

# Relationship Advice: Is Friendship After Divorce Possible?



By Amy Osmond Cook for [Divorce Support Center](#)

Headlines are filled with photos of happy celebrities vacationing in remote places with their children in tow. It's a picture perfect story—almost. For some celebrity exes such as Miranda Kerr and Orlando Bloom and Mariah Carey and Nick Cannon, the marriage ended long ago, but the family unit remains. It's not uncommon to hear stories of former couples vacationing together, living by each other and spending family time together. With such a high-profile breakup, how can co-parenting be such an easy transition for them? My [relationship advice](#) for you is to emulate these famous relationships

because the success largely depends on the parents' ability to move forward.

## **Relationship Advice Navigating Friendship Post-Divorce**

Though the success of co-parenting is largely dependent on the circumstances of the split, these celebrity couples are proof that children can still grow up with the positive influence of both parents, even after the marriage or longtime relationship and love has ended. Here is my relationship advice for how to successfully transition from a married household to shared parenting between two households.

**1. Focus on long term.** A swift dose of reality should remind you that carrying anger or other negative feelings won't change the outcome. Your marriage died. Mourn the loss of that part of your life then move forward to create a new future for yourself and children. "I am always impressed when I see couples who manage to stay friends, as it takes strength in character and an understanding of the bigger picture to rise above the hurt," wrote Seth Myers, Psy.D., in the article, *Stay Friends After Divorce: Why, Coping, and Moving On*. "While we can't do much to change the state of affairs in other couples, you can reflect on your own relationship." Recognize that your former partner must make the same effort. This often means a new relationship—and you need to be okay with that.

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**2. You are not defined by your divorce, so don't allow it to dictate your actions.** Your role as a spouse may be over, but your parenting role continues. Don't allow the end of your marriage to overshadow the positive, future memorable moments you owe your children. By making the choice to fill your life with positive and hopeful plans for the future, you'll have a

solid base on which to build new relationships. But, you do need a plan. A personal strategy will lessen the potentially negative effects if you witness your partner moving forward. It will also remind you to stay focused on the plans you have prepared for your progress. This transition requires a great deal of discipline and compromise since you're putting your feelings aside for the sake of contributing to a positive parenting environment for your children. A large part of this growth is recognizing that was then, and this is now. Your actions will be a lasting example for your children. What message do you hope they remember? Whether positive or negative—it'll make an impact.

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**3. Relationships are life's classroom.** Seth Myers described it best when he wrote, "Too often, men and women end relationships and feel that they made a mistake in choosing the partner they committed to in the past because the relationship didn't work. But such a perspective betrays the bigger picture that relationships are one of life's greatest classrooms and it's within this context that we figure out what we need and learn how to move closer to true fulfillment." Instead of focusing your energy on changing the result of your ended marriage by making him pay for what he did, recognize your role in the demise of that relationship and make it a goal to learn from that experience. Feelings of resentment and revenge do nothing to change the outcome. All it does is affect those you still fully love—your children. "Barring cases of abuse," added Myers, "learning to forge a friendship with your ex after divorce can be a truly healing experience and allows for an important integration of your past with the present."

By staying committed to long-term goals, maintaining a positive and hopeful attitude on your future, and viewing your relationship as a learning experience, you're set to develop a

surprisingly supportive relationship with the one person who used to know you best and that's a winning strategy for you and your children.

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## Relationship Advice: Top 6 Contributors to Infidelity



By Toni Coleman

We read celebrity gossip about infidelity all the time. Sometimes, as in the cases of Debra Messing or Claire Danes,

it's a part of their dating behavior. But what compels a partner to cheat? And why are the perimeters of commitment such a mystery to them? In this article, relationship expert Toni Coleman, LCSW, gives [relationship advice](#) and explores the hidden meanings behind infidelity and what we can do to secure our relationships and love.

## Relationship Advice On Infidelity

When infidelity occurs, it often leads to a lot of blaming that focuses on the violation of trust and a realization that one's partner isn't the person who they believed them to be. There's a clear distinction made between victim and perpetrator. While this is certainly true to a point, it ignores the dynamics that left the relationship vulnerable in the first place. And it leads to a simplistic and erroneous conclusion that nothing could have prevented the infidelity except for the wronged spouse to have picked someone else to marry. Remaining stuck in this thinking is a sure way to end up in divorce court. My relationship advice to healing is that both people need to take an honest look at the state of their marriage prior to the cheating, what each contributed to their problems, and how they could work together on building an infidelity proof union. Identifying which of the following issues played a role in their marital breakdown is the first and most important step. Below are the top 6 contributors to infidelity.

- 1. A breakdown in communication.** A "problem with communication" is the number one reason couples give for seeking relationship help. It has a broad interpretation but essentially boils down to having difficulty connecting through daily conversation, misunderstandings and hurt feelings due to an inability to express feelings and needs clearly, conflict when discussing sensitive topics or issues they disagree on, and/or withholding through silence. Any of these can



contribute to increasing distance, which leaves a void that one partner might attempt to fill by going outside the relationship. This is of course a poor choice, and one that can bring the couple to a place there is no coming back from.

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**2. A decrease in emotional and physical intimacy.** There is a lot of emphasis placed on a couple's problematic sexual relationship as the cause of marital unhappiness. However, this is only one facet of what they share and though it is important, addressing it alone will not offer a complete solution for repairing their broken bond. Emotional intimacy provides fuel and is foreplay in a relationship—and unless two people share a strong friendship and good intellectual chemistry, their physical relationship can become another chore that is best avoided or handled quickly and without wasting any of the little emotional energy that their relationship has left them with. One partner might make the poor decision to reach out to someone who they can laugh with, who listens to them and seems to really get them, and who challenges them and inspires them in a way their spouse no longer seems to have any interest in doing.

**3. Unaddressed stressors related to family and job.** Couples encounter many challenges on the long road through commitment, marriage and family life. Sickness, loss of a job, an ill or handicapped child, unexpected financial problems, and the day-to-day struggle to find balance in a too-crowded life all lead to stress. For many people, this is something they try to ignore or just push through, thinking that in time, things will get better on their own. Then, one day, they realize they are completely overwhelmed and experiencing physical and emotional symptoms that contribute to an “every man for himself” mindset. When this happens, the marriage is often put on the back burner and the individuals hunker down, focused on getting through another day, unable or unwilling to add to

their own burden, even for the well-being of their partner.

