

Engagement satisfies commitment needs for couple

Dear Dr. Brothers: I'm 45, have no kids, and after one short and one long marriage, I have decided that I am simply not marriage material. The problem is, I have met someone I would like to spend the foreseeable future with, and I really can't see ever enjoying going out with anyone else.



Dr. Joyce Brothers
• Ask Dr. Brothers

He is pressing me to get married (he's a wedding "virgin"), but I told him I will get engaged instead.

That way, we can show our commitment, and yet I won't be in that awful place I can't seem to get right.

This is a sort of compromise. He thinks I have some emotional problem if I won't get married. What do you think?

ing a rather healthy attitude about it — not jumping to the conclusion that you don't love him, which would be the obvious, simplistic thing to assume. But I don't think he's quite hit the nail on the head — it's not about him, but it's not all about your fears, either. It's about your fears plus your experience.

— T.G.
Dear T.G.: I think that you probably know yourself a bit better than your boyfriend knows and you realize that at the moment you are a bit phobic about the institution of marriage. Your boyfriend seems to be tak-

Getting engaged as an end in itself is nothing new. There are thousands of families with children in which the man is described as the woman's fiance. Whether there is a ring and a date set is an open question. In your case, you'd both want to agree on

what emotional, physical and financial commitments are intended by your engagement. This social experiment might have an unintended effect: After a period of engagement, you may grow into another kind of couple, who want to go to the next step in your commitment and actually get married. I believe you don't want to do that now; but I also believe strongly in the possibility for growth and change. Congratulations!

Dear Dr. Brothers: My wife and I are both in our 50s; our kids have gone off to college. I thought this would now be a time when we could enjoy ourselves. Instead, all she can talk about is how we're getting old. She complains about her aches and pains (she's been to the doctor, and he's found nothing). She wants to buy a long-term-care policy because — well, you never know when you're going to become incapacitated. And her favorite topic of

conversation is about some disease that a friend or relative has come down with — and how we might suffer the same thing before long. She's starting to creep me out! How can I get her to understand that we likely have 20 or 30 years left of fun and frolic?

— W.P.
Dear W.P.: Your wife sounds like she has some anxieties about her empty nest and what this means about her stage in the life cycle. It's not necessarily a matter of aging, or not aging well — chances are, your wife looks as good as the next 50-something, or could if she didn't feel so old, right? But some women (and men) do cling to an outdated view of how they are supposed to act in middle age, and have a vision of old age rapidly approaching in which life as they know it is essentially over.

There is nothing wrong with planning ahead, securing funds

and health-care plans for old age — as long as they make financial sense for you. Perhaps with one of you interested in fun and frolic, she feels the need to be the serious one who is saving up for the rainy days to come. But, since people age at different rates, you may have to stop ridiculing her and start trying to adjust to the situation. Reassurance — along with a bit of that fun and frolic — might go a long way toward calming her fears, while letting her know that you will always be there for her, no matter what age she feels.

Dear Dr. Brothers: I have such a hard time making decisions that I am the laughingstock of my family and friends! I can make a decision when it comes to which direction to take my investments, or which route to take on the way to the theme park. But when it comes to things with lots and lots of options — often insignificant things — I am

helpless. This puts me at a big disadvantage when ordering at a restaurant or shopping for clothes. It seems the more I have to work with, the worse I get. Why is this, and how can I get everyone to stop rolling their eyes when the waiter comes?

— L.T.
Dear L.T.: First, I think you should stop beating yourself up. At least you are a deliberate, thoughtful person who doesn't go around making faulty snap judgments. If you can't see the same humor in your situation that your family and friends do, then work on some strategies for coping with those situations where you know you are going to be hemming and hawing as the waiter ... well, waits. Pick up the menu as soon as you sit down at a restaurant, while the others are still chatting. Arrange to order last (although I bet you already do!). Try planning in advance what you want to eat, or decide to pick the fourth

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