

Make up or break up:

How to tell if it's time to move on

Use our guidelines to help you decide whether your relationship is moving full steam ahead -- or going downhill fast

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Find out how to find true love with these secrets!

As most of us know, relationships are anything but cut and dry -- especially when conflict is involved. It can often be extremely difficult to decide whether to end a relationship or keep going, driving us crazy in the process!

Marilyn Barnicke Belleghem, a registered marriage and family therapist provides some important things to think about when trying to decide whether you're in -- or you're out.

Don't let your emotions do the talking

We have a lot of emotional investment in our relationships, Belleghem explains, and the more in love we are, the more our emotions come into play. This can make rational thinking near-impossible.

"Your thinking brain gets put on the back burner when emotions are involved," says Belleghem. For example, could you make a rational decision while either really angry or sexually aroused? We didn't think so. This means, major relationship decisions shouldn't be made in haste, mid-fight or mid-thrust. If you can't have a conversation about the state of your couple-hood without yelling, walk away for a while until your heart rate comes back down to a more normal level. You'll be much less likely to make a regrettable decision or say something you wish you hadn't.

If I'm Ok, we're Ok

If you're unsure of where your relationship is going, Belleghem suggests asking yourself how you feel about yourself in that relationship. Consider the following criteria:

- Do I like myself when I'm with him?
- Do I like myself only when I'm thinking about him, i.e.: only in my fantasy, not reality?
- Am I able to be myself when I'm with him?
- Do I feel attractive and confident when I'm with him?

If you like yourself when you're on your own, but find yourself turning into a nagging bitch or losing confidence in yourself when you're with him, it's time to reconsider your relationship. But on the other hand, things might just be OK if there is no shift in how you feel about yourself when you're together, and you can be (and feel good about) your fabulous self.

Don't let the small stuff stifle a good thing

No relationship is perfect, but sometimes we get so distracted by little things -- his penchant for flannel shirts or chronic inability to replace an empty toilet paper roll with a new one -- that we can't see we've got something good. If you find yourself ready to part ways over a series of minor annoyances, ask yourself if your complaints are legitimate, or just a way to feel more in control. "The person doing the complaining often has the power, or wants it," explains Belleghem.

Focusing on minor issues can also point to a fear of closeness or commitment, she says. If you like to dance and he doesn't, is that a good reason to break it off? Not if everything else is running smoothly. If you can compromise (go dancing with your girlfriends instead) maybe you should give things another chance. "Don't sweat the small stuff if the relationship on a whole is good," Belleghem says.

If everything else about your relationship is on track -- you trust each other, you're attracted to one another, you respect each other -- look at compromising on some of the little things you believe are holding you back from intimacy.

Bringing up the big guns

But don't ignore issues that won't go away either. "Good relationships are good deals," Belleghem says. If someone can't stick to little deals, such as a pick-up time or dinner plans, how will they handle more serious responsibilities such as mortgage payments or day-care drop-offs?

Pay attention to things that worry you on a deeper level. Some bigger issues to think about include:

- Standards of cleanliness – can you handle his mess forever?
- Parenting style – will you be forever fighting over how to discipline?
- Drugs and alcohol – is his habit more than casual, and can you deal?
- Financial responsibility – are you both contributing to savings?

If you know now that any of the above are already problematic, it may be time to sign off. "A relationship is about more than just romance. You also have to be able to handle responsibility together."

So if you're asking yourself that age-old question, "should I say or should I go?" take some time to really think about what you want and how you feel before making your big decision.

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