

Could money issues be costing you your relationship? Patricia Flokis tells us how to avoid paying the ultimate price over financial woes

LOVE & MONEY

Making it work

There's nothing more likely to cause conflict in a marriage than money. How both of you choose to spend it, invest it, save it, and even simple issues like who pays what bills or how much to splurge on holidays can cause arguments so spiteful you start to question if you're really meant to be together. So why is love and money often such an explosive mix? Here, experts give their advice on how to stop money from sabotaging your relationship.



WHY DOES MONEY CAUSE TENSION?

People have different values and expectations when it comes to money, which depend on their family background and life experiences," says Carmel Franklin, director of the Care Financial Counselling Service. "So when people enter a relationship, they often have different attitudes to money."

Ideally, couples should talk about the way they handle money before it becomes a problem, but that rarely happens. "Money is one of those taboo subjects, particularly in the early stages of a relationship when people are worried about not looking too tight or they feel the need to be generous to impress the other person," says Dr Matthew Bambling, lecturer

at Queensland's Australian Catholic University. "But when they marry or cohabit and need to do things like set budgets and pay off a mortgage, that's when their different attitudes to money, and how they handle it, can rear their unromantic heads."



IS IT REALLY ABOUT THE MONEY?

It's easy to be angry over your partner buying himself a \$2000 suit while you think twice about buying yourself new underwear, but it's often not a lack of money that gets couples arguing. Money is often a manifestation of other grievances – a lack of attention or affection, feelings of distrust, past resentments ▶



5 SIGNS YOU HAVE MONEY ISSUES

- 1 You argue about money every time you talk about it.
- 2 You avoid talking about your finances.
- 3 You find it hard to trust him with your money.
- 4 You have problems working out joint budgets and financial goals together.
- 5 You feel pressure to sign things and invest or spend money in ways you're not comfortable with.



...from Good Health, June 2009, pgs68-70

A full-page photograph of a smiling couple walking hand-in-hand on a gravel path. The woman is wearing a bright pink, sleeveless, knee-length dress with a bow at the waist and a large, ornate white hat with a pink flower. The man is wearing a black tuxedo with a white shirt and a black bow tie. They are both looking towards the camera and smiling. In the background is a two-story brick house with white window frames and a gabled roof. The path is made of light-colored gravel and curves to the right. There are some green bushes and trees in the background.

In a 2008 Relationships Australia survey, financial insecurity was cited as an issue that placed major pressure on 40 per cent of relationships. In 2006, it was just 18 per cent.

choose an appropriate and neutral time.

● **Save a little.** When times are tough, financial differences can often be exacerbated. "Putting away some money, even \$20 a week, adds up over time," says Bambling. "It can reduce anxiety, and the shared goal can bring you closer."



WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

● Visit the Australian Financial Counselling &

Credit Reform Association at www.afccra.org for financial counsellors who provide free, independent and confidential information to people experiencing financial difficulty.

● Visit Relationships Australia at www.relationships.com.au for information on their relationship courses and counselling options.

● Visit the Australian Government website at www.understandingmoney.gov.au for useful information and practical tools including budget planners to help you take control of your finances.

CAN A SPENDER AND SAVER EVER MAKE IT WORK?

"Difference can be your best asset because you can help each other get the things you really want," says Rana Jewell, an accountant and author of *Couples with Financial Difference: Can a Saver & a Spender Live in Harmony?* "For instance, I'm a saver and I find it hard to spend money on frivolous things that have no

worth other than joy, so my husband who is a spender, encourages me to do so. And he has a healthy amount of savings in the bank due to my sound financial management."

Jewell encourages clients with different spending styles to write down goals they agree on. "Not everyone can learn to save," she says. "But if you're happy [with your financial goals], it's easier to work towards making lasting changes." ♦



'YOURS', 'MINE' AND 'OURS'

How important financial independence is in a relationship depends on the couple. "It's your choice whether you have separate or joint bank accounts, or both, but you need to consider what you both want and are most comfortable with," says Franklin.

"Ask yourselves: if you had a joint account would you both need to sign to draw money out, so there's accountability? If only one person could do it what potential problems could there be

down the track? What kind of limit would you have on personal purchases? How will joint expenses be paid?"

Also be aware of the consequences. "If you're asked to be a co-borrower or a guarantor for your partner's car loan or become a partner in his business, you need to know what that means and what the implications are," adds Franklin. "If there's any anxiety about it, don't sign. It is always a good idea to seek independent advice."

and issues of security and control. These are some reasons why financial fights are emotional and draining.

"It's very common for people's dissatisfaction, stress and tension to be expressed through arguments about money," says Bambling. "For instance, one partner might overspend or deliberately blow the budget because they feel they're not getting the love they deserve. Alternatively, a partner feeling undervalued at work might react at home by trying to control their partner's spending."

It's also not unusual for couples to come undone when there's a change in the status quo because their money values are suddenly challenged. For instance, women who take time out of the workforce to raise a family often resent having to ask their partners for money and begin to feel financially powerless in the relationship, even if that's not the reality.

Some men also really struggle with job loss or when their wives begin earning more than they do. "It can be a major assault to a man's self-image and sense of

masculinity because, at the end of the day, many still believe that the buck stops with them in terms of financial responsibility," says Bambling.



MONEY-PROOFING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

● **Examine your backgrounds.** "Sit down together and honestly discuss where your ideas and values about money come from," says Bambling. "Once you identify them you can challenge them. Ask if they are useful or if they are actually unhelpful."

● **Find common ground.** Avoid the 'blame game' when discussing the state of your finances or you won't move forward.

● **Focus on the positives.** You must face your differences and have a plan to tackle them, but don't overlook the financial strengths you both bring to the relationship.

● **Decide who will handle the finances.** "There could be some practical and valid reasons why one person does more of the everyday money stuff like paying bills," says Franklin. "However, it's always good for both partners to know where their money is going and to be involved in major decisions like setting financial goals."

● **Plan regular money meetings.** "Start with a full financial audit, then check in every month or two so there are no surprises," advises Bambling. Keep meetings short so you can give it your full attention, and always

