

Is Your Relationship Going Through The "Terrible Twos?"

By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

Q: "We need relationship help! I've been with my partner for a little over two years and all of a sudden we seem to have so many relationship problems. How can our relationship go from being everything I've ever wanted to falling apart so quickly?"

A: The two- to three-year mark of a marriage or relationship can be a difficult time for many couples. I'm finding that more and more couples are seeking marriage advice and relationship help during this particular relationship phase. Let's look at a possible explanation for this phenomenon.

Marriage and long-term relationships require a great deal from you. This isn't bad news, and it shouldn't be surprising, since you know that anything worthwhile takes effort, persistence and commitment.

Your relationship is no different.

Many couples fail to recognize and commit to the work required to keep their marriage or relationship healthy.

Relationship help: Your brain tricked you, sort of:

The problem is that our brains have a tendency to trick us when we first fall in love. Research shows that the brain's pleasure centers go into overdrive when love is new, and as a result, our mood improves, we become more motivated and focused, and what was once considered uncharacteristic for us (like going dancing until the wee hours of the evening; or sharing our "true" feelings during a three-and-a-half hour conversation) now feels totally normal.

But around the two-year mark of your relationship, the love chemicals that were bathing your brain go back to typical levels, and when that occurs, the uncharacteristic traits that made you (and your partner) so incredibly endearing during the beginning phase of the relationship may take a leave of absence—leaving you the leftovers of what can feel like a less than ideal partner.

What was once effortless (i.e., sharing your feelings) now takes work—as a result, marriage problems and increased relationship conflict are likely to intensify at this time.

During this transition period, loving sentiments can give way to incessant complaining. Effective communication skills and learning to harness the power of gratitude can be very helpful during this difficult time.

These complaints usually take the form of:

"You used to be so _____" (fill in the blank: attentive, talkative, passionate, etc).

So the talkative guy you fell in love with now seems more like the stoic, emotionally unavailable type; the person who had energy to take you to a late night movie every weekend is now adamant that s/he has to be in bed by 9:00pm; the wonderfully empathic listener now spends most of his/her time channel-surfing, checking emails and appearing glassy-eyed whenever a conversation runs longer than two minutes. You get the picture.

Many couples interpret these changes as evidence that they've made a big error and ended up with the wrong person, rather than seeing this period as a transition phase of the relationship that requires compromise and the ability to negotiate the emerging challenges.

So rather than assuming your marriage or relationship is inherently flawed, hold onto the perspective that your relationship is going through something that's akin to the "terrible twos" – a developmental phase that can ultimately make you and your union stronger.

Don't forget to sign up for my free [Relationship Toolbox Newsletter](http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/relationship_newsletter.html) which can be done by going to http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/relationship_newsletter.html. As a bonus, you'll receive the two special reports:

Relationship Self-defense: Control Your Arguments Before They Control You and *The Four Mindsets that can Topple Your Relationship*

Are you ready for greater intimacy and a more harmonious relationship?

Check out the [Turbo-Charged Communication Program](http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/store/turbo_charged_communication.html) today at http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/store/turbo_charged_communication.html.

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Author Bio

Over the past fifteen years Richard Nicastro, Ph.D. has helped couples build stronger, more fulfilling marriages and relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

You can reach Dr. Nicastro via his website <http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com>