

Should I stay or should I go? As divorce cases and relationship break-ups spike as a result of the Covid pandemic and more and more people are looking for help from relationship counsellors, what does the future look like for couples.

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There is no doubt that the Covid crisis has put an enormous strain on marriages and relationships all around the world and many people are now turning to relationship counsellors in an attempt to find some resolution to their individual situations. (1) Divorces have seen a spike since the pandemic started (2) and the housing market is experiencing a boom as couples seek to sell their homes as part of settlements. Separated couples are also looking to find new places to live to accommodate their shared children if they have them. With the prospect of possible redundancies and economic uncertainty brought about by the Covid crisis, and not knowing what the new "normal" will be as lockdown eases, there are concerns that the situation will only get worse.

Leading international relationship experts, Matthew Albiges and Rebeca Perea who run Aligned With Love based in South Wales, are helping couples to find a breakthrough in their relationships so that they can decide whether they should stay or should they go? They believe that despite the pressures at the moment, many people are prepared to work harder on their relationships and to turn them around.

"Sadly, half of marriages end in divorce and many of the remaining ones are unhappy, with 60% of respondents to an anonymous survey on our website confirming that they 'sometimes think seriously about breaking up,' says Matthew

"When things aren't working as we would like the effects can be severe. A 2005 survey for instance, found that participants with marital concerns had elevated levels of cortisol (a key stress hormone). Over time this can lead to weight gain and high blood pressure, disrupt sleep, negatively impact mood, reduce energy levels and contribute to diabetes.

"Changes to working and educational patterns during the series of lockdowns have put many couples and families into closer proximity than ever before, highlighting and exacerbating existing issues as well as reducing opportunities to relieve the pressure.

"The housing market attests to the demand for families for more space with additional rooms for work or education, and outdoor space to be able to exercise and escape the confines of the walls of our house. How different is the sound of our children playing outside, compared to when they are confined indoors!

"When marriages end, it often means transitioning from a single household (with mum and dad living together), to two households which both need to be able to accommodate children living, at least some of the time. Financial reality often means that the two households post-divorce do not enjoy the same space or physical advantages of the single household that existed previously.

"We may wonder whether the relationship difficulties might be easier to tolerate than the material difficulties that we anticipate once we go past the point of no return and end the relationship, with all the consequences that flow from that!

"This can be enough to help to focus our minds on doing everything possible to work on the relationship, and really get to the bottom of our challenges, before being ready to give up on it and

everything we've invested in it."

"On the other hand, we may get to a point where we can no longer ignore the problem. and we've seen the impact on ourselves of living in a toxic environment, whether in our self-esteem or confidence or even to the point of not wanting to get out of bed in the morning. The question we need to start with is, "would I be happy to live for the rest of my life in this current relationship situation. Things only change when we are ready for change and the truth is that problems rarely get solved through inaction!" says Rebeca

So if it's not working, and we want to try everything before giving up on the relationship, what can we do to move towards a point of clarity?

A Guide to what to do and the mistakes to avoid.

Firstly, a note about what NOT to do!

When we're driving in our car and we see a warning light on the dashboard, what do we do? Do we call a specialist that knows how the car works who can get to the bottom of things, and advise us on a solution? Or do we address the light itself by trying to disconnect it, or by sticking a piece of paper over the light so that we can't see it anymore?

Both mean that we don't see the warning light anymore, but they are fundamentally different approaches... with very different results!

The first approach is based on identifying the reason why the problem came to light and looking for a solution on the level of CAUSE.

The second is about addressing a symptom of a problem – the warning light on the dashboard isn't a problem in itself... but it is POINTING at a problem!

Often when we are trying to address our relationship problems, we inadvertently focus on symptoms such as why we argue so much, or why do you talk to me in such an angry way, or why didn't you tell me about an issue that was affecting you. That's because it's the symptom that we experience – in the same way as the dashboard warning light – is the thing that is visible, but it is not the CAUSE of the issue!

Taking a step back

As we are IN relationship itself and heavily invested in it working, it can be difficult to have sufficient perspective to see it objectively. Not only are we often holding onto feelings or regret or resentment that cloud our judgement, but we are trying to reconcile the gap between how we'd like the relationship to be, and the reality on the ground. We often tell ourselves that things are different to how they are, as the truth is too uncomfortable to confront directly.

That's why it's useful to step back by taking some time out, so that we've got time for the feelings to ease, and we can re-evaluate from a safe distance. Have I got this issue out of proportion by allowing it to go around and around in my mind, or am I seeing the truth?

Getting ourselves into a positive state

Sometimes we can be so fixated on solving other people's problems that we forget to look after ourselves. This can bring us to the point when we feel that we are giving from an empty cup! Even though it's coming from a positive intention, is it sustainable to keep giving if we don't take the time to 'fill ourselves up' too?

This can look different for people depending on what our needs are – anything from a pamper day, to

taking a long walk in nature, to getting up a bit earlier to fit in some meditation or yoga... it's evaluating what we need and making it a priority to give ourselves that gift!

If we resist this idea as sounding selfish, consider how well a relationship is going to work if either (or both) parties are consistently in a negative space of blaming, resentment and anger... and think what it would take for YOU to get yourself into a more positive state!

No-one else can do this for you, and you may find that people around you are more supportive than you imagined... especially when they see the results in you!

Remembering the good times... even if they feel a long time ago!

When you think about the good times in the relationship, does it feel like a long time ago? That dream that you had when you first got together with your partner, of what your life was going to be like... building a future together?

We can sometimes get so caught up in the day-to-day grind of everyday life, in managing all our commitments, earning a living and making sure the children get to where they need to be at the right time! It can feel more like a logistical exercise than a loving relationship.

So, what can we do to reconnect with those feelings of magic that underpin the relationship and remind us that we have this emotional bond at the core, as well as the many responsibilities that we share together?

Use these three questions to focus on:

1. What did we do in the PAST to make the relationship feel like magic?
2. What do we do NOW to make the relationship feel like magic?
3. What can we do in the FUTURE to make the relationship feel like magic?

Getting professional help

After struggling for a while, couples can get to the point where even with marriage counselling it can be difficult to re-connect with the spark. It's a bit like when we have old wounds that haven't been treated or allowed to heal in the right way, some permanent damage can be inflicted.

So if you're struggling consider getting some professional help NOW so that you can get to the bottom of things and to establish more positive habits and behaviours that are going to support you and your family in the long term.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Footnotes:

(1). In 2020, research commissioned by the leading relationships charity, Relate, highlighted the impact lockdown measures are having on romantic relationships.

Almost a quarter of the survey's respondents (23%) said the circumstances place pressure on their relationship with their partner. More than one in eight (12%) of those living with their partner agreed that staying at home makes them doubt their relationship.

The research found that irritation is an issue for couples: 27% of respondents said they were finding their partner irritating right now, with feelings of irritation more common among women – 31% found their partner irritating compared to 22% of men.

(2) There was a 42% rise in divorce inquiries between 23 March and mid-May, compared with the same period in 2019, according to the figures from Co-op Legal Services.

Based on the latest divorce data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), potentially this led an extra 38,346 couples calling it a day in 2020.

Therefore, the property market could see a boost of 38,346 homes entering the market if these additional

divorces lead to the sale of the family home.

Matt & Rebeca are qualified therapists using a range of techniques including coaching, hypnotherapy, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), psychotherapy, CBP (Cognitive Behavioural Psychology), RCP (Rapid Cognitive Processing) and EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique). They have supported countless couples (as well as individuals) to make BREAKTHROUGHS in their relationships.

You can find out more about their work at:

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