

## Thinking of ending your marriage?

You've probably told your husband or wife that you are deeply unhappy in your marriage, and you may have said you want to end it. This is a hard time, one you never thought would come to pass the day you got married.

Perhaps you're not certain if ending the marriage is the right step? Counseling can help you make the best decision about the future of your marriage.

Are you talking with friends or family members about your decision? They may be taking sides: saying either that you should move on from your marriage now or that you should keep trying to make it work. It's hard to know where to get an objective perspective.

Your best friends are the ones who will assist you to see both sides, who will not be premature in taking sides in the crisis.

Counseling for this stage of a relationship is specialised, and the principles have been only recently developed in the psychotherapy literature. This is not exactly individual psychotherapy nor is it couple therapy. While there is a discernment phase the focus of counseling will lead to:

- Clarity and confidence in a decision about the future of your marriage
- Understanding of what has happened to your marriage and the part each of you has played in the problems
- A plan for change if you decide to work on the marriage
- Learning that you can carry with you into future relationships if you end this one, and a better chance to be good co-parents if you have children.

Surveys (US data?) find that up to 40% of divorced people have regrets about their divorce decision, often because they feel they (and their partner) did not try hard enough to see make the marriage work. Are there rocks not turned over and looked under in your marriage, thoughts and feelings not expressed, mistakes not acknowledged, help not sought?

When counseling goes well people most often become more settled and confident about their next steps, whether to make one, last, all-out effort in couples therapy to restore their marriage to health, or to move forward with divorce. William Doherty (a

US therapist who specialises in this discernment phase of counselling) states that about half of couples choose the reconciliation path in couples therapy, and most of the other half end their marriage after having carefully considered their options.

Counseling for this phase is usually brief (4 or 5 sessions maximum for each partner) you will be supported, honored for where you are, and asked to look at what you would need to change in yourself to have a healthy relationship —whether in this marriage or in a future one. You may end up with a realistic plan to restore your marriage to health. Or you may end up with a decision to end it that you will be less likely to regret in years to come, and you will learn things that you can carry with you into new relationships.

Walter Logeman - [walter@psybnet.co.nz](mailto:walter@psybnet.co.nz) December, 2017  
(This material is based on the work of William Doherty.)