

CAN SEPARATION SAVE A MARRIAGE?

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Marriage sometimes presents difficult dilemmas. One of these is whether to stay together or not.

Maybe your marriage has become intolerable but divorce seems like too huge a step? It seems that every day spent together creates more damage but you are not ready to end it finally. There is still hope that the dream of being together can be revived but you have no idea how or even if you have the will?

This is often when the idea of separation becomes considered as a compromise option. A question you might have is whether it is likely to create added complications or does the physical distance of living apart create the potential to have the space for a less emotive way of seeing the situation?

Separation can be useful, but only under certain circumstances, if it is properly managed and with a clear goal in sight. When a couple separate simply in the hope that you might miss each other and therefore appreciate the other again, this might indeed happen, but it will not necessarily deal with the issues that led to problems in the first place. Problems will soon arise again when you reconcile.

Being apart also introduces new factors, for example, insecurity about what the other is doing, resentment about being the person who has to leave the home etc which adds to the layer of existing problems.

A separation aimed at punishing the other party never works because game playing in relationships cannot work in the long-term. New constructive ways of working together on difficulties have to be found.

GUIDELINES

To increase the chance of a separation working the following guidelines are recommended. If conflict is too high you should work with a third party to negotiate agreed upon terms of the separation.

1. The separation must have an agreed upon **TIME LIMIT**. Open ended separations create insecurity and anxiety. If when the time limit e.g. 3 months is reached, the couple can renegotiate if more time is needed.
2. The separation needs to have clear **GOALS**. Why are you doing this and what is it that you hope to get out of it in the end.
3. **HOW** are you going to go about meeting these goals?

You need to be very clear about what the problems are and what is needed to work through them.

Some questions to ask when looking at goals are:-

- Can you do this alone or do you need counselling? In all likelihood you have tried all you can and have become stuck.
- Can you listen to each other and hear each other's ideas regarding the separation without more conflict?
- Are you going to meet during this time to work on the relationship
- What will the arrangements be regarding children
- What are the rules regarding other dating/relationships? The general guideline is that if this is a time to work on the marriage then introducing new complications is not useful. Many people when feeling angry or anxious during a separation are vulnerable to connecting with someone new who can make you feel better. It needs to be clear if this is still a marriage with all the rules of fidelity.
- Are you prepared to make sacrifices and go through discomfort to try and make this marriage work?

- Have rules about whose home is whose. The person who leaves no longer lives at the family home and has to respect the boundary of not dropping in at any time as if they still lived there. Likewise the partner who stays at home cannot just arrive at the doorstep of their partner's new home to check up on them.
- Financial arrangements need to be clear regarding existing financial commitments.

NO MAJOR DECISIONS should be made regarding any big investments or expenses during this time. This may not always be avoidable but should be followed if possible.

At any time during this period of separation something is not working, the agreement can be relooked at to find what can be "tweaked".

A separation that has the main aim "to see what happens" is likely to fail. Like a business, you need to be clear what you are headed to achieve and not hope it will all fall into place.

Ultimately all of this has to be negotiated and AGREED ON and then translated into a simple CONTRACT that is not a legal document but a statement of intent.

If it becomes impossible to agree on the basic conditions of the contract it is likely that the marriage itself does not have a good long-term prognosis.

Where the contract is workable and adhered to and both people committed, there is the possibility of learning to work through old resentments, find new ways to communicate and to re romance the relationship.