

## Communicating the decision

Divorce is a process, not a single event, and one person usually wishes more strongly than his or her partner to end the relationship.

It is not surprising then that a couple will not necessarily be at the same starting point emotionally when the decision is made.

Telling your spouse of the decision to end your marriage is at best painful and at its worst devastating. It is important to expect a rush of complicated emotions from both of you.

Certain factors can either diminish or increase the painful impact of the message:

- The more direct and clear a message is, the better.
- Shock, distress and in many cases denial make understanding what you are saying difficult.
- Repeating intentions and plans has to be part of this process.
- Be clear about immediate practical arrangements whenever possible. Do you have a plan regarding where to go afterwards, or for help for your husband or wife at a time when he or she is too shocked or distressed to think clearly.
- Give an explanation, as far as possible, for the break-up. This is kinder than just announcing an end.
- Honour your spouse's need to understand. This is only kind and fair, and to understand your reasoning is important even if that reasoning is not shared.

Anxiety about his or her reaction is usually the most powerful stumbling block to communicating the decision.

This is based on fears that the spouse will say or do something terrible, make painful accusations (some of which might be truthful) and show extreme anger, pain and bitterness. People are also stopped from communicating their decision by the fear of how they themselves will feel: that they will become depressed, that the fear of the unknown will overtake them or that deep uncertainty about the rightness of the decision will engulf them.

These are normal and expected states of fear and anxiety.

Unstable emotions will become the theme of your daily life and that of your spouse. In most cases this intense phase passes as the decision stays clear and firm. If the decision waivers, changing only to be made and stated again, the intensely painful phase returns each time the decision is communicated.

Please see our separate section on [telling the children](#).

There will be more detail available on this topic in *The Divorce Book*.