

David Arquette and Courteney Cox: Did Over-Complaining Kill Their Marriage?



By Guy Winch, Ph.D., author of *The Squeaky Wheel*

While it's natural to moan and complain to our spouses and expect support and understanding from them, too much complaining can change the very nature of our relationship and damage it beyond repair. When David Arquette and Courteney Cox announced they were splitting up last October, Arquette mentioned that Cox was sick of "mothering" him. For a celebrity couple, the two have been relatively close-lipped about the details of their separation. However, it's fair to assume that if Cox was doing too much mothering, Arquette was doing too much complaining.

When one member of a couple becomes an over-complainer, it creates significant stress on the relationship and the entire household. Unproductive complaining such as venting, whining and moaning, creates an atmosphere of negativity and dissatisfaction that pervades the home. Over-complaining of the unproductive kind can also make it difficult for other members of the household to express their own joy and happiness.

The problem is that such habits can develop slowly and go unnoticed until the problem is severe. For example, a husband might go through a period of employment instability and feel down about himself and the world. His wife might be supportive at first. She might try to help out by offering regular dollops of sympathy and taking on more responsibilities. However, by doing so she is reinforcing her

husband's complaining and enabling him to remain miserable and passive. Over time, the husband in this scenario can become comfortable in the situation and expect his wife to continue "mothering" him.

When left unchallenged, this kind of dynamic can lead to a shift in the very nature of a couple's relationship. Instead of being husband and wife, they now relate to one another in a manner more reminiscent of mother and child or mother and teenager. As a result, their relationship suffers, their marital satisfaction drops and their sex life erodes. Whining is rarely a turn on.

Although it's natural to go through difficult times and expect support from our spouses, couples should never let negative circumstances turn into an enduring reality. If your spouse is over-complaining so much that you begin to think of him or her as a whiner, alert your partner to his or her behavior and how it is affecting you. Ask your mate to learn how to use complaints sparingly and productively—for everyone's sake.