Some resort to promise "never to fight" again or to simply take a walk in the park when arguments get too heated. Dr James Dobson had this to say, "I'm not even sure I agree with the goal of never fighting.

There is a place for confrontation in marriage. But the key is to learn how to fight properly. It's always destructive to attack the self-esteem of a partner; hurling insults and harsh words when we are angry. But there is a place for conflict that focuses exclusively on the issue that separates a husband and wife. This approach is highly recommended in the long term for marriages, and it even beats a brisk walk around the park."

Whether we choose to fight or not and if we choose to stay on in a marriage, we all need that extra help to stay committed to the marriage path.

Question 1: If you really love each other, won't that hold you steady when the storms come?

Answer:

Not necessarily--certainly not if you are thinking of love as a romantic feeling. Feeling wonderful about one another does not make two people compatible over the long haul. Many couples assume that the excitement of their courtship will continue for the rest of their lives. That virtually never occurs! It is naïve to expect two unique individuals to mesh together like a couple of machines and to remain exhilarated throughout life. Even gears have multiple cogs with rough edges to be honed before they will work in concert.

That honing process usually occurs in the first year or two of marriage. The foundation for all that is to follow is laid in those critical months. What often occurs at this time is a dramatic struggle for power in the relationship. Who will lead? Who will follow? Who will determine how
money is spent? Who will get his or her way in times of disagreement? Everything is up for grabs in the beginning, and the way these early decisions are made will set the stage for the future.

A perspective on human relationships—not only in marriage but in every dimension of life can be summed up—"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than you."

If we heed this, it could virtually eliminate divorce from the catalog of human experience. It will give you stability when the storms begin to howl.

Question 2: In recent months, there have been two occasions when a woman at work has made a pass at me. I love my wife deeply, have no interest in this lady, and have communicated this to her in no uncertain terms. Do you think I should share these incidents with my wife?

Answer:

Yes, I do. First, I believe the healthiest marriages are those that are open and honest on such matters. Second, because sharing important information is a step toward accountability in a situation that could prove dangerous. And third, because your wife should be your best friend with whom you discuss troubling circumstances and how they will be handled.

My only caution is that you be careful not to reveal this disclosure in order to make your wife jealous or to use the incident to manipulate her. Some spouses seize an opportunity like this to play power games with a mate. Check out your motives carefully before you talk to your wife, and share the experience as objectively as possible. She will appreciate you for it.

Finally, I urge you to continue to reject the advances of the lady in your office, regardless of how attractive she is or how flattering her interest in you may be. To pursue her may give your ego a ride for now but only pain and sorrow lie down that road—for her and for you.
Question 3: You described the "trapped" feeling that causes some people to withdraw from their spouses. I think that applies to my wife, who has been strangely distant from me in recent years. Can you tell me more about what such a person might be thinking?

Answer:

The feeling of entrapment begins with disrespect for a partner. For example, a man may think these kinds of thoughts about his wife: Look at Joan. She used to be rather pretty. Now with those fifteen extra pounds she doesn't even attract me anymore. Her lack of discipline bothers me in other areas, too--the house is always a mess and she seems totally disorganized. I made an enormous mistake back there in my youth when I decided to marry her.

Now I have to spend the rest of my life--can you believe it?--all the years I have left--tied up with someone I'm disinterested in. Oh, I know Joanie is a good woman, and I wouldn't hurt her for anything, but man, is this what they call living?

Or Joanie may be doing some thinking of her own: Michael, Michael, how different you are than I first thought you to be. You seemed so exciting and energetic in those early days. How did you get to be such a bore? You work far too much and are so tired when you come home. I can't even get you to talk to me, much less sweep me into ecstasy.

Look at him, sleeping on the couch with his mouth hanging open. I wish his hair wasn't falling out. Am I really going to invest my entire lifetime in this aging man? Our friends don't respect him anymore, and he hasn't received a promotion at the plant for more than five years. He's going nowhere, and he's taking me with him!

If Joanie and Michael are both thinking these entrapment thoughts, it is obvious that their future together is in serious jeopardy. But the typical situation is unilateral, as in your marriage. One partner (of either gender) begins to chafe at the bit without revealing to the other person how his or her attitude has changed. A reasonably compassionate person simply does not disclose these disturbing rumblings to someone who loves him or her. Instead, a person's behavior begins to evolve in inexplicable ways.
He may increase the frequency of his evening business meetings—anything to be away from home more often. He may become irritable or "deep in thought" or otherwise non-communicative. He may retreat into his televised sports or fishing trips or poker with the boys. He may provoke continuous fights over insignificant issues. And of course, he may move out or find someone younger to play with. A woman who feels trapped will reveal her disenchantment in similar indirect ways.

To summarize, the trapped feeling is a consequence of two factors: Disrespect for the spouse and the wish for an excuse to get away.

Question 4: My husband, Paul, has been having an affair for the past three months and is living with the woman. How should I respond in the event he leaves her and asks me to forgive him and take him back? Should I just throw my arms open and pretend the affair never happened?

Answer:

Well, you should certainly take him back. That's the point of everything I have written. But your power to negotiate necessary changes will never be greater than in that moment, and you should not deal it away too quickly. I would suggest that you get Paul's written commitment to participate in counseling immediately, not even waiting two or three weeks to get started.

Old patterns will persist if serious effort is not made to change them. Your family also has some deep wounds to work through, and they're not likely to complete that healing process on their own. You must make it clear that never again—and I mean never—will sexual unfaithfulness be tolerated. Paul needs this motivation to go straight. He must know, and believe, that the sky will fall if he has one more escapade or even a serious flirtation with another lover.

You must convince him that you mean business. If he wavers, even slightly, give him another month or two to sit somewhere wishing he could come home. Better that you continue at the door of matrimonial death now than go through the misery of infidelity again in a few years.

This article was written by Focus on the Family Malaysia and the Questions and Answers are
extracted from "Complete Family and Marriage Home Reference Guide" by Dr. James Dobson with permission.