

## 3 Big Marriage Killers and How to Stop Them

By [Francesca Di Meglio](#), About.com Guide

After answering 19,000 relationship questions on the site [AskApril](#)<sup>1</sup>, couples expert April Masini has an awful lot of insight into what causes trouble in a marriage. She says it's not what you think. Sure, money and sex - which are often reported as the topics about which most couples fight - can be divisive. But in-laws, children from previous relationships, and exes can bring down a marriage, she writes in an e-mail. Here is a breakdown, with tips from Masini, on how to keep these 3 [marriage killers](#)<sup>2</sup> from landing you in divorce court:

### In-Laws

[The in-law problem](#)<sup>3</sup> has been discussed many a time on this site and the world over. Combining two extended families continues to be quite the challenge. Indeed, Masini says in-laws break up marriages all the time. "A mother-in-law or father-in-law puts his or her needs ahead of yours, and fighting ensues," writes Masini. "Your spouse doesn't understand why you're turning this into a big deal. You feel the same way. Resolutions happen by default and resentment festers. Next thing you know, you're both dreading Thanksgiving."

Couples need to take a long look in the mirror. They have to determine if they are indeed putting the needs of their parents or family of origin ahead of those of their spouse. If you are - and you have to be really honest about it - you have to stop. When you take your vows, you're basically saying that your husband or wife is going to be your No. 1 priority. That means that not even mommy dearest should come between you. The in-law problem is particularly sticky when the parent hasn't had any other children get married and therefore has no precedent for how to behave with the son- or daughter-in-law, writes Masini.

All too often, spouses, whose [parents are meddling](#)<sup>4</sup>, leave negotiations in the hands of their partners. "The mistake that many people make is getting in the middle of an issue that is really between the spouse and his or her parents," Masini adds. "The spouse who is not a blood relative of the parents should never have to fight his or her own battles." It's up to you to set boundaries with your own parents and make it clear that the two of you come first always.

### Children From Previous Relationships

"When children are involved in blended marriages there are relationships between the kids and their biological parents, the ex-spouses who are parents, the step-parents and the kids; the step-parents and the biological parents; any boyfriends or girlfriends of an ex -- or the teenage children and many sets of grandparents," writes Masini. "Tired just thinking about it? You should be!" Indeed, these complicated circumstances complicate the marriage. There are sometimes custody battles, rows about discipline and parenting, and [jealousy](#)<sup>5</sup> brought on by exes who have to be in the picture because there are children involved. The list goes on and on. The other issue that always seems to come up is the kids themselves. Often, they learn how to take advantage of the divisions between all these adults and manipulate the situation, which Masini warns is bad news for everyone.

The adults in the family have to form a united front. "When you show your kids that the new family has a new structure, and as parents, you're clear on it, your kids may dislike the structure, but they'll understand it, and that's more than half the battle," writes Masini. Of course, you have to be clear about the rules. If you don't agree on the rules as parents, you need to make compromises that take both stances into consideration. One of the most important tips Masini shares with couples in this situation is to make sure to never put down the ex-spouse in front of the children. That person is still their mom or dad, and it will only hurt them. Finally, make like a parent and have a heart. "Empathize with the kids who may not like you, and may feel resentful," suggests Masini. "Give them a lot of space and time to get to know you. Don't demand parental love. Earn it."

### Exes

At some point in history, people started to believe that it was both necessary and appropriate to [stay friends with their exes](#)<sup>6</sup>. When you have a child with your ex, then this is somewhat true. You need to be civil and create structure for your child. If you do not have a child together, then you should abandon friendships with your exes. You don't have to be mean to them or even break up all over again. But you should not invite them to your wedding, Thanksgiving or Wednesday afternoon lunch, suggests Masini. If seeing an ex is unavoidable, it should happen very rarely and always with your spouse and the companion, partner, or spouse of your ex, too.

Your ex's presence in your life will make your spouse feel uncomfortable. Period. In fact, Masini suggests you bring this up with your spouse pronto and come up with rules for dealing with your exes. Perhaps, rule No. 1 should be not to deal with them at all. "Your marriage is sacred. Don't introduce any element that might upset your spouse or your relationship," advises Masini. "The payoff isn't worth it, and there are enough challenges in marriage, like job upset, health, crazy relatives, kids, neighbors, money, sex -- there's no reason to include exes in your lives."

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