

Should you stay or end your marriage?

consider the
factors with time
and patience

BY MICHELLE KELLEY, LCSW

One of the most heart-wrenching decisions is to remain in or end a marriage. How do you decide? And once you've arrived at a decision, how do you know it's the best choice?

Many people, myself included, spend years in relationship limbo, trying to decide what is best. If only marriage was simple, or if there was a test to help individuals decide. But it's not simple and much is at stake.

What factors should be considered before making such a paramount decision? Individuals need to consider whether or not there is a chance to rebuild the relationship, and understand how children will be affected. Undoubtedly, children must be considered but they shouldn't be the only factor. Although many studies have been conducted on the effects divorce has on kids, there hasn't been much focus on how children are affected from an environment plagued with conflict and discord.

Contemplate what you will gain and lose from ending your marriage, and how you have changed or grown as an individual, and as a couple.

Take the time to reflect on your relationship and your contributions to your individual situation; all relationships provide opportunities for personal growth.

Discernment counseling is a viable option; it is specifically designed to assist couples to either work on their marriage or end it amicably. This type of counseling helps couples gain some clarity and confidence regarding their decision. Discernment counseling is a short-term, intensive process usually requiring one to five sessions. It differs from traditional marriage counseling which aims to salvage a marriage.

In the event of domestic violence and/or a serious threat from a spouse, immediate action is required. Otherwise, divorce is a process which should be given much time and thought – it is not

an event. Consider the time and effort we exude when selecting our marital partner. We should also apply ample thought and patience when making life-changing decisions such as a this.

If a divorce is imminent, the goal is to determine how to proceed in taking good care of yourself (emotionally and physically) and your children. When a couple decides to end their relationship, it is highly recommended (especially, if you have children) to get professional counseling for familial support during such a critical transition period. Parents need to learn how to best support their children during the upset of this transition which includes: legitimizing children's feelings, learning the rules of co-parenting, offering support/guidance, keeping them emotionally healthy, and keeping details of the divorce to a minimum.

If you end up divorced, it is best to abstain from a relationship for some time. All too often, I see people relationship hopping without taking time to reflect and learn. Beginning a new relationship soon after a marriage ends can be quite unhealthy and traumatizing to children.

Let's face it "happily ever after" is not a guarantee. When an intimate relationship is no longer meeting your needs, should you jump ship or recognize all relationships are imperfect and experience rough spots? There is no clear cut answer and resolving this dilemma depends greatly on personal circumstances and requires time and patience. Whichever path you choose, please remember to deal with it in a dignified and intelligent manner. Professional counselors are always available to help. ❖



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