

How Long Should You Wait for a Proposal?



By Jane Greer, PhD for GalTime.com

In the land of quick marriages, Academy Award-winning actress Hilary Swank has taken a different tack. She was married to actor Chad Lowe for eight years, and dated him for six years before that.

Most recently, the actress dated John Campisi for five years. Swank recently announced that they broke up in May. The rumors suggest that John's not proposing might have sparked the separation. That may or may not be the reason, but it does beg the question for anyone who has been in a long-term

relationship and waiting to get engaged: How long do you wait for your partner to be ready? Basically— When is enough... enough?

There is no question in your mind that you are ready to commit to your partner for life. Your partner, however, continues to drag his feet. As hard as it is to accept, sometimes relationships outlast their shelf life and stop moving forward. How can you know if your relationship has reached that point, and you have entered that zone of just wasting your time? Is there anything you can do or are you destined to be taken along for the ride?

The most important thing to keep in mind is that, despite the fact that your partner's reluctance to commit can feel like a rejection of you, try not to take it personally. You can do this by recognizing that when one partner is holding back on taking that huge step, it often has more to do with their own individual issues and fears than with how they feel about the other person.

He may have experienced his parents' divorce when he was younger, and see marriage as destined to fail. Perhaps, he was betrayed at one time themselves and now has trust issues. If he has been married before and gone through his own divorce, there might be all sorts of concerns keeping him from remarrying. Or he might be worried about differences in religious beliefs and lifestyles, or his career success. One of my patients, for example, is ready to get married and eager to take that next step, but her partner is hesitant. They have been dating for three years, and are now living together, but he says he needs to feel more secure in his job and be earning a higher salary before he feels ready to buy her a ring.

I encouraged her to talk to him, as I would suggest you talk to your partner about why they are not ready to go forward. See if you can jointly determine what it might take for them

to get beyond their fears. Set goals to work toward making those changes. Maybe it means talking through the religious differences and making a concrete plan, or it could be as simple as finding a new job or asking for a raise. And then you can set a time limit for yourself, maybe six months or a year, and see if anything is being done.

As long as your partner is trying then your relationship is still viable and worth fighting for. But if your partner is all talk, and has made no attempt to move toward the goals you set together, then sadly it might be an indication that nothing will ever change. At that point, you can do what they have not been able to do and take the next step yourself and move on.

Then you will know you did everything you could. Hopefully, if this was the issue that separated Hilary and John, these were the steps they were able to take.