

SAVING YOUR MARRIAGE FROM EXTREME CRISIS

MEND THE MARRIAGE: ADVANCED COURSE

BONUS BOOK #2

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Know The Signs Of Depression & Seek Help If Needed

Divorce, separation, and relationship conflict can lead to sadness, depression, and a wide range of other difficult emotions. This is to be expected and is normal for most people.

However, in rare circumstances, or with individuals who suffer from medical or psychological conditions, divorce and other marital conflict can lead to clinical depression. **If, at any time, you believe that the depression symptoms you are experiencing are not normal – or if you have thoughts of suicide or self-harm – seek professional help immediately.**

Regardless of where you live, there are mental health resources and assistance available to you. Contact your doctor or phone your local health care provider to find the help you need in your local area.

[Click here to see a list of symptoms associated with depression.](#) If you encounter any of these symptoms, seek help from a certified mental health practitioner.

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SAVING YOUR MARRIAGE FROM EXTREME CRISIS

We all probably know someone who goes rather blithely through life, eating what they want, working too many hours, not exercising very much, smoking, not going to the doctor often enough, and generally paying no attention to their health. They eat too much salt, drink too much beer, snack on lots of candy – you know the story.



Then one day they have some sort of health crisis – a heart attack, or dizziness due to high blood pressure, or they throw their back out. Suddenly, they get this “wake up call” about their health.

If they're lucky, they get a second chance, and they use it well. They start getting some exercise, and they pay attention to what their doctor is telling them. Perhaps they change their diet drastically, learning to cook delicious but healthier food. Maybe they work hard to quit smoking, or cut out alcohol.

Although it would certainly have been better for them to have lived a healthy life all along, there's no way for them to go back in time and start over. They have to start from where they are. And many people who find themselves in this situation do indeed recover and lead much happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives.

You can imagine a similar situation with regard to someone's marriage – perhaps your own. Looking back from a moment of crisis, from a marriage “wake up call,” you can clearly see that you probably should've done things differently, paid a bit more attention to certain aspects of your relationship, to avoid the extreme crisis that you're in right now.

But it isn't possible to travel back in time to fix the little troubles that led to the big breakdown you are now facing. So the best you can do is to get serious and start from right where you are to repair and strengthen your relationship.

Deadly Divorce

Divorce, that dreaded D-word, is depressing, dangerous and expensive. Avoiding it is imperative because getting a divorce can not only cripple you financially and emotionally, but it can also damage your health and increase your chances of serious depression or even suicide. It can lead you to make many other bad choices.



So, if you've reached the point where you or your spouse, or both of you are thinking about divorce, it's time to take immediate corrective action.

Divorce is like the atom bomb of marriage. Be sure you never hint at or threaten a divorce in an argument with your spouse. That's like a nation dropping an atom bomb on a neighboring country because of a trade or border dispute. Don't do it.

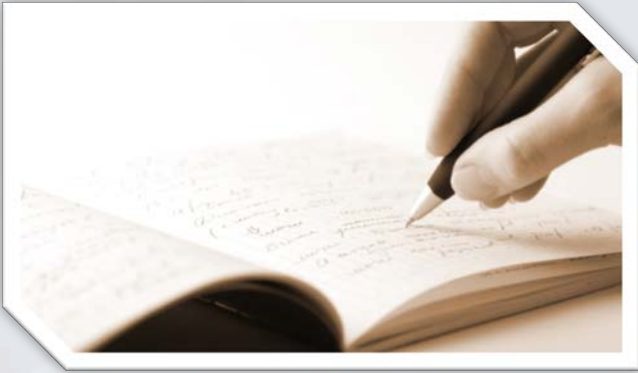
If your spouse has dropped that bomb, it can feel like your whole life has already been destroyed. You may feel incredibly sad, like you want to withdraw from the world and just give up. Or you may feel intensely angry, and you may hurl your own atom bombs back at your spouse, trying to hurt them the way they've hurt you.

But though it may feel good to lash out at them in your hurt and anger, it doesn't accomplish anything. It's like that unhealthy patient lying in the hospital bed sneaking another cigarette or gobbling down some salty chips. You may feel temporarily better, but it ain't worth the price you will pay down the road.

