

"Stay in or Leave a Relationship"

I was talking to a woman that has been with her boyfriend for seven years, is fairly unhappy and does not know if she should stay or go. She is uncomfortable in the relationship, but fears not being able to find anyone else if she moves on. They have gone back and forth on several key issues for many years, but she has never had the strength to cut ties. She knows in her heart that this is not the man she is meant to spend her life with, but she is also torn because, generally speaking, he is a good guy. I need to start by saying there is no magic formula for whether you should stay or go. Whether you are unhappily married, or in a committed relationship that is less than stellar, it is an individual decision that shouldn't be taken lightly. You never want to base a decision out of fear. By this, I mean, you shouldn't stay in something only because you are afraid of being on your own. Or, you shouldn't commit to someone because you are afraid you'll never find anyone else. You want to be with someone for the right reasons. You want to be compatible, you need to generally like the person, you want to have similar values and visions for what your future will look like, and you need to respect and honor your relationship. Every relationship is going to have their ups and downs, so you can't expect to always get along and be engaging with each other. If you are in a similar situation, it is important to take a step back and look at your relationship with a new set of eyes. Remember that if two people are committed to making things work, and they still love each other as partners and friends, then they have a great chance of growing as a couple. Also know that there may be a time when, as a couple, you have exhausted your efforts and may be ready to part ways. Here are some tips to help you re-evaluate where you are in your own relationship.

1. Happy or not?

Are you or are you not currently happy in your relationship? Is your partner also dissatisfied or is it just you? Are you constantly looking to your partner to make you happy and fulfilled? That is a huge request to ask of one person. Remember that just because you are not happy, this does not mean there is anything critically wrong in your relationship. You may need to focus on getting involved in activities that bring more joy to your life. Maybe you are blaming your partner for your unhappiness, where you need to take responsibility for creating your own happiness. Or, there may be fundamental problems that need to be addressed. Take some time to clarify this for yourself.

2. Be proactive and ask for help

If there are fundamental problems in your relationship, have you sought out help? I commend couples that reach out for help when they do not know where to turn. This

means you still have the fight in you to make things work. Sometimes it is helpful for each partner to talk with someone individually first, in order to completely share their thoughts and feelings on the relationship. If you still care for your partner, don't throw in the towel before you give it your all. You will, then, at least feel peace with whatever outcome comes your way. You will know that you tried and made an effort to work things out.

3. Don't let fear be your decision maker

If you are extremely unhappy in a relationship and you have tried several methods of reconciliation, then, it may be time to take a break. So many people think it is a black or white issue, meaning you either stay together or you completely break up. There is always some gray area to explore first. You can physically take a break from each other to re-think your options, see how it feels to be alone, and determine the steps that you may need to take. Again, don't let fear decide what path you are going to take. Know that you are much stronger than you may give yourself credit for, and you will always be o.k.

4. Acknowledge and heed any red flags

Is there anything that appears to be or feels different than usual, anything that feels uncomfortable or just not right.....spouse's behavior, how both of you interact with each other, inability to communicate openly, honestly and effectively about your feelings, the situation at hand, where you both stand in the relationship and where you want it to go? Is there a lack of mutual respect for and trust in each other, any controlling behavior in either partner, any form of abuse or infidelity in the relationship? If any of this rings true for you, it's important to view these as red flags that there are issues that need to be addressed and resolved through efforts on both of your parts before moving forward with a decision about whether or not to leave the relationship. If either of you is unwilling to work at resolving the issues that are causing conflict in the relationship, that is a good indicator or factor to assist in making the best decision.