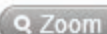


# Start of a year can be hard on the heart



The year has barely begun, but for some couples, it can be the time for endings. Here are two reasons relationships end more often in the first four weeks of the year:

The new year is often a time of reflection, looking back at years gone by and evaluating if you are happy with the decisions you have made – and if not, what your choices are at this time.

Most people don't want to break up too close to the holidays. They see it as a time for family and togetherness, and even though they may be emotionally distant, they may feel the need to wait until the holidays are over to announce their decision.

Whatever the time of year, leaving a relationship is always a difficult and complex decision – further complicated, perhaps, by having had children together. The longer you have been a couple and the more shared memories, the more difficult it can be.

It is not unusual for a partner to take up to five years to actually leave the relationship. He or she may have been unhappy for years, considering leaving but just not ready to follow through. To permanently leave a longterm relationship, you need to be determined, courageous, ready to initiate the split and resilient enough to deal with the fallout.

In my practice, I am proud to say that more than 75 per cent of the couples I have seen have been able to reconnect and save their relationships. But there are always those who have waited too long to get help. Once the resentment becomes so big that a wall is created, feelings are numbed or shut down, and at that point, no tools, skills or counselling can save the relationship.

Here are a few questions that may help you see where your relationship stands:

1. Do you find yourself arguing more or less often when you have time alone together?
2. Despite your problems, are there activities that you both still enjoy doing as a couple and help you to feel closer?
3. Do you really like your partner? Is she or he basically a nice person?
4. Does your partner make you feel humiliated or invisible?
5. Does your partner shut down when you want to talk?
6. Is it hard to tell when your partner is telling the truth?
7. Is there still physical affection between the two of you?
8. In times of crisis, is your partner there for you?
9. If you could go back in time, would you still pick the same partner?
10. Do you share the same goals and dreams for your future together?
11. Do you still have hope the relationship can improve?

These questions are a guideline to let you know how you are really feeling. Too often, people get into a rut and accept their unhappiness as normal. They forget we all deserve to be happy and be with someone who is supportive, encouraging and has our best interests at heart.