

We Are All Different

“The task of attempting to sculpt our marriage partner into our own likeness fails before it begins.” – Judy Clark

“I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.” – Bible

Carl and Karen thought sure theirs would be the ideal marriage. They had so much fun together during the dating period and seemed like the perfect couple. A few months after their wedding day, however, they began to have second thoughts.

Before the wedding it was evident to Carl that Karen was the life of any party, and he enjoyed her free spirit. Karen appreciated Carl's steadiness and felt it would be a great counter balance for her. After the wedding, Karen learned that Carl's definition of spontaneous fun was a week's advance notice. And the fact that Carl wasn't *getting* a week's notice began to irritate him.

News flash! The person we marry (or are going to marry) is different from us, and not just in gender. Dr. Gary Chapman, in his book “Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married”, identifies some of the conflicts that can occur as different personality types are combined in a marriage.

It is important to understand two key points about these different personalities. First of all, generally speaking, it's not a matter of right or wrong – just different. And second, and perhaps more important, we need to have some awareness of these differences between spouses, so we can minimize the negative consequences of their interactions.

Gary is a morning person. He is bright and cheery when he jumps out of bed, which is normally before 6:00am. Karolyn, his wife, doesn't believe in mornings. She tolerates them, but that's it. So Gary and Karolyn have both learned to make some compromises so they can function together.

Tim wants to go rock climbing. Tara points out to him the distance they might fall and the hardness of the rocks if they do so. Tim is an optimist and Tara is a pessimist. Tim has learned to listen to Tara's concerns, and Tara tries very hard to trust their combined judgment.

Joe grew up with a mother who found it was easier to pick up his clothes where he dropped them rather than to make him pick them up. Joe's wife believes every piece of clothing in the house has its place and should be in it. And she is not inclined to assist Joe in this matter. She was able to discuss this calmly with Joe, however, and Joe has agreed to put his dirty clothes in a specific location, and not wherever they fall.

Mary likes to talk. Mike doesn't. Mary openly shares her view point on every subject that comes into her awareness. Mike usually isn't aware at all, and if he is he doesn't say much about it. With the help of a friend, they were able to learn both to talk and to listen to each other, and to accept the fact that one does more than the other.

Frank likes to make things happen. Jan enjoys watching them happen. At first they both thought they were a good match, but after a while Frank became frustrated because he felt he was always the one to make the decisions: where to eat, what the entertainment was to be, how to discipline their kids, etc. Frank and Jan had some heated conversations before they were finally able to work together and apply their respective strengths to their marriage.

Christy is very organized. When she loads the dishwasher, the plates, bowls, glasses, and silverware are all in their appropriate positions. Charlie, on the other hand, loads the dishwasher more like the washing machine. If he can get the door shut he's happy. Once again, calm communication was necessary to reach a comfortable middle ground.

You are different from your spouse. Differences are not grounds for divorce; they are opportunities for enrichment. Work together and enjoy the differences!

The Family and Marriage Coalition of Aiken, Inc. (FAMCO) provides resources for you to succeed in your marriage and families. Roger Rollins, Executive Director, FAMCO, 640-4689, rogerrollins@aikenfamco.com , www.aikenfamco.com .