

## **Separation and Divorce**

Separation and Divorce are public admissions that a relationship no longer works for one or both partners. Break-ups are often painful as practical matters, including children and possessions, have to be addressed amid emotional distress.

Some relationships are unable to contain some of life's pressures and stresses; illness, redundancy, retirement or debt all take their toll. A life change; redundancy, retirement or children leaving home, can leave one partner excluded and despairing.

Is it temporary blip or total breakdown?

Demand for a divorce can be an expression of anger or disappointment with the relationship, in which case Relationship Counselling may help unravel the strong emotions and see if they can be addressed.

The discovery of an affair or betrayal can leave a partner feeling they have no option but to separate. Hearing the 'unbearable' emotions in a structured setting with an experienced counsellor can answer many of the "why?" questions. When strong feelings are addressed there may be new possible outcomes.

People develop at different times; sometimes one partner lags behind and then catches up. But when a couple no longer share the same path, serious questions have to be addressed.

### **What issues can Relationship Counselling address?**

- Can self-respect be maintained amid the changes.
- Can a new contract be negotiated?
- Will the unhappiness be left behind or taken forward in a new guise?
- Will the same issues emerge in subsequent relationships?

The answers can be useful to your long-term chance of happiness.

Divorce may be considered the best way forward. Understanding what went wrong can minimise bitterness. If the decision to divorce is the right one, this can allow both to move forward with a better chance of rebuilding their lives. Problems caused by poor communication and inability to manage conflict come to a head with the discovery of a betrayal. Could the ailing relationship be re-built with more realistic expectations or would it be healthier to leave it behind?

Taking a detached view of the pressures of work, ill-health and life changes can help people feel less bitter

### **When is the right time for Divorce or Separation Counselling?**

- When a couple feel they cannot continue living together
- When anger and hate have replaced love and respect
- When either partner feels disrespected and unconsidered
- When a couple cannot manage conflict

- When life changes exclude one partner
- When communication has broken down
- When life's pressures overwhelm
- Feelings of despair and disappointment are unbearable.
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Good Relationship Counselling is impartial and allows the couple to take a measured overview so that the final decision can be made with confidence. There will be no pressure to divorce or repair the relationship.

- Is the current downturn one of life's inevitable troughs or is it the real end?
- Have issues from early life been re-enacted and surfaced; have feelings of being unheard, unloved or feeling second-best resurfaced in this relationship?
- What attracted the couple to each other in the first place? Often the initial reasons for being attracted resurface in the reasons for the break-up, too.
- How did the hidden values of each family have a bearing on this relationship?
- What changes could not be accommodated?
- What was "the final straw?"

The public admission of the failure of a relationship can be surrounded by strong emotions: sadness, disappointment, despair and anger. It can be helpful to process these with an experienced counsellor – and can reduce antagonism for the children.

New communication skills can be useful. If you have children together your relationship may continue for a very long time. It may be useful to learn to negotiate and deal with conflict for discussing the children's issues. Relationship Work can be useful for either partner as they struggle to re-establish their self-esteem and redefine themselves once the decision has been made.

When a couple separate they inevitably take back the projected hopes and negative feelings that the other has held for them. "If it wasn't for him/her I could have succeeded in my career", "If she/he hadn't spent so much I could have had the lifestyle I deserve". This can be a painful process as each faces up to life's disappointments without the buffer of blaming the other. Counselling can help to process and face this to allow a new life to emerge. Grieving for the relationship and the lost hopes and dreams can take some time but is a useful investment for future relationships.

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Content written/edited by *Denise Pickup BACP (Accred)* in 2008. The content is for general information only and may or may not relate to your individual situation; please contact a professional directly to discuss this issue.