

Guys Only Guide to Divorce – IS IT REALLY OVER?

See how men respond when their partner leaves the marriage. The statistics say that about 3 quarters of divorces are initiated by the woman, so learn the warning signs before she walks out.

By Sam J Buser PhD & Glenn F. Sternes PhD. Updated: September 25, 2014



I came home at about the usual time. When I walked in, I knew something was wrong...things were missing. My gut started to ache. Then I saw a letter left on the table. Oh, no, not a “Dear John” letter. It can’t be. She’s gone! I don’t want to believe it. I can’t believe it!! I read the letter again in disbelief. There was a knot in the pit of my stomach. It just can’t be. She’s left, and I never saw it coming. — (Martin, 34-year-old chemical engineer)

When a marriage ends, most of the time, it is the woman who makes that decision. Constance Ahrons,¹ a leading authority on divorce, reports that between two-thirds and three-quarters of divorces are initiated by women. So the majority of this chapter addresses how guys respond when the woman leaves the marriage. However, sometimes it is the husband who decides the marriage is over. Therefore, we also include answers for many of the questions that men ask when they have decided to go. Is It Really Over?

Before a woman leaves a relationship, especially a marriage, she usually makes a lot of complaints about why she is unhappy. If the complaints fall on deaf ears, the woman will usually intensify her complaint, perhaps with a different twist. If she concludes that it does no good to complain to her man, she may eventually give up the complaining, but that doesn’t mean she’s satisfied.² It means she has given up trying. For most women, it takes years before they are truly convinced that nothing is going to change.

How was I to know she was ready to leave?

Many guys are surprised when their woman leaves, despite the fact that she may have been threatening to leave for years. Maybe guys get a false sense of security from endless threats. It’s like the story about the little boy who cried “wolf” too often. After a while the villagers stopped believing him. Maybe you stopped believing your wife’s threats as well. Or maybe you knew she was mad or unhappy; you just didn’t know she was that unhappy. Remember that, in general, women are less likely than you to express their feelings directly, especially when they know it will cause a conflict with you. If the two of you have tried discussing problems before to no avail, then she’s probably not going to tell you that she’s fed up enough to leave.

George came home from work one day to find his house empty, his kids gone, and a note on the fireplace mantle stating, “I’ve filed for divorce.” Stunned, he walked outside only to be confronted by a sheriff’s deputy who asked his name. The deputy then officially served him with papers indicating that his wife was suing him for divorce. “I never saw it coming,” he told the psychologist as he paced the consultation room during a meeting of a men’s group.

“Didn’t you know she was angry?” asked one of the group members. “Well, I knew she was mad, but I didn’t know she was THAT mad,” he replied. George then went on to describe detailed complaints that

she had made for years—all of which he had essentially ignored. The only surprise, really, was that she had waited so long to leave him. He got lulled into a false sense of security because she had not left him before. Sometimes, the handwriting on the wall is quite clear, if we could just see it.

Why wasn't she honest with me about leaving?

If your wife left you, and you had no clue it was coming, it may have been because she was afraid of your reactions. If there has been a history of violence between the two of you, she wisely chose not to tell you of her plans. Or maybe you never touched her, but at some point, you threatened to harm her or make her life difficult if she tried to leave. In an argument, you may have used “You’ll never see the kids again,” or “I won’t let you have a penny” or even “I’ll never let you leave.” Even if “all you did” was put your fist through the wall a couple of times when you were angry, you may have scared her sufficiently that she was unwilling to be honest with you when she made her decision to go. If any of these scenarios fit, your wife may have been smart not to tell you. You might say that you never “really” would have done any of those things, but how was she supposed to know that? The best you can do now is to not do anything else she would experience as threatening.

If she was so unhappy, why did she wait so long to leave?

Women are generally reluctant to leave relationships, even bad ones. They tend to stick it out in an effort to make it work. Women stay in unsatisfactory relationships for a number of reasons.

WHY WOMEN DON'T LEAVE

Love. “I still love him. He’s like two different people.”

Children. “Our children are better off with a father. I couldn’t raise them as well by myself.”

Economics. “My standard of living—and that of the kids—will go way down if I leave him.”

Religious Beliefs. “Marriage is a solemn commitment. Divorce is against my religious beliefs.”

Pressure from Family and Friends. “They tell me it is my duty to stay with him. They keep urging me to stick it out, promising it will get better.”

Family History. “People in our family never divorce.”

Culture. “Divorce goes against our cultural values.”

Work Reasons. “I would have to go back to work. I don’t have job skills.”

Isolation. “I have no place to go.”

Fear of Failure. “I don’t want to feel that I failed at marriage.”

Is the woman, always right?

