



## Men: Should I Stay or Should I Go?

While all marriages will go through tough spots from time to time, sometimes those bumpy patches can go on from weeks to months, to years. With optimism, we tell ourselves that it will get improve, or that we'll "sort it out," even though we don't really don't know how to 'fix' the problems which come around like some sort of recycling argument. We know that fixing things is probably beyond our skillset, so we ask our friends and family for advice, but they don't seem to have any answers either.

So the intimacy wanes, the communication divide widens, mutual resentments appear, and the tolerance for each other's disappointment in the marriage grows ever louder. In fact, arguing becomes more frequent. Alternatively, the silence between you becomes deafening. If it wasn't for the man-cave, shed and television, you might attempt a repair. But regardless of the vibe at home, you are nervous, frustrated and out of your depth.

For the men who are struggling in their relationships, I have created some coaching exercises to reconnect men with their partners – individually, in between couples counselling.

Here are some of the things men ask therapists...

- Why does she have to make life so damned difficult?
- Our life is pretty okay. Why can't she just be happy/ relax?
- Why is it that I am the one that has to change?
- After all that I do for this family, why can she not see that I work hard to provide for us?
- I am successful in other areas of my life, why can't I understand relationships?

### Courage for the warrior

It takes a lot of courage to even examine what's not working in our relationships, so being willing to change the parts that are not working takes a 'warrior mentality.'

It can be difficult to take a step back and to think impartially. When you are close to a situation and it is causing you pain, there is a part of the brain that switches off logical thinking, so solutions are not as easy to grasp. Sadly, all men see themselves as 'fixers' and this is hardwired into the reptilian brain. Therefore, seeking help with a counsellor can seem unnatural, like an intrusion that somehow reflects upon one's manhood. "I should be able to handle this." "I should be the one to cope with family dilemmas." "I don't need a therapist! Surely, it is my job to make my woman happy?"

But just as all the big CEO's and professional footy players have a coach (yes, every single one), couples now need a relationship coach to help them to get back on track and to stay at top performance. Furthermore, it makes sense that if you want to improve your relationship game, you can leverage the knowledge of an expert to help you get further, faster, for longer.

### Should I stay or should I go?

The methods that I share with clients take time and effort, but have worked wonders for many. And I believe it can help you too. The processes I use, have helped clients to go from a state of confusion, to crystal clarity as to whether they are still committed enough to their marriage to fight for it.

### 3 myths about leaving

Myth 1: I don't need to work on myself, she does...

It is always easier to lay the blame on our partner, even though we know that we played some role in the relationship's demise. Perhaps we were not good at communicating our needs to our partners. Perhaps we were not honest with our partners about our expectations of their roles, or honest with ourselves about what we expected. It does not matter. What matters is that we heal any emotional wounds so that marital baggage surrounding the failed relationship does not get carried into the next relationship, creating a pattern.

Myth 2: If I am the leaver, I get to escape the pain

It is not uncommon for people to think that if they are the one that leaves the relationship, that we get to forego all the pain associated with abandonment. Unfortunately, no one gets through a broken marriage or de Facto relationship completely unscathed. You can expect regret, guilt, loneliness and potentially some family shame to work through. A decision to end a relationship has far reaching consequences and will impact your children, in-laws, family and mutual friends. In fact, there will be those who decide to choose sides. When a person is the initiator of separation, they are more likely to be labeled negatively and blamed.

Myth 3: Happiness is external: I will find happiness with someone else

In a modern world, it is not uncommon (post separation) for partners to swipe left for a new partner before they have gone through the five stages of grief - which inevitably come after a break-up. However, a 'too soon' relationship is not an antidote to our grief and loneliness. We might believe that a new relationship will fill the gap of the old. But happiness can only come from within. While it is possible to find long-term love the second time around, the bureau of statistics (Australia) says that 65% of second marriages or de Facto relationships (and 74% of third) will fail. It is important that you know, understand and love yourself first. AKA, do the work on yourself in therapy!

### You are the only one that you can change

If you are considering leaving because you are not getting what you want in your marriage, it is not always the answer to walk away. Remember that you will be taking you, your issues, your communication problems and other things with you when you go.

### Feeling significant

One of the top reasons that people are unfaithful to their partners, or want to break up, is because they want to feel like they did when they were single. They want to feel significant, desired, young, special etcetera. It may be that you have let yourself become the breadwinner, the father, the husband, the handyman and the dogsbody. When you feel so numb that you start to get your emotional needs met with the cute girl at work, a secret dating app or social media likes, you know that you are getting desperate for attention.



If you are feeling insignificant, then you have to realise that it is something that you have allowed to happen, through laziness, over time. The questions you need to ask yourself before you leave are these:

“Where did I abandon myself, my own heart, my dreams and my needs?”

“When did I make my partner responsible for my happiness?”

“What was I believing about myself that allowed me to go without what I was needing?”

“How can I become the kind of loving partner that I am seeking for myself?”

The shifts need to come from within you. You need to become the type of person that can both give and receive the kind of love and passion you wish you had.

A shift requires you to be willing to see the role that you played in what happened. And it requires you to get really clear about how you want your life to be going forward because the chances of this happening in another relationship are high, after the joys of new love and hot sex have faded. You can reverse this feeling of insignificance in your current marriage with coaching. You may discover that your partner may also be feeling insignificant around you.

### **Relationship coaching**

Counselling can improve relationships from the first session. I have seen tremendous breakthroughs and forgiveness in one session. It is my experience that individuals and couples never regret counselling. What they do regret is not beginning the process years before. They know that their happiness and marital contentment would have been sustained from the early years instead of having a prolonged, unhappy period in between.

Counsellors cannot offer advice about whether you should stay or go, but we do help you to look at pros and cons of staying and increase clarity. We talk about our own experiences, common trends for Australian marriages, and support clients in their decision making.