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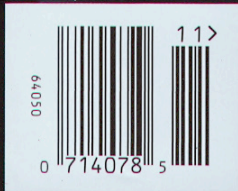
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Can Married Men and Women Just

No. 'It's Not Impossible; It's Impractical'

BY DR. MICHELLE R. CALLAHAN

I know it doesn't sound fair or politically correct, but married men and women simply cannot be friends with the opposite sex. It's not impossible; it's impractical. I'm sure that somewhere out there at least one person has managed to pull it off, but it can be pretty risky, and given all of the other obstacles your marriage has to face, why add the temptation of friendship with the opposite sex?

Nothing is wrong with married people wanting opposite-sex friends. But ask yourself, can you handle the responsibility that comes with the relationship? We always believe we can handle the temptation until we discover that we can't.

Having an opposite-sex friend can put you in danger of both emotional and sexual infidelity. Sometimes spending "quality time" with a friend can lead you down the road of relying on them in the way that you should rely on your husband or wife.



Dr. Michelle Callahan is a life coach and psychologist who's worked with clients for over 10 years and has appeared as a relationship expert on several national TV shows, including *Oprah*.

Having that emotional closeness to another person could result in you feeling emotionally closer to your friend than your spouse, letting down your guard, and allowing an emotional affair, that even worse, might lead to a physical affair. Or maybe you become physically attracted to a friend. Only one of the two of you needs to initiate the physical contact, and once started, you may not want to—or think you are able to—stop.

Married people have to take responsibility for protecting their marriage. You have to use every defense mechanism you have to keep your marriage out of harm's way. Infidelity can ruin a marriage, so if avoiding opposite-sex friendships is the cost of staying happily

married, then say hello to your same-sex friends! It doesn't mean that you will never interact with the opposite sex. You will chitchat with your work buddy and have fun when a group of your friends are out together at a bar or dinner. But it does mean that you won't go with your single friend to dinner and a movie, or spend hours on the phone talking about each other's relationship problems.

Sometimes we aren't as strong as we need to be, which is how infidelity starts. If you know that you may be tempted by a relationship outside your marriage, or that you have an ego that you need to constantly feed with attention from the opposite sex, then you can probably guess that if your "friend" is right there willing and able, you might not resist.

Now, think about your friends' needs for a moment. Remember, opposite-sex friends can get lonely, so you never know what someone else's agenda might be. Maybe they need a partner and they figure from watching you that you are the one for them. Maybe they don't have anyone else to be close to, so they lean more on you than they should. Maybe they are just looking for a friend with benefits.

Of course marriage should mean that nothing will happen between two friends, but so many affairs start with two people who thought they were just going to be friends. They think that all they're doing is having innocent little phone conversations—that as long as they're not having sex, everything is fine. It is...until it's not. Rarely are men and women friends without some form of attraction to each other that they usually consider and sometimes act upon.

What happens to the opposite-sex friends you had before you got married? They get managed and rearranged just like the rest of your life. When you get married, you realize that there

“What happens to the opposite-sex friends you had before you got married? They get managed and rearranged just like the rest of your life.”

are many changes and sacrifices that you have to make in the interest of keeping a happy home. Managing your friends doesn't mean cutting them off cold turkey. It just means making sure that you balance the relationship with your marriage and that you don't do anything with that person that you wouldn't want your spouse to see, hear or know. If you need to deceive your spouse, you've overstepped the boundaries of friendship. People who don't have relationships with both of you have to be moved to the sidelines, or they're likely to cause problems in your relationship.

There really isn't much that you can get from your friend of the opposite sex that you can't get from your spouse or your same-sex friend. So is what you stand to gain worth more than what you stand to lose? Success in life is about choices, so if you're going to choose marriage, keep your eyes on the prize (your spouse!). □

Be Friends With The Opposite Sex?

Yes. 'Jealousy Reflects A Total Lack of Self-Confidence'

BY DIANE WEATHERS

His part of my past unfolds like a cinematic romantic comedy. Girl meets boy and they fall in love. It's all wonderful until it isn't anymore and girl and boy part. Boy marries and starts a family. Some years later, boy and girl rekindle their friendship over long lunches and telephone conversations. When the former girlfriend marries, the ex and his wife take the wedding photographs. The newlyweds move to the same suburb where the ex lives, and now both couples are neighbors, attending each other's backyard barbecues and dinner parties. When the ex-girlfriend's marriage ends, the ex-boyfriend remains the friend in time of need, weighing-in with sympathy and wise counsel.

My friendship with this man has become a constant in my life, a relationship I now treasure. Through him, I have learned that the end of one close relationship can mark the beginning of another special connection. From his wife, a woman completely at ease in the skin she is in, I've discovered how beautiful and proud you stand when you're unthreatened by the female friends in your husband's life. "Jealousy reflects a total lack of self-confidence," she

“I've discovered how beautiful and proud you stand when you're unthreatened by the female friends in your husband's life.”

says. "It creates fear and obstacles, and brings nothing good to your marriage."

The idea that platonic friends have no place in a married couple's life is an outmoded convention, a throwback to the days when after the big dinners, the men headed for the parlor to drink bourbon while the woman gathered in the kitchen. Today our lives intersect on so many levels. We work side-by-side in the workplace and workout alongside each other in the gym. We're also marrying later and more frequently. The close relationships we develop along the way—with classmates, colleagues, bosses, mentors, mates and lovers, men and women—provide continuity and keep us grounded.

When we marry, we often neglect these relationships. We'll even abandon our same-sex friends, especially if those friends are single. This is a mistake. Ideally, your spouse is also your best friend, but not your only friend. Your mate's needs and priorities always take precedence over those of your friends. But you and your marriage inevitably suffer when your mate becomes your entire world.

Consider yourself fortunate if you're married and still have at least one close friend—not someone you hook up with on the sly—who is a member of the opposite sex. This person can be a great sounding board when you and your partner are going through one of those communications meltdowns that morph into prolonged silences. A woman's great guy-friend can be her husband's ally and remind her to be patient when her mate temporarily retreats into his man-cave. Likewise, a man's gal-pal can help him understand why his wife reacted that way when he gave her a gift-wrapped bag of fried pork rinds for Valentine's Day.

But you have to choose your friends carefully. Ever present, overly needy friends of any gender can trigger discord in a marriage. You also have to be mature enough to confront your own ulterior motives. People unhappy in their marriage can use their outside friendships as a wedge to create marital drama. "My wife thinks something is going on between us," one male friend who I might run into once a year confided to me. The seeds of any suspicions about me were clearly planted by him. I knew then it was time to put even more distance between us.

For there to be space in a marriage for each other's friendships, there needs to be the highest level of self-respect, open communication, trust and trustworthiness from all parties. This is smart, grown-up behavior that some people just can't master. One longtime male friend of mine has a chronic itch he must scratch. Now married to wife No. 3, he's still on the prowl. His wife has no need to worry about his female friends. We know him for what he is and call him out on it. It's the more casual acquaintances—the woman sitting near him in the club when his wife gets up and goes to the bathroom—who pose the greater threat to their marriage.

Men and women who cannot be trusted to honor the sanctity of marriage are people who can't be trusted. No outside bans or prohibitions can change them. But when wives and husbands and their male and female friends share similar values and have a strong sense of personal integrity, they can form a community that can support the marital bond. I was in my ex's home for a recent Sunday afternoon gathering. My mother and daughter were there, along with his older brother, his wife, their son and some of his wife's relatives. There was so much storytelling and shared history in the room that day. I remember thinking: "It doesn't get too much better than this." □



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