Start From Where You Stand

It's important to understand the situation you're in so that you can get to work improving it. Thinking and writing in a calm, quiet place is the best way to do that. Take

a few minutes every morning, or on your lunch break, or just before sleep, to scribble down some thoughts about your marriage.



Creative writers often use this type of “freewriting” to get their ideas down quickly onto paper. It’s a useful technique, too, for making some sense of the crazy jumble of thoughts and emotions in your head.

Scribble down whatever comes into your mind for five minutes or so, and then read through it, looking for patterns. Save the paper for a few days if you want to refer back to it, but feel free to destroy it, too, if you wish. No one ever needs to see these private thoughts but you.

Another thing some creative writers do is freewriting to get toxic or negative thoughts out of their mind. Some famous novelists sat down at their typewriters and typed a whole page of “I’m a terrible writer!” and similar stuff before they ripped it up and began their serious writing. If it helps you to get out negative thoughts crowding

your mind, by all means write them down, no matter what they are. We all carry ugly, unpleasant ideas inside us, and it's good to find a healthy, private way to express them. Destroy the paper when you've finished as a way of letting go of these negative feelings.

Then write down whatever you can think of about your current situation. "I can't communicate with my wife!" or "My husband never takes out the garbage!" or "I am afraid my wife is having an affair!" or "I had an affair and my wife won't forgive me" or "My husband wants a divorce and I'm afraid of losing him." Do this every day for a week or so, and you'll soon begin to have a clearer idea of where you stand.

You should also write some ideas about what led to the breakdown in trust and love between you and your spouse. Try to think of negative behaviors you engaged in, like nagging or making fun of your spouse, not pulling your weight in terms of household chores, ignoring or neglecting your spouse, being jealous, or losing your temper. For a full list of these types of negative behaviors, consult *Mend the Marriage* chapter 2.

The work you do here, getting a clear idea of your situation and how you feel about it, will pay dividends later, when it's time to communicate with your spouse about saving your marriage. Because you've taken careful steps to organize your thoughts, you will be better able to "stay on message" even during heated and painful and scary discussions with your spouse.

Do You Want to Save Your Marriage?

This may seem like a silly question, given that you are reading this document, and perhaps other guides like *Mend the Marriage*. But it is going to take a lot of work and heartache to repair your marriage, and you must be clear and honest with yourself about whether you are willing to make that sacrifice. Your marriage will have to become one of the very top priorities in your life, right up there with your personal health.

Marriage is a great benefit to most people – it improves health and happiness and it also boosts your financial success. Married people live longer, too. Most marriages are worth saving. But be sure that you want to save yours.

Another bit of writing you can do is to make a “gratitude list” every morning. Take a couple of minutes to write down a list of things about your spouse and your marriage that you are grateful for. List everything positive you can think of – having someone to talk to, emotional support, financial help, companionship, love, help when you’re sick, a partner to help do the chores, being around someone who sees the best in you, sharing your dreams, being married to a good cook or a handy home repair expert – anything that comes into your mind.

A few days of this exercise should quickly show you the incredible number of positive things in your life that come from being married, and from being married to the particular person you are with. Keeping that positive relationship in your life should now seem like an important priority.

Conversely, you can also make a “consequences list” of all the fallout and damage likely to result from a divorce. Though it’s more important to focus on the positive benefits of your marriage, it can be helpful to see the problem from the other side – divorce as something to be avoided.

Even On Your Own, You Can Help

So far, none of the steps outlined here have involved your spouse at all. Obviously, it takes two people to make a marriage, and it will ultimately take two of you to repair it. But the good news is that you can make a huge, positive change in your marriage *all by yourself*.



You may have already done it by writing down the positive aspects of your marriage, listing the things you love most about your spouse. You’ve changed your

attitude towards your marriage. No longer is it just something you take for granted or neglect while it runs (you think) on autopilot. Instead, you've reminded yourself that your marriage is a precious gift, a positive force in your life, and an enjoyable relationship. That shift in your attitude will come through in all your actions and conversations with your spouse, even subconsciously. So you have already made some positive progress.

