
The Beacon

Guiding You through the Process of Change

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**Should I stay or should I go now?
If I stay there will be trouble.
And if I go it will be double.**

Sometimes, it feels like The Clash got it right (lyrics above). People find themselves in romantic relationships with major questions about whether it is the *right* relationship. Neither staying nor leaving may seem to be the clearly correct choice.

Situational Factors: In addition to considerations about who your partner is as a person, you may be influenced by multiple situational factors. For example, whether or not you have children together often impacts the decision significantly. People considering a break-up may also decide differently depending on their age, and on the length and status of the relationship. Younger people may feel they have more time to meet other people, whereas others may fear that this partner may be their last opportunity for love and companionship. Also, if a circle of extended family and friends are shared, the possible loss of or harm to these other relationships may play into a decision. Consideration of all of these situational factors, while often inevitable, removes the focus from the relationship in question, and may get in the way of making the best decision possible for the individual.

Deal-Breakers: Many people feel that they have “deal-breaker” issues – issues about which disagreement would be intolerable and prevent the continuation of the relationship. For example, whether or not to have children, religious or social beliefs, substance use, etc. If the difference isn’t discovered early on, or if someone’s perspective shifts over time, these deal-breakers may arise later in the relationship. Sometimes, the difference seems bearable when the relationship is more casual, but then magnifies as the couple becomes closer. In this case, it may be more difficult, though equally necessary, to acknowledge the difference on the deal-breaker issue, and end the relationship accordingly.

Are you “done?” Sometimes one of the people in a couple is just “done.” Usually, they’ve been struggling with conflict or dissatisfaction for awhile. Maybe, they’ve tried counseling or attempted to resolve the issues on their own. Maybe they’ve met someone else and their interest and devotion are with the new person. Sometimes people just know in their hearts that

they’ve reached the end of their emotional investment in their partner, and have no more energy or hope or passion to give to the relationship.

What’s the best it can be? If a couple decides that they have enough love, and hope, and commitment, they can work to improve the relationship. There may be communication patterns that are causing problems, and learning new skills can be a huge improvement. Also, having an opportunity to truly express both positive and negative feelings about your partner and your life together, and feeling truly heard by your partner, may allow for significant positive progress. Couples counseling can help partners work toward greater understanding and empathy for each other, and learn new ways to address challenging issues. If both people are invested in the process and committed to working together, counseling can help couples discover the best that the relationship can be if they decide to stay together.

Is the “best” good enough? After trying to take the relationship as far as it can go, each person needs to decide if this “best” is good enough for them, and if this relationship is the one they want to pursue. Different people have different criteria for staying - depending on their expectations of the “right” romantic relationship, and on the standards they set for themselves. Ultimately, deciding whether to stay or go is a very personal issue. When you reach a decision that you believe is right for you, you should trust your instincts and your judgment as you move forward in whichever direction you choose.

References:

Close Romantic Relationships: Maintenance and Enhancement by John H. Harvey and Amy Wenzel

Intimate Connections by David D. Burns

Uncoupling: Turning Points in Intimate Relationships by Diana Vaughan

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