

## Are you really ready for divorce?

### The eight questions you need to ask.

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Your marriage is in question and you're facing a real dilemma. You may be the one who is deciding should you stay or should you go.

"I feel like I need to get a divorce and end this so-called marriage. Yet how can I be sure? Some days I feel more confident of my decision than others. A part of me still loves him, or at least I care for him. I don't think I am in love with him, but what if I make a mistake? A lot of people will be affected by what I decide. Maybe I should not rush ahead with this. That's amusing since I have been thinking about it for three years. This whole thing wouldn't even be an issue and I could forget about this divorce, if he would just change his behavior."

Or you may be the one who has just heard that your spouse wants a divorce.

"Divorce? Where did that come from? Two weeks ago we were talking about a vacation in the mountains. I had no idea our marriage was this awful? I am shocked and devastated. I have got to find a way to put a stop to this. Maybe this is all a dream and when I wake up things will be back to normal."

Most books and [articles on divorce](#) are written based on the assumption that once a couple says they want a divorce that they are ready for divorce. It is our experience as [therapists and divorce coaches](#), who have helped many people through this process that this is in fact not the case. Usually when couples begin the [divorce process](#), either one but more often than not, both, are not really ready for the divorce.

Divorce professionals such as therapists, [mediators](#), and [attorneys](#) often believe that statements such as, "I've had it with him." or "My feelings have died for her," are indicators that the marriage is over. Attorneys often equate being hired for their services as an indicator that the couple is ready to divorce. This is not so.

Most couples who begin a divorce are unprepared and are often not even on the same page when they begin. It is this lack of preparedness and readiness for a divorce that either causes marriages to end prematurely or divorces to deteriorate into competitive contests.

The decision to obtain a divorce is one of the most crucial decisions a person can make, with consequences that last for years or a lifetime. A decision this important requires much greater attention than it is usually given by both couples and [professionals](#). It is a process in and of itself. Once a couple is prepared and ready, they will sooner be able to begin their divorce by both being on the same page and this will eliminate most of the [emotional](#) and [financial](#) struggles that cause divorces to become adversarial and ruthless.

**More information on considering divorce:**

The reason many people do not even think about getting ready for a divorce is because they operate under the assumption that the sooner you can get out of a stressful situation, the better. So there is a natural tendency for people who are in difficult marriages to want to get the divorce over with as quickly as possible in order to [move on with their lives](#). Family and friends often encourage this as well. They hurt for the family and so also prescribe to the myth that the quicker the divorce is over, the sooner everything will return to normal. But unfortunately, in most cases, just the opposite happens. Couples who make rushed decisions to leave the marriage have had no time to evaluate their feelings, thoughts, or options. As a result, they are unprepared for the roller coaster of emotions, the complicated [legal system](#), and the many life-changing decisions that they need to make. Quite often, they make [agreements](#) which they cannot sustain, and instead of the situation getting better, they often find that they have just traded one set of problems for another. So it is no wonder that they often get tangled up in lengthy court cases and the very thing they hoped for, a quick divorce, often takes years.



[Is Divorce the Right Choice?](#)  
[Things To Know When Contemplating Divorce](#)  
[Should You Stay or Go?](#)  
[Love in Ruins](#)  
[Making the Decision: Separation](#)

This article outlines what couples need to do in order to face the numerous dilemmas that are inherent in divorce. A dilemma implies that you are torn between two choices, each of which have undesirable fearful elements. If people have not resolved their dilemmas before the divorce, they go through the process trying to manage their fear in different ways by hiding their doubt, responsibility, vulnerability, or dependency. Whether a couple is starting the divorce process or even just contemplating a divorce, they need to first identify with the following divorce dilemmas.

### The Three Divorce Dilemmas

Couples who are facing the possibility of a divorce face one of three dilemmas:

1. **I want the divorce, but I am not sure if it is the right decision.** Since going through a divorce affects the lives of your [children](#), as well as your lifestyle, economics, and marital investment, the pressure to make the "perfectly correct" decision is enormous. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees. The best-case scenario is to make a decision that is not emotionally based, nor driven by your ego.
2. **I do not want the divorce, my spouse does.** Being in this reactive place will leave you feeling out of control and a helpless victim. You will experience intense emotional devastation, as your life will be changing before your eyes without you having any say in the outcome. In addressing this dilemma, you need to ask yourself if you are clinging to staying on familiar, safe ground and to a marriage based on illusions. It is not easy to acknowledge and confront the problems in a marriage, when you are feeling so hurt by your partner.
3. **I only want this divorce because my marriage is not working.** If this is your dilemma, then you will want to avoid responsibility at all costs by seeing your partner to blame for the demise of the marriage. There will be tremendous preoccupation and anger about how your partner caused you to make this decision. The amount of noise generated from this blaming will be in direct proportion to your unwillingness to risk expressing any of your own fears and sadness. If this doesn't occur, the divorce proceedings to follow will be riddled with tension and conflict, and a continuation of the blaming.