Continue to focus on yourself. Ultimately, you are the only person you have any control over, the only person whose attitude and behavior you can change. Any efforts you make to behave better and to support your marriage instead of undermining it are legitimate and will improve things almost immediately.

Even if you don't see changes in your spouse immediately, you will notice changes in yourself. Just deciding to work hard to save your marriage is a positive action you can be rightfully proud of. You will feel better, both consciously and unconsciously, because you are taking positive steps. Regardless of what your spouse is or isn't doing, you will know you're trying hard to change things for the better.

And you'll be surprised. Positive changes in you will also be noticed by your partner, whether or not they say something about it. Continue to focus on your attitude and your entire situation will improve.

For a fuller account of immediate steps you can take on your own to save your marriage, read section two of *Mend the Marriage*, which describes the ABCD system.

Time to Start Talking

Innumerable marriages founder because of poor communication between spouses. Improving the way, you communicate with each other is one of the best ways to move past a crisis and to forestall future crises.



How do you communicate with your spouse? Do you nag, or simmer silently in seething rage, or play the victim, cry, or explode in screaming fury? None of these are

great ways to communicate, although in some marriages that's how people get their messages across to one another!

Once you've done the hard work of thinking about the crisis your marriage is in, once you've written down and organized all your ideas, and once you've decided that saving your marriage is a top priority, it's time to talk.

But in all too many marriages, people don't know how to talk to each other. So you may need to learn effective communication strategies that will not only help in this immediate crisis, but will also help to make your marriage happier, healthier and stronger in the future.

Learning to talk, paradoxically, means first learning to *listen*. In the modern world, where we're in the constant connected company of computers, smartphones and televisions, it isn't at all easy to listen to what other people are saying. Look around and you will see things that should shock you, but which are quite common – like couples having dinner at a romantic restaurant and checking out their phones instead of looking at or listening to each other! Welcome to the new normal.



To learn to listen and talk to each other, you and your spouse need to take turns. Either buy a timer, such as an hourglass used to time boiled eggs, or use the timer built into your phone. Set a period of two or three minutes (three is better) during which your spouse talks and you remain completely silent.

Let them say whatever they want during this time. Even if something they say directly affects you, makes you angry, saddens you, or seems like a problem you've got

a brilliant solution to, keep your mouth shut. All you are doing at this point is listening. Don't interrupt your spouse for any reason.

Really concentrate on listening. What is your spouse actually saying? Are they happy or sad, or are they feeling some other, more complex emotion? What was their day like yesterday? Was it frustrating, or fun, or a mix of both? What's going on at their job? How are they feeling about going to work today or tomorrow? Do not feel you have any obligation to reply or comment on these things when it is your turn to talk.

After the three minutes are up, then it's your turn to talk while your spouse listens. You don't need to have an agenda to talk. Think of it more as a stream of consciousness. Say whatever is on your mind, whatever you think of. Talk about your emotions, about how your day is going, or what it was like at work yesterday. The subject of your soliloquy doesn't matter much – what's more important is that you learn to talk when it's your turn, and listen when it's your spouse's turn.

How Do You Feel?

The foundation of effective communication with your spouse is effective, honest communication with yourself.

Describing your emotions is like painting a picture. If you only have two colors, it's not possible to do a very thorough job. So if you only know a few words for feelings, you can't express your emotions very well, whether to yourself or to your spouse.

Some people only know a few words for their emotions – happy, sad and angry. But there are hundreds of other words that describe different degrees of all our emotions. If you have a limited emotional vocabulary, start learning some new words for your feelings.

Are you happy, content, smug, satisfied, ecstatic, joyous, blissful? What about sad, depressed, despairing, melancholy, moody, morose, bleak or brokenhearted? Fearful? Nervous? Terrified? Triumphant?

Perhaps you are glum, lonely or lethargic. What about furious, enraged, seething, irritated, frustrated, incensed, irate, reckless?

I'm not saying you need to use all these words, but it is worth paying attention to the subtle degrees of your feelings, particularly in order to clearly communicate those feelings to your spouse. And your own understanding of yourself, of your own emotional landscape, will be improved as well.

Making New Habits

Learning to communicate more clearly and effectively is the first step. Next, it's important to build a habit of healthy communication into your daily routine.

