

Why Women Leave Emotionally Before They Leave a Relationship

Sometimes women book a couples counselling session when they are at the eleventh hour. In my experience, they do this to gain some clarity. They may be thinking, “Can we do something to make the marriage to feel right again?”

However, when these women have tried everything they know for years to make the marriage work it may be too late. They would try different tactics, spice things up in the bedroom, be more accommodating of the husband’s dreams and hobbies etcetera, and things would be better for a while, but they would always return to this sense of disconnection, the same resentments would begin to build up, and the feelings of not having the life they wanted would be there haunting them.

So... the woman would step back emotionally, give up on ever fixing things, give up on her partner

And the marriage ever being consistently good. But, she would not tell her husband that she had given up on the marriage until maybe after couples counselling.

Why is it that women often leave a relationship mentally before women leave physically?

There comes a point in every diminishing relationship where the whole process of physically leaving (especially if children are involved) seems like a logistical nightmare. So, by the time a woman makes up her mind to leave in boxes and crates, she has already moved out emotionally perhaps months or years before.

The problem is that when a woman asks for a separation or divorce, she may surprise her partner. Yes, she now has her husband’s undivided attention. And he will have enough anxiety and fear to be willing to make the long-overdue changes... In fact, he will bow to any demands in order to save his family and marriage.

The wake-up call for husbands. Common outcomes:

1. The husband suggests or books couples counseling
2. The husband is suddenly ‘emotionally present’ for the wife
3. The husband says “I love you” for the first time in years
4. Partner makes plans for the future - such as holidays, second honeymoons, new kitchen etc.
5. The partner becomes attentive and wants to reconnect in the bedroom

After the first couples counselling session

Despite some excellent suggestions and exercises for getting the marriage back on track, none of the activities seem to work for the woman. These marriage building exercises and tips might have worked years ago, but not now. She feels hopeless, forsaken, empty and guilty. The partner feels powerless, impotent, vulnerable and unprepared.

Unfortunately, no matter what he tries, he can’t turn back time and her heart is without empathy (a defense mechanism). This is because in the time between leaving the pain of a failed marriage behind (mentally leaving) and the time she actually declares she is leaving the marriage cannot now be fixed by last-minute behaviour and changes. This is what people call ‘too little, too late.’



It is now at the point where all marriage coaches wish they had a magic wand for the sake of the children and pleading husbands.

The magic wand

Despite the hopelessness of the situation, miracles do happen. I have had clients who have used Narrative methods or Gottman methods and rebuilt a crumbling marriage. Couples should at least attempt to repairs their relationships, even if it seems hopeless. No one wants to be a single parent and statistics show that new partners will never love our children as a real parent does. These days, it is not uncommon for some couples to stay living under one roof as co-parents (flatmates) for the sake of the children and/ or for financial reasons.

Here is a testimonial for a couple who used my Narrative method even when all hope seemed lost:

"Ghita, thank you so much for what you have done for our family!" Mr & Mrs Lees (36 and 39), Couples Counselling, Gold Coast.

Honoring decisions

When it is a case of 'too little, too late', however, I will honour a wife's decision. I may try to reality check how a future as a single parent will play out though and explain what mediation is like, so that she does not 'cut off her nose to spite her face.' Sometimes being 'right' about some old argument or being disappointed in a husband as a gender role model is not worth the loss of a family. This is an ego perspective. *The ego is never your friend and wants to keep you alone and focusing on your grievances.*

Albeit, after all is said and done, the final decision is of course up to the individual woman.

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