

Expert Relationship Advice: I'm Divorced, But He's Married



By Toni Coleman, LCSW, CMC for [Hope After Divorce](#)

I recently received the letter below and offered my expert relationship advice in my response.

Expert Relationship Advice from Hope After Divorce

Dear Toni,

Somehow, I have fallen in love with a married man. I know what you must be thinking: that if I knew he was married, and I

walked into it anyway, I did this to myself and need to just accept the consequences. If so, you would be right, but I honestly didn't have the intent to go down this path. It more or less evolved from us being co-workers and friends. Ironically, he was the one who I leaned on a lot through my ex's infidelity and subsequent divorce. It was a time of great vulnerability for me, and he was just so great; in fact, he was everything my ex had never been. After hours of talking, long lunches, drinks after work and an increased frequency in texting, we shared a kiss. From there, it was too easy.

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He is a good man, the father of three children and spouse to a nice woman. I know they have had their issues and problems, but he has never been unfaithful to her in the past because he is not that kind of guy. He has told me that he did not intend this either and feels guilty and torn about continuing, even though I know he values our relationship and love. He loves his family, is concerned about his children, and knows he would take a terrible financial hit if he were to divorce.

I'm hoping you can help us figure out what we should do next. Speaking for myself, I would love it if he could be free and we could have a life together. I know this is very selfish, but it's the truth. However, I am not exactly sure how he feels. He has told me he cares about me and has demonstrated this in many ways, but I know he is devoted to his family. I have considered just breaking it off, asking him to go to counseling with me, and telling him I can't remain in limbo while giving him a period of time to tell his wife and begin a separation or else. The last one is a bit of an ultimatum, but at least I could be sure of where he really stands. Any insights, suggestions or wisdom gained from your experience working with situations like this would be greatly appreciated.

– In Love's Limbo

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What's Next For This Relationship and Love

Dear In Love's Limbo,

Wow, your ex did this to you, yet you have let yourself be a part of doing this to another wife. You mention the irony, but I don't sense much remorse on your part, and that is a bit troubling. You also say "he" is married to a nice woman and that he has never done this before because he is a nice guy. What does that make you?

My intent is not to dump a lot of guilt or criticism on you; I am instead asking hard questions in order to get you to step beyond your present perspective and take a larger and more brutally honest view of the situation in which you now find yourself. This did not just happen – it is the result of a series of steps taken over time, each of which could have been different if either of you had made a different choice. Seeing this as a choice is very important, as you are not a helpless victim here, and that means you can make choices that will help you to work towards what is best for all involved.

I get the sense from several things you have written that your lover has been expressing ambivalence and has suggested that he does not want to continue. It also seems apparent that you do not share these feelings and would have no hesitation to move this relationship and love forward once his marriage is out of the way. The reason these impressions are important is that, if I am correct, your letter might be motivated by a desire to find a way to convince him to remain involved with you and end his marriage because his reluctance to do so is becoming very apparent to you. If this is the case, any

suggestions I might offer would not be addressing the real issues and dynamics and would not help either of you in the long run.

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Therefore, I recommend that you begin with an honest discussion about what both of you want. This will require that you create the right environment and give him the space to share his feelings honestly and without fear of backlash. After all, would you want to be with a man who feels ambivalent or pressured to be with you? If his heart is with his family, what of any real value would be left for you? There is also all the collateral damage that would result if he were to break up his marriage and family life. Would it be worth it to him if he only has a half-hearted desire to be with you? Do you really want a future with someone who isn't fully committed to you and the relationship?

The truth may be very painful to accept, and you would be left to grieve if a decision is made to end your affair. I suspect you are feeling a bit desperate to avoid this pain, and that is understandable. But weigh that against a possible lifetime of resentment on the part of your partner and continued grief over never having the relationship and love you had hoped for. Somehow, a quick and clean cut seems like the better option. However, you will need to really listen to what he has to say before you will know what you need to do.

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