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**4. A negative or hostile home environment.** When a couple stops communicating, puts their focus on their own needs, and withdraws due to overload—the environment often becomes charged with negative energy and feelings of resentment and anger. The tension is often palatable as one or both seek a way to escape through watching TV, going online, spending time alone in different rooms and parts of the house—and seeking companionship and dialogue with others outside of the relationship/family. Essentially the negative energy pushes them further and further apart until home is not a comfortable or happy place to be, so they look elsewhere for that lost comfort.

**5. Stressors related to physical or mental illness.** This is the “in sickness and health” part that is contained in the marriage vows. For many couples, naiveté contributes to that feeling of invulnerability that many start out their marriage with. Sickness happens to other people, but won’t happen to them. Then when something bad strikes, it feels completely unexpected and can have a sudden destabilizing impact on a relationship. Even if the couple can quickly put resources and supports in place to deal with the crisis, it can be a game changer, depending on the type, severity, and chronicity of the illness. Physical and emotional exhaustion, draining or depleted resources, lack of down time and fun, and the potential for a large shift in how the couple interacts and relates—can push one or both people over the edge. If one individual ends up in a caregiver role for their partner, it shifts the dynamics in a way that can leave them unable to get their own needs met—and they may feel resentment and a desire to escape this new life they had not planned on. Even if the illness is not chronic and can be eventually resolved, the stress can alter how two people relate and lead to emotional

and physical distance that leaves a void of unmet needs.

**6. Financial problems.** Money problems are often said to be the root cause of marital conflict and discord. Difficulty managing joint finances, agreeing on a budget, keeping secrets about purchases and debt, and conflicting values regarding saving and spending are some of the common issues that arise. If these are not addressed quickly, they can lead to a loss of trust, and respect, and an unwillingness to be open and candid regarding important financial decisions that could have a long-term impact on their family's security and well-being. When this happens, some people are vulnerable to thinking about what it would be like to be with someone else, to have a partner that offers financial security and someone who wants what they want for their future.

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No wonder the marriage vows include the phrase "for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health..." Marriages are tested by all of these, and if a couple doesn't work together, they will slip apart—and the space that is left is what a third person moves in to fill.

*Toni Coleman is a licensed psychotherapist, certified relationship coach and internationally recognized dating and relationship expert and founder of consum-mate relationship coaching. She is frequently quoted in many local and national publications and top ranked dating and relationship websites and has been a guest on a number of radio and TV programs seeking to provide their listeners with her cutting edge expertise. She is a regular contributor to Hope After Divorce and HealthyLiving.care.*

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# Relationship Advice On Financial Infidelity



By Toni Coleman

While celebrity news cites irreconcilable differences as the final blow for [celebrity divorces](#) such as Brandi Glanville of “Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,” actress Kaley Cuoco, and celebrity chef Giada DeLaurentiis, it doesn’t take long for the matter of money to surface as part of the proceedings. Whether finances are openly discussed as an asset to a healthy relationship and love, or used as fodder when your vows start falling in the red, money is an integral part of any marriage.

# Relationship Advice On Handling Money Issues

If you're concerned about how you and your partner communicate about money, pay attention to the following relationship advice. Watch for these four warning signs of financial infidelity.

**1. You never sit down and talk specific numbers.** After two people are married, their lives become intertwined. Their home and individual possessions essentially become the property of both. And ideally large purchases, investments, and decisions regarding long-term financial goals are decided jointly. But what if a couple never discusses a budget or decides how they will handle savings and investments? That answer is usually that you're both too busy, one of you is better with money and handles all the bills without the input of the other, or you each handle your money in your own way. If any of these are true you could be on a slippery slope. Continuing down this path could lead to important financial decisions being made without the knowledge or consent of the other, which constitutes financial infidelity.

My relationship advice is to address this by sitting down and listing all your income and expenses. Then, decide on a budget that covers joint expenses while also allowing each of you a discretionary pot of money that only you control. Every few months conduct a joint review to assess how your system is working and make adjustments as needed. Handling it this way allows you both some autonomy but not at the expense of your marital financial health and happiness.

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**2. Discussing finances becomes heated and defensive.** What happens if you agree to sit down and talk about your finances

and one of you reacts with defensiveness or anger because you feel you're being accused or challenged in some way? When you attempt to talk it through, do the words "yours" and "mine" get used too often? Does it ever feel like money is a taboo subject that you shouldn't really be discussing at all because it often leads to hurt feelings or conflict? If any of these sound familiar, you're at risk of ending up with no financial plan, which often leads to impulsive, short-sighted, and costly choices. When this happens, partners can begin to focus on protecting their share of the assets, which increases secrecy and contributes to a further breakdown of cooperation and an increasing loss of intimacy. The way to address this issue is to decide together that continuing to avoid the problem is not an option. Then you may need to seek out resources to help if you continue to be unsuccessful in your attempts to resolve it on your own. Try talking with an experienced counselor or a financial planner.

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**3. Large purchases are hidden.** When there is a breakdown in cooperation and a loss of intimacy, secrecy flourishes. These conditions create an environment in which partners can begin to act autonomously and in their own interest, hiding large purchases as they tell themselves they have no other option. Over time, one partner can run up huge amounts of credit card and other debt, liens are placed against the home due to unpaid taxes, and properties go into foreclosure—all happening without the knowledge or consent of the other partner. Yes, these are all examples of worse case scenarios, but they happen with alarming frequency. The solution is open, honest communication—again seeking out competent, experienced professionals when needed.

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**4. You discover a secret bank account or PO box.** When one

partner is being secretive, the other one usually senses something is up and begins to pay closer attention. This is often when the discovery of a secret bank account or PO box is discovered. Sometimes the partner happens upon the information as they're attempting to get a better handle on the couple's bills and complete paperwork. Either way, it not only spells serious trouble, but it also says that the problem has been going on for some time and has most likely reached a serious stage. It is at this stage that large secret purchases, huge debt or liens and potential foreclosures come to light.

