

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE DIVORCING

1. Will I be happier if I'm out of a troubled marriage?

Will leaving your marriage bring relief? Freedom? Self-respect? Though you might feel these things temporarily, the tough truth is that they won't last.

Why? The reason is simple: feelings don't come from your circumstances. Feelings are nothing more or less than the side effects of your thoughts. If the thoughts you create make you unhappy in your marriage, these same thoughts will have power to make you unhappy after you divorce.

You may be surprised to hear that your spouse isn't making you feel unhappy, unappreciated, or unloved, but it's the truth. Your spouse can't cause you to feel anything—only you can do that.

But here's the really good news: since no one but you has the power to make you feel anything, you have the power to feel what you want! You can respect yourself and stay in a marriage where a spouse has been unfaithful—if that's what you want. You can choose to love and believe in yourself even if you have a critical spouse—if that's what you want.

The decision to stay married or to divorce is yours to make. Regardless of what you decide, it's always up to you to make you happy.

2. Am I making myself the victim?

Let's say that your spouse goes out with his or her friends more often than you'd like. You might find yourself with thoughts like these:

"My husband doesn't think I'm fun to be around—that's why he spends so much time with his friends." "My wife doesn't value me. Her friends are way more important to her than I am." "He doesn't care that I'm alone tonight." "I probably shouldn't trust her."

Do your thoughts put you and your spouse into the roles of victim and victimizer?

What if, in the same situation, you had thoughts like these instead:

"I'm glad my husband has good friends that bring variety to his life." "My wife loves me. Her friendships are also important to her." "I have a right to myself to do whatever I want!" "It feels good to trust my wife."

How would a change of thinking alter how you feel toward your spouse? How would it make you feel about yourself?

Owning our thoughts and emotions helps us recognize that a marriage is simply made up of two people who are trying to make a go of life in the best way they know how.

3. Is my decision to stay or leave based on “shoulds?”

Some of my clients come to coaching with strong reasons why they “should” stay in a marriage or why they “should” leave. These “shoulds” are often based on a mental checklist that reflects family or cultural opinions.

There’s no marriage that you “should” leave. There’s also no marriage that you should stay in.

Only you know what’s right for you. Not your mother, best friend, therapist, bishop, well-intentioned but overly passionate sibling, or child. Take time to listen to those who love and care about you—you’re bound to get plenty of “you shoulds” from them—and then remind yourself that only you know what’s best for you.

4. Do I like my reasons?

When I work with a couple who is considering divorce, I have each spouse list the reasons why they want to stay and the reasons why they want to split up. Often, one of their lists will trend toward fear-based reasons while the other will mostly include hope-based reasons.

Always ask yourself, “Which reasons do I like best?” You’ll have greater confidence you’re making the best decision when you like the reasons behind your decision.

When you understand that you can be happy in or out of your marriage, the decision to stay or to go becomes simpler.

5. Am I looking to the past or the future to make my decision?

We often look to the past to predict how the future will be. Why? Even though it may not seem this way, the past is only neutral facts. It has power over us only when we drag it into the present and use it to determine our future.

What if I decide, based on my thoughts about the past, that my marriage has been a painful slog for the last ten years? How can this thought affect how I show up in the present? Does it make me fearful? Resentful? Defensive?

Consider how those feelings—which are based purely on the past—could color the way you interact with your spouse now. Will they create the results you want in your marriage?

If we want to create a different experience in our marriage, we have to think new thoughts. It's as simple as that.

Learning how to create new thoughts is easier than you might expect, but it's a deliberate process. Let me teach you how to get there. Visit www.natalieclay.com to sign up for a free consultation.

My job isn't to convince you to stay in your marriage or to divorce—only you know what's best for your life—but I will help you understand and manage your own thoughts so you'll find peace in your decision.



***Couples Coaching
with Natalie Clay***