



“Soon we’ll all be attached to a wee computer that nags—and we’re choosing this entrapment.”

Gina Barreca, Ph.D.

## Liking the Child You Love

How to build a better relationship with your kids—even when they’re driving you crazy.

by Jeffrey Bernstein, Ph.D.



Jeffrey Bernstein, Ph.D., has authored four books, including *10 Days to a Less Defiant Child*. [more...](#)

### Criticism, Avoidance, and Negativity: How They Destroy Love?

Making your love last means stopping the toxic fighting

Published on December 8, 2014 by Jeffrey Bernstein, Ph.D. in Liking the Child You Love

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In my relationship book, *Why Can't You Read My Mind?*, I discuss the real source of where most relationships become toxic—your own thoughts! The reader response from my recent post entitled, [9 Toxic Thoughts That Can Destroy Your Relationship](#), suggests that masses of couples are in big time emotional pain!

For sure, sadly, there a lot of walking wounded out there! By "walking wounded", I mean the tons of people who feel unfulfilled, or worse, emotionally neglected or abused, in their intimate relationships. It seems that everywhere we turn, we unfortunately see and hear about people who are unhappy and emotionally hurting, often severely, in their quest to feel loved. Most of these unfortunate couples fall prey to relationship toxicity overload.

Here are what I consider the top three signs of toxic relationships:

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**1. Criticism and contempt.** According to Dr. John Gottman, criticism and contempt are highly destructive in loving relationships. Signs of criticism and contempt may appear as your partner distastefully making fun of you. One female client of mine would tell her husband he was sexually inadequate in response to him criticizing her excessive spending habits. Quite a toxic mess, for sure! Contempt can also appear as one partner criticizing another in public. Acting superior also conveys a contemptuously, toxic message. To experience the one you love, or once loved, ripping you with incessant fault-finding barrages is highly demoralizing and emotionally unhealthy.

**2. Avoidance.** Do silent treatment fueled arctic winds whip off her shoulder and knock you over, leaving you breathless and hopeless? Does he deprive you of physical affection but then complain that you are too needy? Do you feel that every time you try to clear the air, he disappears into it? Does he refuse to go to counseling? Avoidance is a very passive-aggressive form of relationship toxicity and it often gets progressively worse over time.

**3. You feel hopelessly lost in negative energy.** At the end of the day, and most of the time during it, do you feel increasingly beaten down, emotionally bankrupt and numb? Do you feel that the times you do positively connect with your intimate partner are all in vain, only to just get sucked up by overwhelming negative energy? Does it unfortunately seem that any initially promising positive changes are unsustainable?

**Be honest with yourself**

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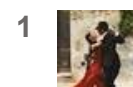


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I certainly have seen far too many couples throw in the relationship towel way too early. At the same time, if your relationship is truly toxic, and your partner will not work with you to make changes, then it may be time to leave. Recognizing, and continuing to acknowledge, the persistent signs of a toxic relationship can empower you to get out of it. Above all, know your value! Prolonging the agony of a truly toxic situation will have deleterious effects on both you and your partner. When possible, see a qualified relationship counselor before making significant relationship decisions. Even if you decide to leave, it is important to learn your role in the toxic relationship dance so you don't do a repeat performance!

References:

Getting Unstuck: The Toxic Relationship. Mark Banschick, M.D., <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/20130...>

The Five Love Languages. Gary Chapman

Why Can't You Read My Mind: Overcoming the 9 toxic thoughts that get in the way of a loving relationship. Jeffrey Bernstein, Ph.D.

Why Marriages Succeed or Fail? John Gottman

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*Dr. Jeffrey Bernstein is a psychologist with over 23 years of experience specializing in child, adolescent, couples, and family therapy. He holds a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the State University of New York at Albany and completed his post-doctoral internship at the University of Pennsylvania Counseling Center. He has appeared on the Today Show, Court TV as an expert advisor, CBS Eyewitness News Philadelphia, 10! Philadelphia—NBC, and public radio. Dr. Bernstein has authored four books, including the highly popular [10 Days to a Less Defiant Child](#) (Perseus Books, 2006), [10 Days to a Less Distracted Child](#) (Perseus, 2007), [Why Can't You Read My Mind?](#), and [Liking the Child You Love](#), Perseus, 2009). Follow Dr. Jeff on [twitter](#) for more tips to save relationships.*

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