

Case Study: What would you do?

Bob came running into the house and called out, “Honey! Look at the new DVD player I bought!” His wife, Sarah, exited the kitchen and entered the living room with a frown on her face.

As Bob anxiously opened the DVD player and described all its features, Sarah became more and more aggravated.

We don’t have money to be buying DVD players,” she said. “Of course we do, we’re getting out tax refund soon. Plus it was on sale. I’ve wanted one of these for so long. When I saw it in the electronics store I just couldn’t wait to buy it.”

We were supposed to save our tax refund towards a down payment on a house!” “There’s no way we’re ever going to have enough money for a down payment. So why not enjoy the money now? Plus, think of all the movies we can watch together.”

Sarah became flooded with emotion and yelled at Bob, “How could you be so selfish!” “Me?! Selfish?! I bought this DVD player for both of us! Why are you always such a tightwad?”
http://www.foreverfamilies.net/xml/articles/manage_fam_finances.aspx?&xslfile=print.xslt&publication=short

Do you and your spouse argue frequently about money?

Do you disagree on how to spend or save your paycheck?

Does paying the bills escalate into an argument with your spouse that isn’t related to money at all? Do you wish your spouse wasn’t such a “tightwad” or an impulsive buyer?

Money can enhance or destroy your marriage and can lead to mistrust, name-calling, selfishness, dishonesty, and even divorce. Research examining the causes of family financial problems shows that money problems are caused by a lack of financial understanding, personal behavior problems, and relationship problems.

More Case Studies in the following articles.

Managing Marriage and Money Problems

Experts offer tips for investing in your marriage so you can worry less about your money.

By [Heather Hatfield](#)

WebMD Feature

Reviewed by [Louise Chang, MD](#)

Maureen and Dave Gomes, who have been married for more than six years, have a system for managing their money: one joint bank account that they both contribute to on a monthly basis and draw from for all house expenses, like the mortgage and electric bill; and two separate, personal accounts, which after their monthly contributions leaves them with their own money to spend. Last but not least, they work on their long-term financial goals together and manage big-ticket items, like cars and vacations, as a team.

“We created this system when we moved in together before we got married,” says Maureen.

“For us, it works. But I do have to say that it would probably fall apart if we didn’t communicate well about our spending, act responsibly, and make decisions together.”

Maureen and Dave have figured out how to mix marriage and money in a way that works for them both. Other couples, however, aren't as lucky.

"With the state of the economy, with housing issues, credit problems, more and more couples are facing serious marriage and money problems, even bankruptcy," says William Harley, PhD, author of *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-proof Marriage*;

Experts explain to WebMD the common financial scenarios couples often face, and offer practical tips for resolving them.

[\(Has your relationship been affected by money? How did you cope? Talk with others on our Couples Coping: Support Group message board.\)](#)

Scenario 1: Neglect = Marriage and Money Problems

Do you find yourself fighting with your spouse over the money he or she spends? Do you frequently spend money yourself, in excess, to spite your spouse because you're angry? While it may seem like money is a serious bone of contention in your marriage, there could be something more to blame.

"Often, in couples who are arguing about money, it's not money that's the problem," says Harley. "Instead, the money fights are a byproduct of relationship neglect."

In cases like these, money becomes a weapon, explains Harley. One spouse uses the other's spending habits as ammunition, bringing up his or her spending when it will hurt the most. Or a spouse spends to get even, even when he or she knows the spending is in excess of the couple's budget.

"Our relationship dynamics and resentments get played out with money," says Jenn Berman, PhD, a marriage and family therapist. "It's not uncommon to see a person get mad at his or her spouse, and then go out and buy something as revenge."

What's the solution? Find a good marriage counselor, and work through your relationship issues, explains Berman.

"Working through a couple's relationship issues can also help solve their financial problems," Harley tells WebMD. "When you fix the root cause, the subsequent problems like money improve as well."

Scenario 2: Love Is Blind

Another common financial problem can occur when a couple is so blinded by love that they spend with no regard for a budget. They take lavish vacations together, buy expensive gifts for each other, or buy a home they can't afford. These expenses serve as a symbol of love for a new spouse, but they also serve to dig a couple deeper into financial turmoil.