At first, taking turns talking using a timer will seem stilted and weird. You will feel awkward and self-conscious. But as you do it more often, things will get easier.

A good time to practice this kind of communication is when you're alone for ten or fifteen minutes, say when you're driving. A walk around your neighborhood with

your spouse in the morning or evening is also a great time to trade off talking and listening. After a little practice, you may be able to ditch the timer and just observe silence while your spouse talks for a few minutes.

No matter where you do it, it's important to make such "check in" conversations part of your regular routine.

You should know what's going on in your partner's life, in their mind and in their heart. That's what real intimacy is. Building a real, true, honest intimate connection with your spouse will put your marriage on a strong, secure foundation, no matter how extreme the crisis or crises you've been through.



Don't confuse intimacy with sex – healthy sexuality is part of intimacy, and contributes to intimacy, but sex is not a substitute for intimacy. Sex can even be a

barrier to intimacy, if partners get lazy and think, “Since we’re having sex, we have intimacy” and don’t work on the more important aspect of intimate communication.

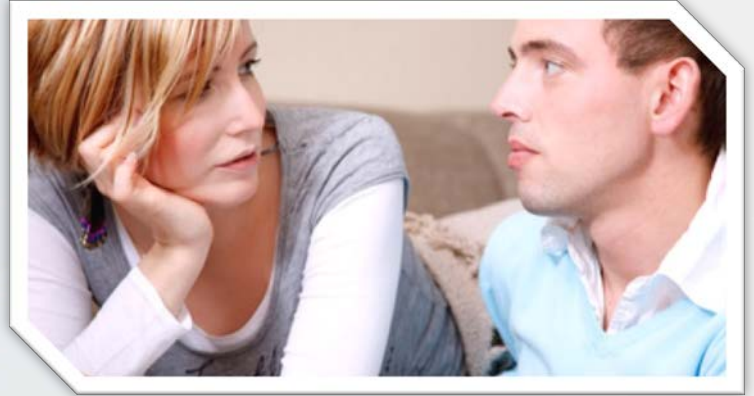
Good communication leads to healthy intimacy, so take time to work on it.

In the current crisis you’re suffering through, clear communication is what you need to get you safely to the other side. Start by telling your spouse clearly and unambiguously that you want to save your marriage. Tell them why your marriage is so important to you, and why you’re making it a top priority to save it.

Don’t tell your partner what you think they should do. For now, just focus on telling them what you want and how you’re feeling. Use your time when it’s your turn to talk to get feelings and ideas off your chest. But don’t speak directly to your spouse or nag and criticize them.

How to Apologize

Another thing that isn't easy for married couples (or anybody, for that matter) is apologizing. It's a lot harder than you think to do it correctly.



Whatever has caused the extreme crisis your marriage is in right now, it's unlikely that it is all one person's fault. Far more likely it is both partners' fault. Even when one partner has cheated or done something drastic like gambling away the children's college money, when it seems clear that most of the blame lies with them, both partners still contributed to the situation in most cases.

If you feel like your partner is completely or even mostly responsible for the extreme crisis, you can still find a way to apologize for your own contributions, however minor, to the situation.

Apologizing is an art. Start by doing the kind of freewriting described above, where you take time to scribble down thoughts and ideas about your situation. While you may be very angry at your partner, try hard to be honest about your part of the problem.

It's true, you couldn't have forced your spouse to have an affair – they chose to do so. And while it is important that you not take on the guilt for having caused something that wasn't your decision, it is still possible for you to take a healthy, honest look at what you may have done in your marriage to help create the environment that led to your partner's affair.

Remember, the affair isn't your fault, but you will still feel better if you clean up anything you did that tipped your partner in that direction. Look honestly at your marriage – perhaps you sometimes ignored your partner because you were busy at work, or perhaps you stopped going on regular dates because you took your spouse for granted. Whatever it is, make a note of it, and think about how you'd like to apologize for it.

If you've been hurt and you're angry, apologizing will be very difficult and you must be careful. Write down what you want to say and read it if you're worried about losing your concentration and having a fight. Perhaps you could ask a sympathetic friend to read over what you've written before you decide to read it to your spouse. Make sure your apology is *all about you* – keep it free of blame and recrimination for what has happened. Stick to a simple formula: "I am sorry for taking you for granted and forgetting to tell you I love you more often. I'm going to work harder to remember how much you matter to me in the future."