When you hear about money being the number one reason for divorce, this is why. Because so much damage has been allowed to occur, the solution will be more complicated and costly in terms of money, time, and marital goodwill. Immediate crisis intervention is needed, which consists of professionals who can help the couple triage their debt, cut their expenses, come up with a payment plan—and continue in their home and adjusted lifestyle if possible. When a couple finds themselves here, they must act quickly and work towards a new normal. Otherwise the financial consequences can be dire and the marriage un-salvageable.

You have worked hard to build your financial security. Don't allow it to collapse by falling victim to poor financial decisions by someone you love and trust. By watching for signs of financial infidelity, you can be sure your wallet is protected as well as your heart.

*Toni Coleman is a licensed psychotherapist, certified relationship coach and internationally recognized dating and relationship expert and founder of consum-mate relationship coaching. She is frequently quoted in many local and national publications and top ranked dating and relationship websites and has been a guest on a number of radio and TV programs seeking to provide their listeners with her cutting edge expertise. She is a regular contributor to Hope After Divorce and HealthyLiving.care.*

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# Love Advice: Roll With The Punches, Don't Get Rolled Over



By Debbie Ceresa

You know the feeling. It's that unsettling doubt that surfaces when the best of days turns into the worst of moments. It's like the time Taylor Swift was awarded the 2009 MTV Best

Female Video Award only to watch helplessly as the self-proclaimed 'expert' on artistry, Kanye West, took the microphone to express his differing opinion. Thankfully, most of us aren't confronted with these instances on national television, yet our reactions to these experiences are just as emotionally charged. As a relationship expert, I know these moments happen in relationships and love all the time. During these occasions, you're faced with a choice. How you handle that decision can make all of the difference in the outcome.

## Love Advice On Rolling With The Punches

Several years ago, I was asked to present several awards during an annual high school honors ceremony. This year, one of the awards would be presented to my team of ambassadors and I couldn't wait. I caught the smiles from the audience and was ready to begin my accolades of the young people on the team. However, before I could say another word, a loud ringing phone rudely interrupted this high point. I could have tried continuing over the interruption. Or, I could have gotten angry and flustered. But, I didn't. The ringing eventually stopped and the audience sat silently. Looking over the crowd, I smiled and jokingly said, "I guess another student wants to apply." The laughter was overwhelming and so was the applause.

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I learned a lot from that incident. Often in our lives, many unexpected events happen. What we do with the unexpected is what matters. My love advice: Instead of living in fear of being knocked off course, here are four strategies to navigate the surprise bumps and keep you on the straight and narrow for success in your love life.



**1. Change your course and navigate the unexpected life bumps.** You know the unexpected is going to happen when you least expect the disruption. Why not channel your adventuresome side? Use the detour as an opportunity to find a new discovery. Many of us hide our longing for adventure by turning cautious and reserved. Remember your curiosity when you were a child? Some of your inquisitive adventures were great learning experiences; others earned you a time-out. Either way, it didn't take long to learn from one of your escapades. As adults in your love life, not all of your challenges bring about immediate positive outcomes. Nevertheless, accept this love advice, your "time-out" experience, and learn from it.

**2. Learn to laugh.** By keeping an open mind, you'll find yourself laughing and enjoying some of the unexpected. It's easy to focus on the familiar and never look beyond the narrow comfort zone you created. Often times, the comfort zone is only in our mind, prohibiting us from seeing so much more. Life is constantly changing; why not enjoy the unforeseen? My expert dating advice: Laugh, join the party, and live in the moment.

**3. Don't listen to the criticism.** Many people rely on the emotional destruction of others to boost their own place in life. Just like Taylor Swift in 2009, and the 2015 Grammy awarding artist Beck for Album of the Year (whom Kanye West also tried to upstage), sometimes this happens when you least expect it. In those seemingly powerless instances, the outcome is entirely up to you. Your strength lies in your ability to rise above the negativity and be an example of grace, maturity and professionalism. Both Swift and Beck displayed immense diplomacy and both gained enormous respect as a result.

**4. Accept and share compliment.** How do you feel when someone hands you a compliment? I don't know about you, but I feel good when that positive gesture comes my way. Focusing on what's good in our lives and taking note of our good fortune

in every aspect helps us operate on a higher level. It encourages us to rise above the pettiness and negativity and remain focused on what is everlasting and important. Accept and be grateful for that positive vibe that comes to you. Think about the many ways you can spread your own thankfulness. I guarantee the positive energy will make your day.

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We can't eliminate the unanticipated twists that happen in our lives, but we can decide today how we plan to navigate them. By remaining flexible in the need to change, using humor to buoy our decisions, turning away from negative people, and focusing on our contributions to the world and being grateful for the goodness that comes our way in return, we can handle the unexpected. In this way, the one thing we CAN expect is much success and happiness in our near future.

*Debbie is a Certified Grief Recovery Specialist® and the author to the #1 bestselling memoir A Beautiful View, available on Amazon.com. A Beautiful View documents her journey through her husband's battle with cancer, which ultimately ended with his death. She has experienced grief firsthand and is well equipped to aid others in the recovery process, whether with death or divorce. For more information about Debbie and how to recover from your loss, please visit [debbieceresa.com](http://debbieceresa.com).*

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# Relationship Expert Talks When To File For Divorce



By J'Nel Wright for [Divorce Support Center](#)

If your relationship and love has been confronted with unexpected and undesirable changes, you might consider ending your marriage. While we witness the threat of [celebrity divorce](#) surface almost every day, along with other nasty allegations, the fact remains that the decision to pursue a divorce is a personal choice.

## Relationship Expert: What To

# Consider Before Ending Your Marriage

Before you make a serious decision about your future, consider our love advice and ask yourself these questions:

**1. What do you value most about the marriage?** Is it the security the marriage provides? Do you value the companionship that's shared? For many, mutual respect is a highly favored characteristic, but whatever it may be, consider the strength of that factor now. For example, relationship expert, Rosalind Sedacca, CCT, says "When one or both spouses stop respecting one another, the foundation of the marriage is torn apart and little can be done to mend it. This is the biggest cause of divorce and is usually behind all the other issues involved." If the value you cherish is lost, you need to decide if it can ever be reclaimed. If not, you have the answer on what the next step should be.