Please note that we are not saying that the woman is always right. Rather, we are saying that when she becomes convinced that it does no good to complain to her man, the relationship enters a dangerous phase. At this point, a seemingly minor—even innocuous— event can precipitate her moving out. One wife we know left her husband immediately after she overheard him say something negative about her to their child. They had argued repeatedly over the years to the point of major conflicts, but she remained

in the marriage. However, after overhearing this one conversation, she suddenly packed her bags. Was it really the man's remark that ended the marriage? No, his wife had given up on getting him to address her complaints, and this simple overheard conversation was just the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.

I've been thinking about leaving her. How honest should I be?

Unless your wife is likely to be violent, suicidal, take the kids and hide their whereabouts, or burn the house down, be totally candid with her. Of course, we are not saying that you should use threats of divorce to indicate how angry you are with her. Only tell her that you are planning to divorce if that is what you are going to do. By being honest with her about your intent to divorce, you begin the transition in a more healthy way. As Robin Green³ put it, "The best way to lend dignity and respect to the end of your marriage is to be as honest with your spouse as he or she will allow you to be."

I left her, but what if I'm having second thoughts?

It is not uncommon for men (and women) to decide to leave a marriage and then later to have second thoughts. After all, she may seem like an impossible person right now, but a few years ago you thought you wanted to spend the rest of your life with her. Is she really all that different from the person you first chose to marry? While it is true that you learned more about her after you married, it is also true that you have built some history with her.

If you are having some second thoughts, give yourself more time before you take further actions. If you have hired an attorney, ask the attorney to put matters "on pause" while you contemplate what you want to do. We don't recommend that you dismiss your previous concerns about the marriage—just take some extra time to evaluate. Don't completely cancel legal proceedings until you have greater clarity about what you want. You may want some alone time to think. You also may want to meet with your wife to discuss what she is willing to do (e.g., make certain concessions, go to marital counseling, join Alcoholics Anonymous).

One benefit from having seriously contemplated divorce and acted upon it (for example, by moving out or hiring an attorney) is that your partner knows that you are serious about ending the marriage. You may have threatened to divorce or leave before to little effect. Such threats lose their impact unless it becomes clear that you are willing to go through with the action. Now, however, it is more evident that you are willing to end the marriage. This may give her greater reason to reconsider her position.

If you've reached such a point in your relationship, you may be well off to seek a competent marital counselor. A marriage counselor can help mediate your disputes and disagreements. Having an experienced third party to listen to both sides can be invaluable at this juncture.

If you are reconsidering your decision to leave the marriage, you might want to check out Dr. Phil's book *Relationship Rescue*.⁴ It offers a pretty good, no-nonsense, man-friendly approach to reconnecting with your partner.

I had an affair, and I'm hot for my new love. Should I leave the marriage and not look back?

The first thing that you should know is that the odds are heavily against going from an affair with someone to a long-term, lasting relationship with that same person. One reason is that both parties know the other has already had an affair. They cheated once and are both capable of deception. So, they each lack trust

in the other's fidelity. We have seen men who gave up their careers, their children, their homes—everything—to pursue a woman. Most of those men eventually come back to see us or our colleagues for more counseling because they have jumped from the frying pan into the fire. Affairs are not good solutions for a failing marriage. They only make matters worse. If you are in the midst of an affair, we recommend that you, at least temporarily, put the affair on hold, and resolve what you are doing about the marriage. If the marriage cannot be salvaged, then it is best for you and all concerned to end the marriage rather than to carry on a double life.

Should I offer to go to marriage counseling?

Jerry was asked by his wife to go to marital counseling. His response? "If you don't like the marriage, why don't you go to counseling? You've got the problem." He reported to us that the next time he saw her in person was three months after their divorce was final. If she suggests marital counseling, just say "yes."

If you are interested in reconciliation, we recommend that you take the initiative and suggest marital counseling yourself. Your partner's response is likely to be that it's too late—you should have agreed to it before. Tell her she is right. Confess you made a mistake and urge her to reconsider. Sometimes, if she does not really want to leave you, she will accede to your wishes. If so, don't assume that the battle is over. She may only be going to counseling now as a way of reducing her guilt about leaving you. On the other hand, she may be holding onto a shred of hope about the relationship. She will need to see that you are sincere in your willingness to change things in the marriage. This is not the time to point out where she is at fault. It is a time to recognize and acknowledge your contribution to the marital problems. If marital counseling continues, there will be time later to address your complaints about the relationship.

This book is for men who are in the process of going through or recovering from a divorce. Whether she moved out today, you just left the courtroom after the final hearing, or you have been divorced awhile and are already dating, this book will help you make the decisions and do the things that will make life after divorce better.

The Guys-Only guide to Getting Over Divorce and on with LIFE, SEX, and RELATIONSHIPS - Sam J Buser PhD & Glenn F. Sternes PhD.