The common element in all three dilemmas is fear. In the first group, there is a fear of making a mistake and being incorrect, the second will hide from it by denying that there are any problems or admitting their attachment to the familiar, and the third group will fear any accountability and softness. The result in all three circumstances will be dragging, combative, and back-and-forth divorces.

For divorce to be a collaborative and respectful process, the couple must be prepared and ready to separate their lives on all levels; legally, practically, and emotionally. To do this, each person must face their divorce dilemma by answering the eight questions below.

## The Eight Questions

### 1. Do you still have feelings for your partner?

Many people who say they want a divorce still have strong feelings for their partner, but due to an ongoing power struggle in the relationship, there is a lack of intimacy and closeness. If this is you, it is best that you work on your relationship prior to deciding to divorce, otherwise your feelings of loss will overwhelm you and you may find yourself worse off after the divorce than you are now.

Celine had been married for seven years to a man she loved, who she considered to be a real sweet, gentle guy. However, she was very unhappy about their [financial arrangement](#). She was the responsible one who paid all the expenses, while he seemed to be forever getting them further into debt. She was very stressed and miserable and saw divorce as her only way out of the financial strain she was under. But because of her feelings for him, she was not able to support such a decision or even set a clear boundary, for fear of losing the relationship. With the help of her therapist, Celine recognized that she either needed to either set a clear boundary and be willing to lose the relationship, or else accept that all her hassling was a waste of time.

### 2. Were you ever really married?

To be really married a couple must have created a [relationship](#) that included an "us" or a "we." Many people who are considering a divorce have never had a marriage that was anything more than two individuals meeting their own needs. They may have raised children and shared a home, but they participated in those activities from a competitive rather than unified position. They would ask -- "Do I want to do this or that", rather than ask "Is this good for us?" If you have not developed a genuine "we" in your relationship, this would be the time to either commit to learning how to do that or to admit that you have never really had a marriage.

Even as a therapist who works in the area of divorce, I had a very difficult time admitting that my own marriage of 14 years was in fact in name only, regardless of the years that we lived under the label of husband and wife. Our pattern was to threaten to break up every few months, and we had a daily ritual of fighting and agreements that rarely lasted more than a week. I used to joke to my wife that she needed to keep her bags packed just in case she needed to leave quickly. This pattern remained despite the numerous counseling offices we attended. It was not until I was able to acknowledge to myself that I was neither [single](#) nor married, that I was in fact nowhere, did any real change occur. We started the real divorce process two months later.

### 3. Are you truly ready for divorce or are you just threatening?

Divorce is often threatened, especially in heated marital arguments for the following reasons:

- Out of anger and frustration.
- To gain power and control over the other person, to get them to see things your way.
- To finally be taken seriously that you want real change.
- As a wake-up call that the marriage is faltering.

People who consistently threaten divorce lose credibility with themselves and their partner. If the person is not merely threatening, but is genuinely ready for a divorce, they can sustain the

following thought in their own mind, "That I wish to close a chapter of my life, because I am at peace with the fact that there is no more that I can do or give to this relationship." They will discuss this appropriately with their spouse without any blame.

#### **4, Is this a sincere decision based on self-awareness, or is it an emotionally reactive decision?**

To be ready to divorce your partner means being able to make a clear, unemotional decision that you can support over time. Divorce means being able to let go of all strong emotional attachments to the other person, the loving ones as well as the hostile and hurtful ones.

Emotionally charged decisions do not last and, if acted on, do not resolve the underlying problem. People who divorce out of anger stay angry even after the divorce is over.

A woman came to see me as her divorce coach after she had been divorced for five years because she was still struggling with the effects of her divorce. Her problem was that she was still feeling rage toward her ex-husband and found her self hating him on a weekly basis. I said to her, "It sounds like you are still married." She insisted that this was incorrect due to the hatred she had for him. I responded that the hate she was experiencing essentially reflected a great passion toward him despite her hateful label, which I doubted any current man could match. I stated that only someone who is married could have such a passion. From that moment on she began to emotionally detach from her ex-husband and work towards, with the help of the coaching, a real divorce.

A statement that would indicate that you are making a sincere, rather than an emotionally reactive, decision is, "I acknowledge that you are a person in your own right with your own personality, hopes and dreams, I can respect you for that, but I no longer want to be married to you."

To be ready for divorce is to have a lower emotional attachment to the person you are separating from; otherwise, the divorce process itself will be roller coaster of intense feelings, including anger, distrust, and hurt.