One goal of your apology is to let your spouse know that you are serious about fixing your marriage. But another goal is to lift some of the guilt you may be feeling about the situation. Guilt, left untended, can fester inside us and result in all kinds of unhappy problems in the future. So it's best to clear it away when you can.

Be honest with yourself – if your main goal in "apologizing" is to gain some moral advantage over your spouse, to make them feel bad and to make them apologize to you, then it is better to wait a while until your feelings change. Don't use something as

powerful and useful as an apology to try and manipulate your spouse. See the apology as what it is – a way to say you regret what’s happened and that you’re ready to move forward.



When You’re to Blame

If the extreme crisis is mostly your fault – if you had the affair or lost your temper one time too many (or a hundred times too many) then it is also vital to apologize. But

when you’re apologizing for something so

serious, so destructive, it’s going to take more than mere words, however sincere, to make a difference.

So if you’re committed to saving your marriage from this crisis, then prepare to back your apology up with action. You must demonstrate to your spouse that not only

have you changed your tune, but that you're going to learn a whole new way to dance, too.

Apply whatever first aid is necessary. Think of your marriage like someone who's been injured in a car crash. Take the correct steps – quickly! If you found someone with a deep, dangerous cut, bleeding severely, you'd immediately apply pressure to the wound to stop that bleeding. And you must do the same for your injured marriage.

If you had an affair, stop it at once. Be clear with the person you cheated with that you are committed to saving your marriage and therefore you are respectfully cutting off all contact with them. Stay on message – don't let yourself be drawn into any maudlin emotional scenes. Tell them that *you have decided to end the affair*, not that you're reluctantly forced to stop it because your spouse found out about it.

Cut off all contact with the person you had an affair with. That means all contact, forever. No telephone contact, no texting, no emails, no letters, no visits, no nothing. If it's someone at your work, consider changing jobs or asking to be posted to a different

office. Sure, that may seem like a big deal, but how important is it to you to save your marriage? Since saving your marriage is a top priority in your life, don't shy away from taking tough action or making sacrifices to protect it.

When it is time to sincerely apologize for the affair, take time to do it correctly. Write down what you did in black and white, and read it. Acknowledge to yourself that you cheated on your spouse. Make a list of the ways that your affair hurt your spouse and weakened your marriage. Write down everything you can think of.

It's a good idea, too, to write down the text of your apology. In heated emotional situations, it is all too easy to get sidetracked and distracted by something your partner says, or by a random thought. Before you know it, you could easily be sucked into an argument. When your tempers flare, you won't be able to say what you need to, and your spouse won't be able to hear it properly, either.

Arrange a safe, private time to make your apology. Make a date to do it and stick to it. Once you're ready, don't put it off any longer.

If you can't create a safe environment at home, consider getting the help of a professional counselor or therapist. A trained expert will make a good referee to keep you and your spouse talking constructively, expressing your feelings without lashing out at the other person. Even if you're reluctant to pay for a lengthy series of meetings with a therapist, don't be afraid to ask one for a single session if you need it. Explain what's happened to your marriage, and tell the therapist you'd like them to help you make your apology in a safe environment. They'll know what to do.

Deeds, Not Just Words

Once you've apologized to your spouse, you've taken the first steps to stop the bleeding and you can begin to help fix the other injuries to your marriage.

There's a popular saying – "Be the change you want to see in the world." This also applies well to a marriage. "Be the change you want to see in your marriage."

Another way to express it is via the famous Golden Rule – treat your spouse the way you would want to be treated.

Depending on the situation you're in, you should take steps to demonstrate to your spouse that not only are you sorry for your part in creating the extreme crisis you're in now, but that you are committed to changing yourself, changing your life, in positive ways. If you had an affair, or more than one, consider getting help. You must be honest with yourself – is this a pattern of behavior in your life? Have you been unfaithful in multiple relationships? Or multiple times in one relationship?

