



Lamplight Counseling

Difficult, Disappointing, and destructive relationships

*As defined by author/
speaker Leslie Vernick*

“A difficult relationship is one in which there are many stressors pressing in on the relationship that make it challenging. This may include blended family issues, in-law or ex-spouse issues, health challenges, difficult children, financial set-backs, job changes, frequent moves, as well as personality and cultural differences. There may also be disagreements on values such as prioritizing saving over spending and lifestyle habits such as being very health conscious or neat with your living space or preferring a more casual approach to life.

These stressors and differences can cause many conflicts. Depending on how a couple handles those differences, conflicts and their emotions will determine whether they can navigate through these difficulties in a way that does not fracture or end their relationship. In other words, if they handle them with mutual effort, compassion for one

another, honesty and respect, usually difficult does not become destructive. If they cannot, then difficult can easily move into destructive.

A disappointing relationship is one in which there are a letdown of expectations in a relationship. It's not what you thought it would be. There isn't obvious sin, disrespect or indifference, but there isn't as much romance, talking, sex or connection as you wanted. There may not be as much financial security or extra resources to have fun or live in a bigger home, or there may be a lack of adventure and stimulation that makes the relationship feel stale and boring.

Many individuals long for an A+ marriage but feel stuck in a C- marriage. How they handle their disappointment (or not) determines whether the marriage survives or deteriorates into a D- or worse relationship.

A destructive relationship is one in which the personhood of the other is regularly diminished, dismissed, disrespected and demeaned. There is a lack of mutual effort at maintaining and repairing relationship wounds. There is a lack of mutual accountability, but rather one has power over the other either physically, emotionally, financially, mentally, spiritually or all of the above. There is a lack of accountability or responsibility accepted for harm caused to the relationship, and relationship wounds are denied, minimized or blamed on the other

In a destructive relationship, you don't just feel it's hard, you feel like you're dying inside. There is no "you" in the relationship. There is a lack of freedom to be yourself, speak your own thoughts and feelings, to be a separate person and to make decisions for yourself. You don't feel safe to speak up, set boundaries, ask for what you need or want or disagree without a heavy price to pay. There is often chronic deceit and indifference to your feelings, needs and personhood."