#### **5. What is your intent in wanting a divorce?**

Any agenda, other than ending the marriage, is an indication that you are not ready to divorce. If you are hoping that through the divorce the other person will change and start treating you better, realize how much they have lost or pay for how much they have hurt you, you are getting a divorce for the wrong reason. Divorce has no power to right wrongs nor change people's hearts and minds. Divorce can only do one thing, end a marriage, and in so doing free each person to make [new attachments](#) to new people.

#### **6. Have you resolved your internal conflict over the divorce?**

Everyone who goes through a divorce is conflicted. People can feel guilty at the same time as they are sure that they want to end the relationship. Or they can feel betrayed and at the same time recognize that their life will be better once they are out of the relationship. Recognizing the conflict and owning that different parts of you will be struggling with the impact of divorce, at different times, is part of the process of getting ready for divorce.

Rick was having the hardest time deciding what to do about his marriage. For the longest time, he claimed that he was confused, conflicted, and torn. He couldn't seem to feel at peace being in the marriage or in leaving. His wife was verbally beating him up over his indecisiveness, often calling him a wimp. As his therapist, I asked to speak to the part of him who wanted out and I told him I didn't want to hear from any other part. He started to speak quite clearly about feeling no passion for his wife, but within a minute he began to hedge this

voice with statements like "She is a good [mother](#) or she is dependable." Each time he would attempt to dilute in this way, I would have to say that I only wanted to hear from the voice that wants "out." As the wanting "out" voice became more and more expressive, he began to visibly sweat. I asked "What is happening?" Finally, he said, "I am feeling guilty." Where is that coming from?" I asked. He said, "I made a promise that I would never follow the path of my father who left my mother." With this opposing voice sorted out and clarified, he was no longer confused. He was able to see that this old promise to himself was in conflict with his present desire to end his marriage. As he continued to work through those two opposing parts of himself he was finally able to make a decision that he felt at peace with and three months later he began the divorce proceedings.

## 7. Can you handle the unpleasant consequences of divorce?

Divorce brings change and grief because it is the loss of the "happy family" dream. Hurts, disappointments, loneliness, failure, rejection, inadequacy can all take hold of the psyche when we are in this extremely vulnerable passage. To be ready for the ups and downs of divorce, it is necessary to have a [support system](#) of family and friends who will be there to help you emotionally and practically when needed.

One of the hardest consequences of divorce is needing to face another person's pain, be it your children's, your family or friends because divorce affects so many people's lives. If you are the one choosing the divorce, you will have to hold on to your decision and the ending of your marriage in the face of all these people and circumstances. If you are the one who does not want the divorce, but your spouse wants to proceed, you will still need to get ready to accept the following consequences of a failed marriage. To know if you are ready, ask yourself if you are prepared for the following changes:

- If you don't want changes to your finances, lifestyle, or traditions, then you are not ready for divorce;
- If you cannot accept your children's sadness and anger, then you are not ready for divorce;
- If you cannot acceptance times of insecurity, fear, and the unknown, then you are not ready for divorce;
- If you are not willing to let go of your spouse mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, then you are not ready for divorce. I recall one woman who was totally bored with her one-dimensional passive husband, and she expressed what seemed like a very strong desire to leave him after 20 years of marriage. Each time she would tell me that she was going to tell him she wanted to separate, she would back off long before she got home. To help her recognize her own struggle, we made a list of the consequences of divorce, and the one thing she said she could never accept was the fact that her kids would hate her for leaving their father. She said she could not risk that, no matter how bored she was. Once she owned that this unpleasant consequence of her divorcing him would be more than she could stand, she was able to think of other ways to resolve the problem of being bored in her marriage. Over time she became more independent and started to travel and develop interests of her own.

## 8. Are you willing to take control of your life in a responsible and mature way?

Whether you are the one who wants the divorce or the one who is having to respond to your spouse wanting the divorce both situations have one thing in common, the marriage is ending. How people respond to this fact determines the type of divorce and future they will have. They can come from a position of bitterness, revenge, or helplessness, or they can negotiate for their future from a position of strength, understanding and respect. The attitude you choose

will determine the type of divorce you have. Your options are as follows:

You can make Agreements that:

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| Protect your rights only                | <b>or</b> Respect your spouse's rights too           |
| Are only good for you                   | <b>or</b> Are good for everyone                      |
| Give your spouse less                   | <b>or</b> Give your spouse what is rightfully theirs |
| Do not inconvenience you                | <b>or</b> Work well for everyone                     |
| Need frequent court hearings to enforce | <b>or</b> Need no court hearings to enforce          |

It is our experience that people who prepare themselves by first addressing all eight questions are more likely to have a collaborative divorce. By starting the process in this way, they are much better able to make lasting agreements with each other, resolve their difficulties, and develop [parenting plans](#) that both supports the children and respects each other's rights.

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