For problems with serial infidelity, as with alcoholism, extreme anger, drug abuse, gambling problems, obsession with pornography, and other serious threats to yourself and to your marriage, it is a good idea to consider outside help. If you can afford it, a professional therapist is a great idea. Even if you can't, you'll be able to find community resources like anger management classes or 12-step programs that can help you deal with whatever you're facing. A doctor or therapist can give you suggestions and recommend places to get help, but you can also find out a lot by yourself with a quick Internet search.

What you talk about and what you're working on, whether in therapy or in an anger management or stress relief course, is your own business, and you don't need to share it with your spouse. But be sure your spouse knows that you are seeing a therapist, or going to these classes, or attending 12-step meetings. That's one way of demonstrating that you are committed to change.

Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help. Therapists and doctors have seen and heard it all – no matter how much trouble you're in, or how impossible your problems seem, they won't shock medical and psychological professionals at all. In a community support group or class, you'll find yourself meeting lots of other normal people who struggle with the same issues you do, and who are committed to changing themselves and also to helping each other. That's a powerful thing for you to experience.

Working Together

So much of what you've done up until now has been working by yourself, or working only on your own problems. But the time will come, sooner or later, when you and your spouse need to sit down, roll up your sleeves, and figure out how to fix your marriage and move forward.

If you (and ideally both of you) have been working on cleaning house and changing your own attitudes, you should find the transition to working together quite natural and easy. Once you've developed habits of better, more honest, more intimate communication, you'll find it's much easier to say what you want and to talk about how to make it happen, together.



You'll find that if you've demonstrated a true commitment to change to your spouse, they will be much more willing to work together with you to plan the future of your marriage.

Here are some ideas to focus on:

Make sure the crisis doesn't occur again. If infidelity was the problem, for example, take steps to keep it from happening again. Talk to each other about situations that could lead to cheating, and agree on plans to prevent that. If one of you travels for work, for example, figure out what that person is going to do if they find themselves tired and lonely in a motel somewhere far away, tempted to go down to the bar and flirt with a waitress or to visit the local strip club. If inappropriate anger was the root of the crisis, work together to figure out the "triggers" that lead to such volcanic explosions. *Mend the Marriage* has an excellent section on dealing with anger. Whatever the underlying issue that led to the extreme crisis, put a plan in place to keep it from happening again.

Continue to communicate clearly and honestly. If you've begun practicing the turn-taking type of communication described above, it won't take too long before you've started to learn more about your partner than ever before. You'll be amazed at what you hear just listening to your spouse talk for several minutes, while you are relaxing and listening instead of figuring out what you're going to say in response. And, conversely, your spouse will have learned more and more about you. Those careful conversations will create a foundation of real intimacy between you. Eventually, you won't need the artificiality of a timer, because you will have learned how to talk to each other in a respectful, attentive way without even being conscious of the effort.

Dream together. A marriage is not just a mechanical contrivance like an automobile engine, which just requires proper adjustments and tinkering to run well. Your marriage can be properly tuned up like an engine and still fail without some sort of dream for the future. Part of what you should talk about with your spouse during your normal check-in conversations is your dreams. Talk about big dreams – a new house, different job, wonderful vacation to Italy or Tahiti – but also about small,

everyday dreams. Intimacy means knowing your partner's dreams as well as their frustrations. Does your spouse dream of going back to school? Of living on a boat? Find out, and tell them about your dreams. Remember, a dream can't come true unless you have a dream.

Do together. Dreaming together is important, but so is doing things together. At a bare minimum, set up some kind of regular "date night" with your spouse, and make it a high priority on your calendar. Don't let anything else except an absolute emergency stop you from this regular couple time. Consider taking some classes together, whether cooking classes or art classes or even workout classes at your gym. Do things together that are good for each of you individually, but which are also good for your marriage. Using your minds to learn new things is a wonderful way to do that. If your dreams happen to coincide – buying a new house or taking that Tahiti vacation, for example – then work together to make them happen.

Working on your marriage, both separately and as a couple, is a lot of effort, but it's also a grand adventure that will challenge you. A shared adventure, even a very

difficult one like bringing your marriage back from the brink of ruin, is something that you will someday perhaps look back on and be grateful for. Good luck!

Sincerely,

Brad Browning

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