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**2. What do you value in your partner?** Think about what attracted you to your honey in the first place. Was it integrity? Was it the prospect of a lifetime of financial support? Does your partner make you laugh or offer protection that makes you feel safe? If something has happened that compromises their character or desirable traits, you need to consider what's left. Moreover, is it enough to sustain your marriage in the future. The key is to identify the difference between reacting to an emotional experience and becoming more self-aware about what ultimately matters to you and what you want in your life.

Divorce support relationship expert Cathy Meyer says "If you're ready for divorce, you've let go of any emotional attachments you have to your spouse. These are good and negative feelings that often come into play during marital

conflict. Deciding on divorce at a time when you're overwhelmed with emotions won't solve problems. It will generate problems and compound any hurt and frustration you may be feeling."

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**3. How much is an outside party influencing your feelings or decision?** At the first sign of infidelity, the pressure to leave the marriage is palpable. Often the hint of staying leaves feminists howling "once a cheater, always a cheater." But what if the infraction is viewed as redeemable? In a variety of instances that go beyond infidelity, how do you piece together the logic of the woman who chooses to stand by her man? Truthfully, a third party has no place in your decision. If they have information that's important for you to know then it should be shared, but if you find yourself overly concerned about the reaction your decision may receive, your focus is misdirected. Only you can decide if this marriage has the foundation to withstand hardship. You're the one to decide if you have the strength and desire to rebuild it. Whatever your decision, be prepared to defend it to those who question it, but make it clear the decision was yours to make.

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We are surrounded by failed marriages that kicked the bucket for a host of reasons. Unfortunately, the commonality of it doesn't make the decision to end our marriage any easier. By establishing our value system and monitoring the present state of a relationship that we once held in high esteem, we can better prepare ourselves to estimate the current value of our love and whether or not it can make it over the threshold to better days.

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# Relationship Expert Talks About Being Friends With Your Ex



By Debbie Ceresa

“Today, I marry my friend.” It’s a common declaration of love shared between two people as part of their wedding ceremony. We promise “to love and cherish until death do us part.” But what happens when the relationship and love you once shared dies? Is it possible to stay friends with your ex?



# Relationship Expert Shares Her Thoughts on a Friendship With An Ex

“If you don’t have children or financial reasons tying you together and you want to stay friends, you need to think about how the friendship would work,” advises Dr. John Aiken, a clinical psychologist and [relationship expert](#), in the article [“Can You Be Friends With Your Ex?”](#) Even if you share children with your former partner, Aiken refers to the importance of establishing boundaries, measuring expectations, and evaluating the true motivations for wanting to keep your ex in your life. We see this challenge in the recent celebrity break-ups of Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck as well as Gwen Stefani and Gavin Rossdale as they move forward with separate lives yet combined parenting.

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Sometimes, the reason the relationship ended supports the need to cut ties and walk away. However, as a relationship expert, I know that, many times, if you struggled on a romantic level, a friendship can still flourish. If you choose to develop a friendship with your ex, here are some things to remember:

**1. Mourn the loss of the relationship you once knew:** You’ve ended your relationship. For whatever reason, you’re no longer romantically together. Now is the time to stop the fighting and blaming and get on the path to recovery. “Give each other time to mourn the death of the relationship,” advises Ami Angelowicz in the article [“The longer you two were together, the longer it will take before you’re ready for friendship. It could be two months or two years – feel it out. You’ll know when the time is right because both of you will feel ready for it. Let hearts heal and flames fizzle out before hopping on the friendship train.”](#) You’ll have challenges along the way, but you’ll find that healing and forgiveness will bring you new insights. Once you step away from the negative thoughts,

you'll find yourself a new person who is able to renew your old friendship with your ex.

**2. Set clear boundaries:** Recognize that you're now at a different stage in your relationship with your ex. All couples have their own song and dance, but now is the time to change yours. This new dance could bring back what you miss about your lost friendship. "The same rules don't apply anymore, so toss out old expectations," advises Dr. Gabrielle Morrissey, a sex and dating expert for [bodyandsoul.com](http://bodyandsoul.com). "Setting clear and defined boundaries means that, when you become attached again, you'll have an emotionally healthy relationship with your ex." Why not treat your ex like your other friends, acknowledging their strengths and weaknesses? Focus on your ex's friendship strengths, but keep the relationship at an appropriate level. Just because you're rekindling your friendship doesn't mean you're looking to rekindle your romantic relationship.

**3. Move forward:** Be angry. Be jealous. You can even spend time feeling hurt. Then move on. It's essential for you to date other people and make new friends in different social circles. "You might not realize it, but keeping your ex around as a friend after a break-up can keep you from moving on," observes writer Karley Sciortino in the article "Breathless: Should You Be Friends With Your Ex?" "Moving on is hard, and the impulse to keep your ex in your life can be really strong – we all get it. But you first need to give yourself a window to move on physically and emotionally."

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Reaching out to a former love certainly has its rewards. You need to allow yourself time to mourn the loss of the relationship and embrace new parameters as well as set clear boundaries as to what those parameters include. Then, after moving forward by welcoming opportunities for love to

become a part of your life, you can enjoy the support of a former partner who knows you better than anyone else while you gain strength and focus on finding a new path to personal happiness.

*Debbie is a Certified Grief Recovery Specialist® and the author to the #1 bestselling memoir A Beautiful View, available on Amazon.com. A Beautiful View documents her journey through her husband's battle with cancer, which ultimately ended with his death. She has experienced grief firsthand and is well equipped to aid others in the recovery process, whether with death or divorce. For more information about Debbie and how to recover from your loss, please visit [debbieceresa.com](http://debbieceresa.com).*

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## **Expert Love Advice: How To Tackle That Nagging Seven-Year Itch**





By Amy Osmond Cook for [Divorce Support Center](#)

Can you remember the first time you were in love? Do you remember how the mere image of your partner took control of your thoughts? Your actions? Your view of the world? Life was vibrant and hopeful. Most of us can relate, but fast forward seven years, and the crowd thins a little. The intensity has dimmed or even disappeared long ago. Were we wrong about that person...or are we just incapable of maintaining a lasting [relationship and love](#)?