"The problem with this scenario is, they eventually run out of money," says Harley.

Once these couples fall into debt, they have something to fight about with both marriage and money problems at play.

In this case, the solution is a smart financial planner who can offer guidance on budgeting, long-term investment goals, and help in getting out of debt, explains Harley.

“A married couple in this scenario needs to wake up and smell reality,” says Harley. “They need to understand how much they earn, and how much they can spend, and stop being so ga-ga over the other person that they’re overspending.”

Scenario 3: When Women Are the Breadwinners

“We live in an age where women are catching up to the men,” says Harley. “In almost one-third of dual-income families, it’s the woman that’s the breadwinner.”

While for decades women have fought for pay equality, now that the fairer sex has caught up, many aren’t happy with their success.

“In a significant amount of couples I see in my practice where the woman makes more than the man, the woman isn’t happy,” says Harley. “She feels used, like she is responsible for everything.”

It gets even more complicated when a woman goes off to work, and the man stays home as Mr. Mom. Many women aren’t happy with this scenario, feeling shortchanged in their roles as mothers even though they’re succeeding in their careers, says Harley.

Being a businesswoman -- and wife and mom when the workday is done -- is a heavy load that can create marriage and money problems for everyone involved.

“It’s always hard to be the one that is not earning the most money, but it’s particularly hard for most men,” says Berman, author of the *A to Z Guide to Raising Happy, Confident Kids*. “Men feel a cultural pressure to earn more money, and it can create issues in both directions -- from the husband to the wife and the wife to the husband -- when the woman is the breadwinner.”

In this case, Berman suggests enlisting the help of both a financial planner and a marriage counselor. The couple should also set up equal spending rights, within reason and means, for each person.

“Have a clear-cut budget you both agree on, so everyone has some fun money to spend,” says Berman. “If couples create a budget where no one can spend, it’s not going to work.”

Scenario 4: Keeping Up With the Joneses

“We are a country that has become accustomed to debt,” Berman tells WebMD. “We judge one another by what we have and don’t have, so couples feel pressure to buy things they can’t afford as they keep up with the Joneses.”

The stress of owing and debt can cause money problems in your marriage, she explains. As a couple spends and spends, with no regard for their mounting debt, it’s the marriage that suffers.

“Couples don’t tend to fight about the mortgage because that’s a choice you make together,” says Berman. “Couples fight about the ancillary goods, like ‘I can’t believe you bought those golf clubs.’ It’s the things you can live without that you fight about.”

Again, financial planning support is key. In the meantime, a couple should ask themselves why they feel the need to live beyond their income.

“It’s important to do some emotional work on yourself to determine why you care about what other people think, and is it about your own insecurities?” Berman asks. “And open communication is a must -- it is so important to the success of overcoming financial trouble.”

More Tips

What are financial fixer-uppers you should keep in mind when managing your marriage and money problems? Here are more tips from the experts that will help you keep both above water:

- **Do a budget together.** Create a budget for both the short and long term as you build your goals and your dreams together, explains Dave Ramsey, author of the best-selling book *Total Money Makeover: A Proven Plan for Financial Fitness*. “Budgeting together will create communication in your marriage,” he says.
- **Everyone gets a vote.** “Both spouses have to give adult-like input and both spouses have to listen to each other,” says Ramsey.
- **You have to work together to get out of debt and build wealth.** “Two horses pulling a wagon can pull a huge load up a hill if they work together,” says Ramsey. “Pulling apart will simply turn the wagon into firewood.”
- **Have joint accounts.** “Having separate bills, debts, incomes, and lives is not a marriage,” Ramsey tells WebMD. “You’re a team, and you need to act like one on both the emotional and financial front to be successful.”
- **Invest in your marriage.** “Spend 15 hours a week together, to give yourself dedicated time to connect, put any issues aside like money, and keep the romance alive,” says Harley.
- **Every action has a reaction.** “Understand that any action you take in marriage, including an action related to your finances, has an impact on your spouse,” says Harley. “If you’re not conscientious of the effect it has on the other person, you’re living independently -- not married -- and you need to reconnect.”

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