

Should I Divorce?

No one can ever answer that question for you. If they try to, they have done you a disservice.

Things to consider while you mull this question over:

- Who or what are you divorcing?
 - Your spouse?
 - Your pain? Sadness? Longing for connection?
 - Your spouse's [addiction, depression, anxiety, control issues, etc]?
 - Your schedule?

- What do you hope will be different if you are divorced? For example:
 - I'll be independent.
 - I'll be happier; I will know who I am if I am not overshadowed by this person.
 - I'll find my soul mate and _____.
 - I'll have more time with the kids; I will not be shut out anymore
 - I won't be dragged into my spouse's mess.
 - My spouse will have to abide by rules of the court so my rights will be protected.
 - I will be divorced and free to move on.

Your answers to these two questions will give you lots of information.

There is a wonderful and wise adage that states: "Wherever you go, there you are."

If you choose to divorce but do not work on your own issues [self esteem, boundaries, identity, time management, pro-active self care] you will not be able to behave differently in your new situation. Sometimes the problems really are caused by your spouse. More often, we contribute to our troublesome relationships. Self awareness and practicing new behaviors are the best things you can do for yourself whether you divorce or not.

Before divorcing:

- Decide what you Need to have
 - Financially
 - Custody/Visitation

- Learn how to set effective boundaries and hold them.
- Learn how to accept your spouse As Is and work within that understanding.
- Pick your ditches: What are Must Haves
- Learn to avoid emotional hooks from your spouse, in-laws, family members.

If you decide to divorce, know that:

- If you are married with children, divorce is simply Stage II of Marriage. The relationship will continue into your twilight years as you parent and grandparent together.
- A divorce will give you three things:
 - Separate housing
 - A financial agreement
 - A calendar within which to schedule visitation and vacations
- The items most upsetting in marriage will continue to be most upsetting in divorce.
- If you do not work on your foibles, misperceptions, and interpersonal relating style, you are likely to pick the same partner with a different face and different set of symptoms.
- The courts, judges, lawyers, and mediators will not protect you [unless you file for and receive an order of protection], help your spouse understand his/her shortcomings, or help him/her see logic.
- The job of the courts is to make legal your agreements and to make final decisions in the areas you cannot agree with your spouse.
- It is up to you to make the final agreements. It is up to you to fight for yourself. It is up to you to protect yourself financially and emotionally.
- The lawyer that presents the best arguments is the lawyer that "wins."
- Almost nobody is ever satisfied with divorce outcomes. Nobody ever "wins."

- The ability to move on after a divorce has everything to do with your ability to mourn the relationship and be at peace with your situation.

A word about abusive relationships:

No one should tell you whether or not to divorce. However, if you are in an abusive relationship of any kind, separating from your partner may be a productive step. Separation can provide a measure of safety from your abuser and can also provide a sabbatical time to evaluate what you need in order to have a healthy and productive partnership whether with your current partner or a new one. The time of separation can be used for individual therapeutic work as well as couples work.

If you are in an abusive situation be sure to have these things in place:

- Work out an escape plan: if you need to leave quickly so your partner can cool down for a day or two, do you know where to go and how to get there?
- A cell phone; keep a phone list of safe people/places in many places [purse, pocket, desk drawer at work, glove compartment] so you will have one nearby as needed or if your phone is stolen.
- Money, clothes and other personal effects in a safe place, outside of your home, that you can get to if you need to leave your home suddenly. Papers such as orders of protection, separation agreements, marriage license, passport can be kept in a safety deposit box as can jewelry and other valuable items that you will want or need.
- Safe havens: places that you can go to if you need a place to be safe and stay for a while. For example, a friend's home, hotel, or another place that you are welcome.
- Keep your car keys with you at all times in case you need to leave. If you cannot leave a dangerous situation, think through which rooms in your home are safest for you. Often the bathroom is one of the safer places in a home. For others, the laundry room, the attic or other rooms provide sanctuary while your partner cools down.