## **Relationship Expert Shares Love Advice On Seven-Year Itch**

As a relationship expert, I know that there's some empirical truth behind the matrimonial seven-year itch. According to the US Census Bureau, statistics continually support this behavior pattern and offer a theory showing that, after seven years of marriage, most couples have raised their children and have realized they don't want to be around each other anymore.

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In an article for *PsychologyToday*, author Dario Maestripieri, Ph.D., referred to the findings of anthropologist Helen Fisher. She theorized that humans may have a predisposition to being serial monogamists. This means that “people are socially bonded to one partner at a time but don’t stick to the same partner their whole life.” Instead, they switch from partner to partner. This often follows a four- to seven-year pattern.

So how do you explain those couples who defy the odds of statistics and anthropological patterns? What is it about the pair that remains together for 30-plus years that we could emulate in our own love life? Here is some expert love advice about what those enduring relationships have that yours may not:

**1. The relationship is flexible:** Most long-term goals need to adapt to endure, and the same holds true for long-term relationships. An article for eharmony.com warns of adhering to patterns that don’t work or weaken a partnership. For example, if one or both of you start taking the other one for granted, if either or both of you adopt a condescending tone in communicating with your spouse, or if you start seeking comfort and support from someone other than your spouse, the healthy relationship can break down. “To help avoid long-term unhealthy side effects that can lead to the seven-year itch, it’s important to change those relationship-weakening patterns and habits,” the article reads. “In doing so, you may discover what you love about each other and ultimately deepen the bond you share.”

In an article for *PsychologyToday*, author Robert Taibbi, LCSW, stresses the importance of updating your vision. “What do you both envision in the next year, five years, or ten years? It’s not so important what you say as you both have the ability to say it,” he explains. “This is what will help you both narrow the gap between your daily life and your inner needs.”

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**2. Communication, communication, communication:** Communication is a habit that should emerge during the early dating stages and continue throughout a marriage. Make it a habit to express your needs. Moreover, be sure to ask your partner what his or her needs consist of as well. This doesn't mean you'll always agree, but it will teach you how to handle conflicting views. In the eharmony.com article, we are reminded to expect bumps in the road. "The goal is not to avoid them at all costs but to understand how to navigate them in healthy, effective, loving ways," it says.

**3. Partners choose happiness over the need to be right:** It often comes down to choosing one or the other. Are you drawn to having the last word? Do you relish those opportunities when you have proven your partner wrong? Is defending your point of view worth taking it to the mat at every opportunity? If so, you may win the battle, but you are destined to be alone at the end of the war. "By letting go of the desire to always be right at any cost, you give yourself and your partner permission to enjoy life again," says eharmony.com. "A happy relationship AND less stress? Sounds like a win-win."

Problems will certainly make a regular appearance in your relationship, whether motivated by self-serving strategies or not. In this case, long-term couples understand the importance of solving problems when they arise. They know that unresolved problems or unchecked behavior creates an unhappy environment. "It just becomes another land mine that you have to carefully walk around," writes Taibbi. "If you're always looking down at where you are stepping, you never can really look at each other."

**Related Link:** [Romantic Relationship Advice: From Roadkill to Recommitment](#)

So how can one scratch that dreaded seven-year itch? Our



relationship advice is to make sure your partnership is important to you. Expert love advice shows that, by maintaining flexibility, communicating, showing respect for your partner's opinions, and handling conflict openly and with fairness, you can uphold the value of your relationship and enjoy an itchy-free future with the one you love.

*For more information about and articles by our Hope After Divorce relationship experts, click [here](#).*

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## **Expert Dating Advice: Should You Give Your Ex a Second Chance?**





By Amy Osmond Cook for [Divorce Support Center](#)

In the latest celebrity news, actress Pamela Anderson recently announced that her celebrity divorce to two-time husband, Rick Salomon, was final. In retrospect, she realized she never should have traveled down that path a second time. In contrast, my aunt Marie Osmond reunited with and remarried her first husband, Stephen Craig, 26 years after they divorced. This [celebrity couple](#) is fantastic together, and I'm thrilled to see them back together. As Uncle Donny stated in *People.com*, "These two people are right for each other."

Deciding whether or not your ex is the ultimate soul mate for you can be a complicated decision, and it's one that requires some soul-searching. Six percent of people remarry their former spouse, and sometimes, it results in happiness, while other times, the old problems flare up again. As a relationship expert, I think the wisdom behind that decision largely depends on what caused the marriage to break up in the first place and what changes are happening now. My expert dating advice would be to consider these three reasons

for remarrying your spouse and these three reasons to move on:

## Expert Dating Advice For Giving Your Ex a Second Chance

**1. You're able to forgive each other:** What was once considered a deal breaker to your marriage may take on a different look as time passes. In her *Huffington Post* article, "Remarrying Your Ex-Spouse," author Lois Tarter believes the ability to forgive comes with time, stating, "If the two ex-spouses worked on themselves while apart and they are in a better place, they may be able to forgive their spouse for all that went wrong."

**Related Link:** [Expert Dating Advice For Finding Love After Divorce](#)

**2. Bad timing caused the break-up:** Could it be the right guy came along at the wrong moment? If so, follow my expert dating advice and look at the personal growth of both of you during the time apart. "Sometimes, two people feel that they need to grow a bit on their own in order to be fully committed to a marriage," wrote Tarter.

**3. The problem wasn't the marriage:** In some cases, it was the baggage that was brought into a marriage that cast a destructive shade on the relationship and love. Rachel Clark, who blogs for Psychology.com as "Marry, Divorce, Reconcile," refers to her own experience when she writes, "It was never the marriage. It was a habit of thinking that questioned and doubted, that spawned negativity instead of positivity. And I can say that came from my childhood because my own parents had divorced."

# Relationship Expert Gives Reasons to Move On

**1. Toxic behavior is ruining the relationship:** As we witnessed with Anderson, a failure to acknowledge the effects of unhealthy behaviors can doom a relationship and love. It's like opening the refrigerator door, hoping to find something to eat, not finding anything, and closing the door, only to open it again a few seconds later in the hopes that something new appeared. That type of thinking is irrational, and so is thinking the same negative behavior patterns will not have an adverse effect on you as they once did.

