



Marriage Survival Guide For Tough Times

On the show [Families under Fire](#), Dr. Phil talks to two couples who say their marriages are collapsing along with the economy. Karen and her husband, Walter, are coping with mounting debt and rising tempers. Sherida says she's tired of being the sole provider in her household while her husband, Brandon, depends on his faith to see them through.

Along with Bishop T.D. Jakes, Dr. Phil outlines a strategy to help these couples and you navigate difficult times.

1) Acknowledge and work the problem.

When the heat is on, don't take your anger out on your spouse. "You get in trouble, you get pressure on you, and what you do is called reflexive biting. You start snapping at the person around you, and you begin to feel isolated and alone," Dr. Phil says. "You've got to turn to your partner and say, 'Look, we're in a bad spot here, and we're going to deal with this together.'"

2) Identify the stressors in your relationship.

As the nation experiences an economic downturn, remember the problem is not your partner, but high interest rates, accumulating debt and looming unemployment. "Aim your guns in the right place," Dr. Phil advises. Once you have identified the issues, work together to find viable solutions.

3) Acknowledge fear.

Dr. Phil turns to a guest on the show, Karen. "It hurts you to think that he was hurting inside, but he is," he says, referring to her husband, Walter. Her spouse admits that he feels like less of a man if he can't provide for and protect his family. Dr. Phil urges him to vent his fears and be vulnerable with Karen. Bishop Jakes suggests that Walter empower himself by allowing his wife to see his good and bad days.

4) Have emotional integrity.

Effective communication begins with honesty. "If you say you're going to look for a job in earnest, then look for a job," Dr. Phil stresses. "Don't say it if you don't mean it." Be open to receiving input from your partner even at the expense of your ego.

5) Be willing to ask for help.

"Think about yourself as being at the bottom of a steep hill, and you're trying to pull a wagon up to the top of the hill. If you're both pulling it up the hill, you're going to get there. If one of you is pulling left and one of you is pulling right, you're expending a lot of energy, and the wagon's not moving at all," Dr. Phil tells both couples on this show. Don't be afraid to admit that you can't manage the household debt alone, or that you're getting in over your head with credit cards.

6) List priorities, values and goals.

Dr. Phil turns to Brandon. "For you, it's not all about money. That's OK. Talk about that. List those things. Make a plan." Find a way that the values of both partners can be honored. "It's like two corporations merging, and you need to have a board meeting," Bishop Jakes adds.

7) Have an action plan.

Dreams can motivate you to strive for the stars, but sometimes, you have to get your head out of the clouds. "The difference between a dream and a plan is a timeline," Dr. Phil says. "You've got to do checkups on yourself and see, 'Am I moving forward?'" Devise a realistic schedule that you and your spouse can get excited about.

From the Show

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