

## The High Price of Keeping Quiet

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Karen and Jim came to me for counseling because Karen had mentioned the word "divorce."

"I don't understand how we got to this point," said Jim. "We were always the golden couple. Everyone envied our relationship. Our friends came to *us* with their problems."

"I think that's part of your problem," I said. "You almost had it too easy. You had a kind of connection that not everyone has. In the first few years, things just flowed."

"But it's a lot harder with two toddlers in the house. **Life doesn't just flow when you've got little children.** You're both tired. Karen feels like she has two jobs and that Jim just doesn't understand. Jim misses the couple time and on top of it, he feels like he's the only one who does."

**Karen and Jim's experience is completely normal.** In fact, up to 67% of new parents experience sharp declines in the satisfaction they get from their marriage. Somewhere around 50% to 80% of new mothers experience some amount of depression. For 10% of them, it reaches a clinically significant level. (John Gottman, Ph.D.; Alyson Shapiro, Ph.C.; and Joni Parthemer, M.Ed.; 2004)

Now they've got the same stresses and strains everyone else does. But they didn't like being like everyone else. So they didn't talk about it. And the things they didn't talk about started mounting up. When that happens, people drift apart. They don't feel close and loving. Eventually they start leading parallel lives. When a couple comes into my office, it's easy to see when they're on this path. They're not rude. They're not abusive. **They're very polite and reasonable. But there's no juice.**

As I explained this, tears welled up in Karen's eyes. "That makes perfect sense," she said. "But now I'm afraid we've gotten past the point of no return."

Two weeks later, Karen and Jim came back in. I knew right away something was different. **They had juice!** I was caught off guard, if you want to know the truth. I was ready to roll up my sleeves and really go to work on this relationship. And now it looked like we were done with counseling already. What happened?

What happened was that honest talk had worked its magic even faster than I could have imagined. Karen said, "**Once we started talking, our problems weren't as big as we thought. But when we weren't talking, they seemed insurmountable.**"

I'm not trying to tell you it's always this easy. Just that it does work. The next time you notice some 'relationship drift,' ask yourself: Is there something we really should be talking about? **It might take some courage to get started.** You might wish you were doing *anything* else. But in the end, you'll find it's worth it. The price of keeping quiet is too high. Just ask Karen and Jim.

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**Claire Hatch Counseling & Communication**

**615 Market Street, Suite C, Kirkland, WA 98033**

Claire Hatch, LICSW, is a licensed counselor who helps people raise their self-esteem and turn their relationships around. She works with clients in her Seattle area office and by phone around the world. Claire gives seminars on how to turn conflict to connection, build a strong marriage, and balance family and work. For more information, visit [www.clairehatch.com](http://www.clairehatch.com) or contact Claire via email at [claire@clairehatch.com](mailto:claire@clairehatch.com) or by phone: 425 823-2273.

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