**Related Link:** [Romantic Relationship Advice: From Roadkill to Recommitment](#)

**2. You are remarrying for the wrong reasons:** Contrary to most Disney movies, remarrying your ex-spouse for the sake of the children, the grandparents, to save the family farm, or any reason that lies outside of genuine love for this person is sure to end in disaster for the second time.

**3. Your ex-spouse has moved on:** If your former spouse has invested his time and affections into another, your time speculating what could have been is over. "Life would be so much easier for everyone involved if our feelings of desire, love, and attachment were reciprocated," was an opinion shared on truthaboutdeception.com. "But more often than not, these basic emotions do not align themselves that way."

By taking an honest look at the reasons behind your split, you may be facing an opportunity to make right what went wrong long ago. Or you may be proud of your ability to escape a destructive relationship that left your heart as empty as your checking account. Either way, toying with the prospect enables you to confirm your choices and feel good about what is to come.

For more information about and articles by our Hope After Divorce relationship experts, click [here](#).

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## Expert Dating Advice For Finding Love After Divorce



By Amy Osmond Cook for [Divorce Support Center](#)

Fellow fictional vampires Nikki Reed and Ian Somerhalder just tied the knot in their celebrity wedding after a whirlwind romance. The famous couple began their relationship in the fall of 2014 when Reed announced she and her then-husband Paul McDonald were separating. By January 2015, the [celebrity](#)

[divorce](#) was finalized and Somerhalder had popped the question. Now, the two are hitched and honeymooning in Brazil after dating for less than a year.

## Expert Dating Advice for Finding Love

To some, tying the knot only four months after leaving a marriage may seem impulsive, but there are no rules set in stone when it comes to finding love after a divorce. “This wildly varies from person to person,” Judith Sills, Ph.D, psychologist and author of *Getting Naked Again: Dating, Romance, Sex, and Love When You’ve Been Divorced, Widowed, Dumped, or Distracted* told Web MD. “Everyone ends a relationship by grieving the emotional investment. For some people, that happens before they move out. Others are still emotionally married after the divorce is final.”

Based on the romantic photos that Daily Mail shared of the honeymoon, it looks like married life suits this famous couple. Reed seems confident about her relationship with Somerhalder, which is one of the most important signs of a healthy union, especially when her celebrity divorce from Paul McDonald was so public.

What are some ways you can tell if you are ready to dedicate yourself to a committed relationship after a divorce? Here’s some expert [dating advice](#) to determine if you’re ready to begin again:

**Related Link:** [Dating Advice: Create The Person You Want To Be](#)

**1. Feel it out:** Stay true to your feelings. Allow yourself “a little time to think, a little time to grieve, a little opportunity to find someone else,” Sills says. Sure, Reed was ready to seriously date almost immediately after leaving her previous marriage, but that doesn’t mean you have to be, too.



Do what feels good. If dating makes you uncomfortable, embrace that fact, and use that time to treat yourself. Eventually, your emotions will let you know when you're really ready.

**2. No, really, feel it out:** Dating after divorce has shown potential to prevent depression in a surprising way. Dr. Karen Finn stresses the importance of human touch when it comes to maintaining good mental health. However, if the idea of becoming physically close with a new person isn't appealing, Dr. Finn recommends to, "get a massage, become known by your friends as a hugger, get a mani and/or pedi, and hug yourself."

**3. Do it for the right reasons:** It can be tempting to jump back into dating after a divorce so that you can claim yourself as "the winner," the one who finds happiness with another person first. Unfortunately, that's not the kind of motivation that will necessarily lead to a lasting new relationship. You wouldn't want to get involved with someone who is invested in hurting their ex's feelings, so don't put anyone else in that position.

**Related Link:** [How to Be Mindful When It Comes to Relationships and Love](#)

There is no schedule in terms of finding love post-divorce. Most importantly, this is a time to rekindle the love you have for yourself! *Then* you can start hunting vampires like Reed, if you know what I mean.

*For more information about and articles by our Hope After Divorce relationship experts, click [here](#).*

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# Expert Love Advice: Is Your Partner Lying? Use These CIA Tricks to Find Out!



By Amy Osmond Cook for [Divorce Support Center](#)

Ever feel like your partner isn't telling you the whole truth? From Bill Clinton's "I did not have sexual relations with that woman" to [Brad Pitt](#) and [Angelina Jolie](#) swearing that no funny business was going down on the set of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, single celebrities and famous couples alike are infamous for stretching the truth. Everyday pairs struggle with lying as well. In a *Reader's Digest* poll, 96 percent of Americans admitted lying to those close to them. But it's also worth noting that 50 percent of lies are told by only 5.3 percent of the people. Consider this expert love and dating advice below!

# Dating Advice to Help You Determine if Your Partner is Lying

A recent *Huffington Post* article identified four ways to tell whether someone is lying:

**1. Look for nasal engorgement and itching:** When a person lies, specific tissues in the nose usually engorge, says Dr. Alan Hirsch of The Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago. This nasal engorgement, which Hirsch calls the “Pinocchio Sign,” causes cells to release histamine, which in turn causes the nose to itch.

**Related Link:** [Find Out What Kristen Stewart’s Body Language Reveals About Her Cheating Guilt](#)

**2. Notice negation and aversion cues:** Look for negation cues, such as covering or blocking the mouth and covering or rubbing the eyes, nose or ears, and aversion clues, such as turning the head or body away when making a crucial statement.

**3. Beware of religious rhetoric:** Religious phrases like “I swear on my mother’s grave,” “God, no,” or “as God is my witness” are ironic red flags.

**4. Call out the denial phrases:** Denial phrases including “trust me,” “honestly,” and “to be perfectly honest” are evasive. Evasion is about trying to change a perception, and these phrases repeated over and over again are typical clues to lying.

## Expert Love Advice From a Former CIA Officer

Phil Houston, former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer and CEO of QVerity, takes it one step further in his recently published book *Get the Truth: Former CIA Officers Teach You*

*How to Persuade Anyone to Tell All.* In it, he explains how you can persuade people – even a partner with something to hide – to tell you anything. Here are four steps to take to follow his expert love advice:

**Related Link:** [5 Red Flags to be Aware of In Your Relationship](#)

**1. Make a transition statement:** First, let them know that the lie isn't working. For example, we might say, "Honey, listen, I've got to tell you. I've got some problems with what you were saying about our credit card statement." Deliver it in a low-key manner without making it adversarial to help keep them calm.

