

## Chapter One

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### **I'M HEADING FOR A DIVORCE - WHAT SHOULD I DO, WHERE DO I START?**

You want out. You no longer love or need your spouse. The kids are older, and you are now earning a living wage. You are tired of your spouse's drinking, untreated mental instability, abusiveness or emotional problems manifested in part by destructive spending habits or other addictions.

Or your spouse has informed you that he or she wants a divorce, or no longer loves you. You find the cell phone records, emails, credit card receipts, hotel records or cards to your spouse from his or her paramour.

You decide that if your spouse is unable to make you feel loved, fulfilled and happy, there may be someone else out there who can. You don't want to feel empty and sad all the time anymore.

You finally found your soul mate, and it is not your spouse.

**Now what?**

**IF YOU ARE THE ONE WHO WANTS OUT ...**

Be fair. Be honest. Come clean. Accept the consequences of your decision – all of the consequences. Stop trying to have one foot in each of two doors. Either stay put, or walk through the other door. Deal with it. Some amount of “yes, no, maybe, I don’t know” is to be expected, but at some point you must make a decision to either leave or to stay.

You may want to end the marriage, but don’t really want to hurt your spouse. You may believe that you are somehow hurting your spouse less by breaking it to him or her gradually over time. So you may think it better to talk of “wanting to separate” because you “need some space,” instead of using the “D” for “Divorce” word.

However, if you tell your spouse that you are *thinking* of divorce, and don’t clearly and definitely say that you *want* a D-I-V-O-R-C-E, you are in effect telling your spouse that there is a one in a million chance you could reconcile. If you tell your spouse, who doesn’t want the marriage to end, that there is a one in a million chance that the marriage won’t end, what do you think your spouse is hearing? He or she is hearing you say, “There is a . . . chance the marriage won’t end.” People enthusiastically buy lottery tickets with lower chances of winning than that.

You will have to face the fact that you WILL hurt your spouse by saying that you want out, and you must then clearly tell him or her that the marriage is over. If you instead tell your spouse that you don’t want a divorce, but that you only “need some time to sort things out,” you are quite possibly being selfish and unfair to your spouse. You will paralyze your spouse, holding him or her back from accepting the end of the marriage, and from making his or her own plan for the future.

You may believe your spouse would be so angry if you say you truly want a D-I-V-O-R-C-E, that he or she would make your life even more difficult, or would hurt the children just to hurt you. Some angry people feel justified in trying to hurt back the people who cause them pain.

Anger is not created in a vacuum. Some choose, either consciously or subconsciously, not to feel pain, fear, shame or frustration. They will instead mask those feelings, and then turn them into anger. Many angry people are angry because they have been hurt, and still carry around unresolved pain inflicted upon them in the past, or in childhood, which pain was never faced or addressed.

If your spouse is an angry person, and you will be causing him or her even more pain by leaving the marriage, prolonging the process may just prolong the conflict. So get it over with. If your spouse is not a danger to you, you may create pain to your spouse (and therefore anger directed at you) for a shorter period of time, by being honest early on about wanting to end the marriage. If, however, your spouse is a violent person, you will need a plan, and will need help in letting your spouse know the marriage is over, in order to stay safe.

Perhaps you want out, but only if everything can work out for you. You may want to know the light is still on for you at home with your spouse if you lose your job, or if the new love interest doesn’t marry you after all. If you have a financially comfortable married life, and are afraid you won’t have a fallback if you are divorced and then lose your job, welcome to the real world. There are no guarantees in life. Again, it isn’t fair to everyone to make them put their lives on hold and to be hurt by you, while you see if you can make a go of it on your own. Either stay or leave.

### **IF YOU ARE THE ONE WHO IS BEING LEFT...**

You will probably journey back and forth through the following stages as part of the normal process:

#### **STAGE 1 – DENIAL / AVOIDANCE**

If I bury my head in the sand, the problem will go away. I’m used to this. It’ll blow over like it always does. I have no options anyway, and can’t afford to leave. This is just my lot in life. My happiness isn’t meant to be.

