



D.O.A. or “The Dead Marriage Syndrome”

By Trudy M. Johnson, M.A., L.M.F.T.

*I checked the obituary page and was surprised to find the announcement of the death of my marriage there. Help! What do I do to revive my partner?*

One of the most difficult marriage counseling cases is the one where one of the spouses is dead. Marriages where parties are fighting are still engaging, there is still passion on some level. It is the spouse who is “dead on arrival” when it comes to relating in the marriage that brings a very challenging situation to the counseling room.

If your spouse has recently suggested you look in the obituaries to find your marriage, here are some pointers to give you help and hope.

1). *Don't Chase the Hearse*

Understanding how dead your spouse is, will be the first step to bringing a dead marriage back to life. Most spouses receiving the “obituary news” about their marriage are clueless. In general, the live partner is completely unaware that the other person has died. Because of this, the live partner may spend valuable moments doing all the wrong things to revive their partner. Just like any other moments of first response in an emergency and potentially fatal situation, it is those crucial beginning moments that can make or break the situation.

*-Would you like to go out for a romantic evening? I'll even plan it!* Really now. Have you ever drug a corpse around town---a romantic dinner, date to the play, perhaps? How fun is *that*? Understand, your spouse is dead. The kind of evening you are now suggesting would have probably been fine and wonderful and exactly what your “dead spouse” wanted *several years or even decades ago*. But now...now that they are dead, as in no pulse beating...to suggest a romantic get-a-way will invoke an angry response from your “dead” mate. A response like this will further cement the realization that you do not know them. Your idea of hearts and flowers is complete invalidation of how they feel.

*-Let's talk and figure out what is wrong with you.* OK. Remember. Dead people do not talk. They don't listen. They don't feel. Talking with your “dead spouse” will only make *you* angry. Your anger will then be further justification to them that being dead is a very safe place in this marriage.

*-Pursuing a dead person will only bring you frustration and pain.* Do not waste your time chasing a spouse who has died in your marriage. They won't run toward you. They will stay very stationary, frozen in time. There will be no movement, no baby-steps towards you, no moments of waltzing or jitterbugging. No sweet “I love you's” whispered in your ear.

