

Should You Leave Your Relationship?

How do you know when it's time to say goodbye to a relationship? In any intimate relationship—especially in a marriage—it's not a good idea to let a doomed partnership drag on, simply to avoid the pain of a breakup.

Signs of Trouble

There are some warning signs that your relationship is in trouble. If you recognize any of these signals in your own partnership, you may have some work to do to get things back on track.

1. **Your life priorities have changed significantly.** Major life changes often force people to reconsider what's important, and this can make a once-healthy partnership lose its bearings. A near-death experience such as a serious accident or illness, being unexpectedly fired from a job, or losing a family member can cause anyone to reevaluate his or her life and decide to make some changes. Everything looks different after such an experience, and some things lose their meaning. When this happens, these new ways of seeing things must be addressed, since it's unlikely that such changes will just disappear.
2. **The arrangement still works, but the passion is missing.** Lots of doomed relationships manage to work—for a while. But when neither partner has any genuine enthusiasm for the relationship, it may be in trouble.
3. **You no longer trust your partner.** After a partner has broken the bond of trust, it can be difficult to get it back. If your partner has had an affair or was irresponsible with a large amount of money, it is understandable that you feel angry and hurt. Over time, these wounds may not heal. Broken trust can cause serious harm to a relationship, and, if it is not healed, the relationship may not recover.
4. **Your partner's lifestyle or values clash with yours.** It is difficult to sustain a long-term relationship when you and your partner do not agree on some of life's most basic things. If you want to make and save a lot of money, but your partner seeks a simple life and would be happy living in a small house with few luxuries, this is a potential problem. If your partner seeks excitement and wants to be around people most of the time but you are basically a loner who prefers solitude, you may find yourselves growing apart. You may have been attracted to each other in the beginning because you brought each other some balance, but, over the long term, the very things that drew you to each other may doom your relationship.

Deciding to end a relationship can have enormous implications. If you are married, have children, own a home, and share finances, leaving your partner can be very complicated and will affect everyone in the family. It is important to make such a decision thoughtfully and for the right reasons.

More Warning Signs

If your partner regularly does one or more of the following things, you have good reason to be concerned.

1. Behaves abusively with your friends and family

2. Betrays your trust
3. Breaks promises
4. Cheats on you
5. Does not challenge you mentally
6. Does not support your goals in life
7. Is extremely jealous without cause
8. Is not financially self-supporting
9. Opposes or ignores your thoughts, feelings, or concerns
10. Physically abuses you
11. Pressures you to have sex when you are not interested
12. Resists your attempts to improve the relationship
13. Shares your secrets with others
14. Tells lies regularly
15. Threatens violence
16. Tries to isolate you from your friends and family
17. Verbally abuses you or puts you down

These behaviors are very serious and potentially dangerous to you. If you are in a relationship with someone who treats you in any of these ways, you should seriously consider seeking the assistance of a mental health professional.

The Impact of Stress

Stress can make it harder to decide what to do. If you are questioning your relationship and have problems with money, are stressed at work, or the kids are acting up, deciding what to do becomes even more difficult. It's important to take your time and resist the temptation to make a fast decision that may later turn out to be the wrong thing for you.

Tips for Making Good Relationship Decisions

1. Take your time making any important decision such as whether to end an important relationship. Even though you may feel confused and indecisive, it is important to recognize that this situation requires a deliberate and careful decision-making process.
2. Making a relationship decision calls for both instinct and logic. It's important to trust your gut, but don't lose track of reason.
3. Look at the issues from different points of view.
4. Consider the immediate and long-term implications of each option (staying or leaving), including the impact of each on other people in your life.
5. Consider the worst- and best-case scenarios, as well as the possibilities in between.
6. Give your relationship every chance to get back on track before you call it quits. Ask yourself if you have really tried everything. If you have, and it still isn't working, it may be time to move on.

Seeking Advice and Support

Involving a few trusted friends in your decision-making process can help you avoid the tendency to rush into a decision and hurry to get it over with. Consulting others helps you step back from the situation and see it in a broader context. While it is more difficult and time-consuming, getting the advice and support of others can help you reach a better decision about whether to end the relationship. This is true for relationships or any other kind of decision.

You may decide to work with a professional counselor or therapist during this process. *This is strongly advised if you are in an abusive relationship.* A licensed, experienced professional can help you sort out the issues, help you see things you may not be aware of, and give you feedback on how you are seeing things. Involving an objective outsider can be a smart move because you can feel free to say everything that is on your mind without worrying about offending someone you care about or being judged for your thoughts and feelings.

Finally, if you decide that the relationship should end, minimize the chances for emotional fallout by planning how, where, and when you will deliver the news. When making such an important change in your life, it is better to set aside spontaneity in favor of being slow, deliberate, and certain.

Suggested Reading

Hammond, John, Keeney, Ralph and Raiffa, Howard, *Smart Choices: A Practical Guide to Making Better Decisions*. Harvard Business School Press, 1998.

Heller, Robert and Hindle, Tim, *Essential Manager's Manual*. New York, NY: DK Publishing, 1998.