My family would disapprove of a divorce. There is a social stigma to divorce. My family's honor is at stake both here and in our home country. If I get a divorce, everyone will say that I could not make my marriage work. If I get a divorce I am a failure. Divorce is against my religious beliefs. My suffering is my cross to bear.

My spouse doesn't really mean it, and would *never* actually leave me. My spouse will change. I will change. It's springtime now, and I'm feeling better. It's not always that bad. Maybe things will improve. I'll stay a bit longer for the sake of the children. I don't want to ruin the holidays.

My spouse would *never* cheat on me. It'll all work out. I'll keep pretending nothing's wrong until I convince myself that I'm not dying just a little more every day.

*Then, once you can no longer look reality right in the face and continue to deny it, you will move to...*

### **STAGE 2 – BARGAINING**

Maybe we can both find happiness, if only ...

If only the drinking would stop, or if my spouse would get on or stay on his or her medication. If we could just go to counseling together, or to AA, we could work out all of our problems. If we could get the finances under control, things would be better. If only we could move away from the paramour, or if there were a job change, our worries would end. If only we had more time together, and my spouse paid more attention to me and to the kids, we'd all be happier. Or if a better or higher paying job would come along. Or if the in-laws would stop interfering. All of our problems could be fixed if only ... if only ...

*The magical wishful thinking is not solving anything. You are simply trying to rearrange the furniture on the deck of a sinking ship. You are now heading right into ...*

### **STAGE 3 – GRIEF/ FEAR/ SHOCK/ CONFUSION/ TURMOIL**

It's getting harder to live this way. There are more bad days than good. The children are really suffering. They are acting out, their grades are falling and they're learning all the wrong things from this dysfunctional marriage. The tension at home is so thick no one can breathe. Everyone is walking on eggshells. I don't know who I really am anymore.

Why did this have to happen? Life is not fair. Why me? What will I do? How can I afford to live if there is a divorce? How will the children deal with a divorce? I could not possibly move out of this house. I can not support myself and the children on my own. I can not earn enough money. I do not want to work fulltime. My relationship with the children will be damaged. I can not stop crying. What should I do?

*Now, the whole prospect of separation and divorce makes you feel ...*

### **STAGE 4 – ANGER**

I am angry with my spouse. I am mad at myself. I hate the paramour. I'm angry that this is happening to my life. All of my dreams are in ruins. I want my spouse to hurt as much as I am hurting. I want to make him or her pay. I'm going to make his or her "new life" miserable. I'm going to call up his or her paramour's spouse. I'm also going to tell his or her paramour what my spouse is really like. And his or her coworkers. And his or her family. And all of the friends we shared. Everyone needs to know that this is all his or her fault, that I am a victim, and just how much I and the children are suffering, all because of my spouse.

He or she is wrong and I am right. He or she is trying to control me, and I will not be controlled. I am going to get what I am entitled to. I want my day in court, to let everyone know I have been wronged. My spouse needs to be punished. I will get even, plus one.

*After awhile a calmness should begin to settle in. If this does not occur naturally, professional help, and possibly short-term medication for situational depression may be necessary, to get to ...*

## **STAGE 5 – ACCEPTANCE**

This marriage is over. I have been holding on to an image of what my spouse used to be, could have been, or should be, but not what he or she is in reality. On a day-to-day basis my spouse creates more pain in my life than joy, and truly does not care how much I am hurting. I have to accept that life doesn't always turn out as planned, and is not always fair. Bad things can happen. I can not live this way anymore. I have to take care of myself. I have to be strong for the children, and I have to take care of them. My spouse saw a lawyer, is actually going to stand up to me for the first time, and isn't backing down. My spouse is no longer paying bills, and I need to do something now.

*You have now come full circle – right back to “**What should I do, where do I start?**”*

*So ... now what?*

Get informed.

Make a plan.

Get your thoughts sorted out.

Implement your plan.

Get your life back.

*How?*

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