time about those things that drive you nuts. You could save a lot of grief and ultimately the relationship.

**4. Run your grievances by your therapist or trusted other.** Confer with an independent third party to seek advice on how to handle those little things that tend to irritate you, thus causing resentment. Ask candidly if you are being unreasonable. Explore ways with this trusted advisor to handle the tension with *your* "issues" or those of your significant other so as not to allow resentment to build. Often, a qualified outsider—one that typically deals with couples and their relationship issues—can provide an honest assessment of your complaints and offer solid counsel on how to prevent your mate's irritating habits or thoughtlessness from getting to you. Many of the marriage and family therapists are resentment specialists! Take advantage of their expertise.

**5. Make a reasonable deal.** If you find yourself getting to a boiling point, where you are ready to explode or pack up and move out, have that open conversation with your mate and see if the two of you can strike a deal. Maybe you agree to take turns picking the children up from school and extra curricular activities. Perhaps he agrees to pick up his socks if you stop leaving your makeup items spread out all over his side of the bathroom counter. While some irritants seem relatively petty to one party, they may not appear that way to the other. Cutting a deal to honor and respect one another in terms of "things" large and small is a sure way to keep resentment at bay.

**6. Be fair.** If you say you will honor an agreement—let's say to fill up the gas tank of your spouse's car next time you borrow it—do so. Making an agreement and not sticking to it is the root cause for resentment among most couples. A person can forgive once or twice, but if a person continues to be treated unfairly or disrespectfully, resentment will surely come knocking at the door.

**7. Set a good example.** If you want your spouse to shed their irritating or thoughtless habits, demonstrate some good faith by getting rid of the ones you know unnerves them. That old adage: "Monkey-see, monkey do," can send a very strong message—a positive one that can work to your benefit.

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