**2. Stop them from talking:** Behaviorists explain to us that, every time you verbalize the lie, you become more psychologically entrenched in it. So step two is to start talking and give them reasons to tell you what's really going on.

**3. Lower their defenses:** Rationalize or minimize the problem so the risks of telling the truth seem smaller. "Hey, listen," we might say. "Everybody has trouble with their credit card statements." We can do it by monologuing as well, which means we are basically trying to tell the person lying that they can still win.

**4. Switch to a presumptive question:** After we lower their defenses, we should switch into a presumptive question, like, "What did you really do with the credit card?"

If you want to find out even more about Houston's method, check out the book on Amazon. I'm going to try the technique out on my teenagers and see what really happened to my last pair of work shoes!

*For more information about and articles by our Hope After Divorce relationship experts, click [here](#).*

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# How Can Celebrity Couple Jennifer Aniston Justin Theroux Make Her Love Last?



By Amy Osmond Cook, Ph.D.

Can it be true? It appears that Hollywood's All-American sweetheart Jennifer Aniston has finally found lasting love with fiancé Justin Theroux. As they get ready to walk down the aisle, here are a few tips that can help them (and all of us!) build healthy relationships with our loved ones.

**Create Your Own Space**



Happy couples carve out their own little piece of the universe—a place where only they have the final say. They listen to their mom-in-law pontificate about the advantages of hardwood floors but choose carpet if their partner has a penchant for shag.

They enjoy each other's company but support independent hobbies. They watch *Vampire Diaries* together—of which separate viewing constitutes a personal betrayal—but also welcome independent golf trips and weekends at the spa. In essence, they build togetherness but foster autonomy.

**Related Link:** [7 Ways to Build a Love That Lasts](#)

### **Fireproof**

To prevent a house from burning down, you take certain precautions. You blow out the candles before you leave the room. You don't leave the dishrag next to the gas stove. And you certainly don't let your three-year-old daughter play with matches.

Happy couples fireproof a relationship in much the same way. They create a safe place for conflict by avoiding inflammatory communication, like name-calling, stonewalling or derogation. They deal with an issue specifically and avoid making blanket statements. Pizza on the wall after Monday Night Football? Game on. But it doesn't snowball into comments like, "You don't pull your weight in this relationship." And the pizza on the wall five years ago after a bachelor party? Off-limits.

### **Go Organic**

There's something about growing your own food that makes you appreciate nature's magic. It's exciting to see the first tendril break ground, then another and another. And when those sorry little tomato plants in chipped clay pots are weighed down with ripe, red fruit—well, that's something to celebrate, especially when you find out how much better homegrown



tomatoes taste than their store-bought lookalikes.

In much the same way, happy couples know that a relationship needs constant nurturing—emotional, sexual and social—to grow. If even one of these areas is neglected, the relationship can become diseased and die. Happy couples rally when they're really too tired for sex because their partner is in the mood. They say, "You do not look fat in those jeans" for the thousandth time and still manage to sound sincere. And they laugh at the same old story that their partner has been telling at parties for years, even when everyone else groans.

**Related Link:** [The Key to a Lasting Relationship](#)

So how can Jennifer and Justin make it work for the long-term? If they create a space for their relationship, fireproof it and cultivate it into something special, they have a great chance of keeping it strong and making it last.

*Amy Osmond Cook, Ph.D. is a faculty associate at Arizona State University, where she teaches Communication and English classes. She is the publisher of Sourced Media Books and co-author of Hope After Divorce and Full Bloom: Cultivating Success. Amy and her husband, Jeff, have six children. For more information about Amy, please visit [amyosmondcook.com](http://amyosmondcook.com).*

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## What 'The Bachelor's' Sean Lowe Needs to Do to Find Love





By Amy Osmond Cook

It was 10:00 p.m. when I dragged myself home and up the stairs of our SoCal suburban tract home. The kids were in bed, and I was ready to relax. From our bedroom, I heard my husband Jeff's voice on the phone raised in alarm. "Can you believe it? That is terrible!" Adrenaline rushed through my body as my mind raced through the possible calamities that could have befallen him. As I walked into the bedroom, Jeff hung up the phone to greet me.

"What's the matter, Jeff?" I cried.

"Oh, nothing," he replied. "My dad and I were just talking about the *Bachelor* episode tonight."

**Related Link:** ['Bachelor' Star AshLee Knew Sean Would Send Tierra Home](#)

My husband, Jeff, is a *Bachelor* fan. Fanatic. We watch every episode, every season. At first, I protested, but now, I have been sucked into the reality show vortex from whence there is no return and am the one popping the popcorn. This season's

bachelor, Sean Lowe, is one of my favorites. He seems like an honest guy trying everything he can to find his soul mate—and how can you fault that? Unfortunately, the bachelors don't have a very good track record when it comes to choosing that special someone. So, now that we're down to the top three contestants, here's what I would tell Sean if I were sitting in Chris Harrison's seat.

**#1. Choose the one that flies under the radar.** While the drama queens (ahem, Tierra) might be more fun or interesting, they're going to get on your nerves over time. So, Sean, if you're looking for a lifelong partner, choose the girl who is comfortable in her own skin and doesn't need to go out of her way to get attention.

**#2. Choose the one who makes you laugh.** Dating is full of desire and passion. But it's inevitable that, over time, physical attraction wanes. In a recent study commissioned by Medicis Aesthetics, it was found that physical attraction mattered more in the first seven years of a relationship than in later years. After that, predictors of long-term relationship satisfaction shifted more toward personality traits. So if you really do want a lasting relationship, choose the one you enjoy being with the most.

**#3. Choose the one who can put up with your pranks.** Sean, we all know you as the bachelor who pulls pranks. You pranked Emily when you were a contestant on *The Bachelorette*, who didn't see the humor in it and kicked you off the show the same week. You also pranked the contestants this season, placing them in uncomfortable situations to test their ability to roll with the punches. Because this is apparently an enduring personality trait, you need to choose someone who can prank you back with equal zest—or at least appreciate your sense of humor. Whether it's pranking, singing in the shower or biting fingernails, we all have idiosyncrasies that may be annoying to some. We just need to find partners who can love us for our uniqueness, not in spite of it.

