



## Eliminating Jealousy in Your Marriage

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The emails continue to flood in on the topic of jealousy. Without question, you sounded forth strongly that extra-marital friendships must be entered into cautiously, as there is a great risk of friendship not only creating jealousy, but worse, leading to unfaithfulness.

While many are quick to criticize anyone experiencing jealousy, more often than not there is at least a kernel of truth in many of the accusations of wrongdoing.

Why are we so quick to experience jealousy? The answer resides not only in the current situation, but for some, in their background. For example, if you were raised in a chaotic environment where there was instability in your home, you may be hypersensitive to any hint of instability. Having experienced abandonment by divorce and brokenness in your childhood home, you may be quick to react when you sense any threats to your family/marital stability now. You may have old wounds needing to be addressed.

One couple who came to The Marriage Recovery Center recently felt very insecure with each other. While there were some “reasons” in their relationship that exacerbated the problem, their early family chaos clearly added to a propensity of feeling insecure. Understanding each other’s early childhood origins helped them keep their mate’s behaviors in perspective.

Even if you had a happy, loving childhood, however, and have escaped instability in adult relationships, it is natural to feel threatened when you perceive a danger to your marriage. We want to protect our relationships, and threats, real or perceived, evoke fear. This is a danger signal and should never be ignored.

And what if your mate, in spite of developing a friendship to a member of the opposite sex, tells you “There’s nothing to be afraid of?” Are you to force yourself to relax and try to settle into the trust they are requesting? Or, can you share with your mate that you still feel threatened, and want precautions to be taken to ease your anxiety?

Again, you’ve voted—strongly.

“Take care of your marriage.”

“Let go of that inner-office friendship with the opposite sex.”

“Build a hedge of protection, showing you value your mate above any other friendship.”

Hear is the strong opinion of one man.

“If a man wants to be friends with another woman, in spite of his wife’s jealousy, he is sending a strong message to his wife. He is saying the friendship is more important than his marriage. His wife or girlfriend is going to get that message and be even more threatened—not less. So, make decisions carefully. In my marriage, I don’t want any appearance of trouble, so steer clear of danger. My wife appreciates it.”

Many problems in relationships are thorny and difficult to resolve. Jealousy, it seems to me, is an easy one to eliminate. In my book, *Nine Lifesavers for Every Couple* I discuss the following guidelines that should be part of every relationship wanting to eliminate feelings of jealousy in their relationship.

*1. Agree that there will be no close relationships with the opposite sex. While a close relationship with the opposite sex certainly doesn’t always lead to danger, a dangerous liaison often begins as a close friendship.*

2. Agree that all relationships will be open to discussion. Dangerous friendships almost always contain an element of secrecy. Keep your friendships open to discussion and scrutiny.

*3. Agree to always be sensitive to your mate’s feelings, placing them above anything else. Feelings must be accepted and honored. They should never be debated. Be sensitive to your mate’s feelings, no matter how uncomfortable they may be to you.*

4. Agree not to scold or judge your mate for their feelings, however unrealistic they may seem to you. Create a safe place in your relationship for feelings to be expressed and protected. Everyone has a right to feel what they feel, and expect those feelings to be heard.

*5. Agree to seek immediate solutions. Don’t let jealousy ruin your relationship. This is an easily solved problem—let your mate know their safety and honor is of utmost importance to you.*

*Dr. Hawkins is the director of The Marriage Recovery Center where he counsels couples in distress. He is the author of over 30 books, including When Pleasing Others Is Hurting You, Love Lost: Living Beyond a Broken Marriage, and Saying It So He’ll Listen. His newest books are titled The Relationship Doctor’s Prescription for Healing a Hurting Relationship and The Relationship Doctor’s Prescription for Living Beyond Guilt.*