

Taking stock – what to expect

The decision to end a relationship is usually made by one person rather than the couple together. But the decision affects everybody and involves them in a long process of separation and divorce.

The personal and emotional process is separate from the legal process. Even without complicated legal and financial issues to sort out, the upheaval for every member of the family in the personal process is profound. This affects children, grandparents and the wider family.

It also has a huge impact on your circle of friends.

Most families experience a substantial drop in their standard of living after separation and divorce.

Children can be badly affected by the process of separation, and will at the very least be anxious about their relationships within the family and about the disruption in their own lives.

Before making the decision to end a relationship, it is important to appraise honestly whether things are so bad that there is no alternative.

To help assess things clearly, there are three questions that might help:

- Is it possible to make changes within your relationship?
- What, if any, practical steps might be taken to improve things?
- Are there any clear advantages in separating and divorcing and, if so, what are those advantages?

Professional advisers can help enormously in thinking these things through, to help you take stock of your position. At this stage, in looking at the relationship and considering the options, the expert advice and perspective of a counsellor or family therapist can be invaluable.

For example, where a marriage is fraught, people commonly focus on “symptoms” – the recurring patterns of behaviour between them. If the symptoms are too numerous or seem beyond repair, divorce feels inevitable. It all feels “too much”.

What a professional can do is help to separate and identify the problems from the overwhelming feelings. This in itself can be a valuable step.

A couple may also find new ways of coping with problems or even resolving them. Outside help can assist in assessing whether or not the marriage is retrievable.

For legal and financial questions, it is possible to have a single consultation with a solicitor, with no commitment at all to continue down that path. A “one-off” consultation like this can provide a snapshot:

- What are the likely legal and financial outcomes going to be?
- Will the home have to be sold?
- How are the assets – and income – likely to be apportioned?
- What will happen about the children?

For everyone involved in marriage breakdown, even for the person who initiates the separation or divorce, there is a loss. There is a strong body of research on divorce that shows that the person who leaves also sustains enormous pain.

Immense emotional strain can be caused by thoughts of what “might have been”, the loss of the intact family and, if you are not the primary carer, the loss of daily involvement in children’s lives and of the intimate contact and knowledge that daily routine can bring.

Please see our separate section on [children](#) – what their perspective might be, and how to help them.

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