

# "Can our marriage survive Facebook?"

Dafina Ward, 37, Birmingham, AL



## "He 'friends' strange women!"

"I'm worried social media is hurting my marriage," shares Dafina Ward, who's been with Ahmad for nine years. "When I joined Facebook, Ahmad called it 'ridiculous.' But then he got hooked.

"Lately I see women I don't know posting on my husband's page. When I learned Ahmad met them online, I was taken aback. I'm like Fort Knox when it comes to accepting friend requests. Now I'm wondering, *Why would a married man need to make new female friends? What else is he up to?*

"Another thing: Ahmad has started to 'friend' old exes. Last week while he was asleep, I checked his Facebook and found a private message from an old girlfriend. I confronted Ahmad: 'Why can't you talk to her in the open? Are you planning to meet up?' When he assured me it was innocent, I felt foolish for letting my imagination run wild. I trust him, but social media leaves so much room for questions. Plus, I've seen people get caught misbehaving online, like getting 'tagged' in the wrong locations with the wrong people.

"Now Ahmad is mad, and I have my self-doubt to blame. I kissed a lot of frogs to get to him. I just worry I'll get hurt like I have before.

"Social media isn't going away, but I don't like how it's making my husband—or me—act. At times, Ahmad's phone is his priority, when I want to be the main person he communicates with. I'm scared things will keep getting worse if we don't get this under control."

## 2 keys to restoring shaken trust

"People often don't understand how fragile trust is in a marriage. Once it's shaken, the relationship can become truly difficult," says church pastor Van Moody, author of *The People Factor*. "The Wards grappled with two of the key reasons lack of trust crops up in a marriage: harboring past feelings of hurt and displaying suspicious or changing behaviors. Thankfully, it can be easy to work through these issues.

"One of the best ways to infuse a relationship with trust is to do what I call 'live in the light.' In other words, act in transparent ways that don't create questions. Adopting simple habits like letting spouses know where you're going and when you'll be home helps. On their own, Dafina and Ahmad came to a compromise about who they could 'friend' and what they could share online. The act of coming up with these guidelines helped the couple instantly feel more bonded, plus rid their relationship of three fear-based responses to damaged trust: withdrawing, building bitterness and spying.

"Another way to have greater transparency in a relationship is to address the blind spots that prevent understanding and empathy. The fact that the same message seemed innocent

to Ahmad yet threatening to Dafina comes down to perspective. Ahmad learned to hear his wife's words and respond with reassuring feedback. He might share, 'I have nothing to hide. You can check my phone.' And Dafina learned to voice her fears without getting defensive. These tweaks made both partners feel more understood.

"With the marriage on solid ground, the mission became maintaining focus on what truly mattered. Marriage issues don't start overnight. They begin with a shifting of attention away from one's spouse toward other people or hobbies. I teach this principle: Whatever you focus on is magnified. The Wards came to an agreement over how much time they should be online each day and made a stronger point to greet each other personally and lovingly in the mornings. Simply having this intention made each spouse feel valued.

"Happy relationships don't happen by accident. By taking intentional steps, the Wards created unquestionable trust and unwavering confidence."



Van Moody

PHOTOS: DAFINA AND AHMAD: ART MERIPOL; H & M: KERRI BUNN; EXPERT PHOTO: QUEEZ SHIPMAN; TEXT: LISA MAXBAUER

## Our status now: happy & blessed Today

"We've come to a really happy compromise and use social media to say sweet things to each other," says Dafina, now celebrating 11 years with her husband.

"People always tell us, 'You're our favorite couple on Facebook,'" Ahmad adds. "Everything is transparent and mutual online. When my wife had minor surgery last year, I used Facebook to ask our friends to pray for her. Our marriage is blessed!"



## "She's spying on me online!"

"Dafina introduced me to social media—now she's mad that I'm using it," responds Ahmad. "But she has nothing to worry about. Those unfamiliar names on my page are just friends of friends. I have to remind my wife, 'I know people you don't know.'

"In my eyes, Dafina's spying is worse than my innocent chatting. I was so hurt that she was questioning my character. I've worked hard to prove that I'm a stand-up guy. So why can't my wife take my word? Yes, I congratulated an old girlfriend on finishing her nursing degree. Dafina must have read the message too fast and out of context because I was woken up at 3 in the morning to angry accusations. I got defensive: 'If you're going to be mad, it needs to be something real!'

"The next morning, I was still really upset. We've never talked about boundaries with social media, but if my wife trusts me in our daily life—my coming and going from our house—she should trust me online. I'm not some 'invisible spouse' on Facebook—one of those guys who says he's married in his status, then acts in ways that seem anything but.

"Sure, I can get caught up in the habit of going online. Facebook is a great way for me to share my sense of humor with 1,000 friends. At the end of the day, though, it's all about my family. I know people who've cited Facebook as one of the reasons they got divorced. I don't want that to happen to us."

Ahmad Ward, 38