Jeff and I will be watching what is sure to be “the most dramatic rose ceremony in *Bachelor* history” with popcorn in hand. And I’ll be interested to see whether Sean chooses the secure, confident, enjoyable woman that he needs to build a lasting relationship. If only I had Chris Harrison’s job...

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## Love Lessons from Holiday Movies





By Amy Osmond Cook

The holiday season wouldn't be the same without Christmas movies. Even if you're bah-humbugging the holidays this year, we can learn a lot about love in these classic holiday films.

**1. Elf** . Will Ferrell is at his best in this laugh-out-loud family flick. Buddy the Elf finds out he is actually a human and goes to New York to find his long-lost father. While there, he trashes his dad's Upper-East-Side apartment, spreads Christmas cheer among cynics and falls in love with Jovi (Zooey Deschanel), Santa's elf at the mall. They eventually get together and split time between New York and the North Pole. *The message: Love can transcend all barriers.*

**Related Link:** [How to Find Love Amidst Holiday Crazyiness](#)

**2. It's a Wonderful Life.** In this heartwarming story, George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) is in dire straits, feeling he is worth more dead than alive. George's guardian angel shows him what the lives of his loved ones would be like without him in it. In this alternate reality, George's brother is dead, Uncle Billy is in an insane asylum, his friend is an exotic dancer

and his wife is a librarian spinster. George realizes that he has the relationships that make a wonderful life. *The message: Love is the main ingredient of happiness.*

**3. Love Actually.** Ten love stories tell a number of tales. My favorite is that of Jamie and Aurélia. Jamie (Colin Firth), a British writer, is crushed when his girlfriend sleeps with his brother. He retires to his French cottage, where he meets housekeeper Aurélia (LÃ©cia Moniz). They are instantly attracted to one another, but Aurélia speaks only Portuguese. When Jamie returns to England, he realizes he is in love with Aurélia—so he learns Portuguese to propose to her. When they meet, Jamie learns that Aurélia has been learning English to communicate with him. Sigh. *The message: Love means learning to speak your lover's language.*

**Related Link:** [Why You Shouldn't Buy Her a Ring for the Holidays](#)

If you're in a romantic relationship, grab some hot chocolate and curl up with your partner to watch these must-see [holiday](#) flicks. And remember: Love transcends barriers, brings happiness and inspires us to communicate better with our partners.

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## 10 Avengers-Sparked Questions to Bring You Closer







By Amy Osmond Cook

“If you could have one superpower, what would it be?” I asked my husband, Jeff, on Friday. We were on our way to see *The Avengers* with our twelve-year-old son, Jake. “I would have mind-reading power,” Jeff said. “I’d be Superman,” said Jake. “Then I could have them all.” “I said just one superpower,” I quibbled. “But I’d stop time.”

Then, for the next ten minutes, my 12-year-old and I argued about whether you could count Superman’s powers as only one power and whether being able to stop time would make you invincible. But I digress.

When I was dating, I wished I had those mind-reading powers Jeff was talking about. What was really going on behind the polite, glassy-eyed smile across the restaurant table? *Is he bored? Is he preoccupied with work? Is he on drugs?* were all questions I found myself asking.

**Related:** [Which Avenger Would Make the Best Date?](#)

We may not be able to read minds, but Maria Coder has brought

us the next best thing: a systematic procedure for vetting our dates. Her book, called *InvestiDate: How to Investigate Your Date*, has all kinds of interesting tips to help you identify liars, cheaters, and con artists in the dating world and avoid physical danger, financial ruin, and emotional harm. One thing that particularly caught my eye in this witty book was a list of 36 questions that can help us develop emotional intimacy with our partners. Written by Arthur Aron and colleagues, the list was derived from their 1997 study in interpersonal closeness. Below are my top ten favorite questions:

**Related:** [How to Communicate to Get What You Need](#)

1. What would constitute a “perfect” day for you?
2. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
3. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?
4. If a crystal ball would tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?
5. If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?
6. What is your most embarrassing moment?
7. Your house, containing everything you own, catches on fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
8. What is your most terrible memory?
9. What is your most treasured memory?
10. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?

This list, frequently referred to as “The Sharing Game,” can give us insight into our partners’ inner psyches. If we like

what we see, this multilayered communication allows us to reach new levels of intimacy quickly.

So while I may not have mind-reading powers, I can use these questions to understand Jeff a little better and refresh our emotional connection.

But I'm still hoping to stop time.

*Amy Osmond Cook, Ph.D. is a faculty associate at Arizona State University, where she teaches Communication and English classes. She is the publisher of Sourced Media Books and co-author of Hope After Divorce and Full Bloom: Cultivating Success. Amy and her husband, Jeff, have five children and look forward to welcoming baby #6 in April 2012. For more information about Amy, please visit [amyosmondcook.com](http://amyosmondcook.com).*

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## **3 Times in Your Relationship When It's Better to Be Safe Than Sorry**





By Amy Osmond Cook, Ph.D.

Zac Efron's well-publicized condom drop on the red carpet sparked Matt Lauer to comment, "Better to be safe than sorry, right?" Zac chuckled, "That's a great message to add to the many messages in the film."

Well, it turns out that "better to be safe than sorry" is a great message that applies not just to condoms, but also to relationships in general. Here are three times when it really IS better to be safe than sorry:

### **1. You suspect that your partner is cheating.**

Barring a traumatic past relationship, people want to trust their partners. So if you keep having that nagging feeling that he's cheating, it's better to look into the possibility than to turn a blind eye. Hopefully, your worry is unfounded. But, unfortunately, each of my friends who suspected her partner was cheating really did have something to worry about. Consider the words of Ronald Reagan when discussing his relationship with the Soviet Union: "Trust. But verify."

**Related:** [You've Cheated, So Now What?](#)

## **2. You see a mean streak in your partner . . . but only with the guys.**

No matter how nice your partner is to you right now, his true colors will shine through eventually. If you see him losing it on some guy at the bar, you can bet that given enough time, you'll be on the receiving end of the dude gone postal. And don't think that his gallant desire to protect the "weaker" sex will prevent an eventual outburst: a large majority of women who suffer from domestic violence were hit the first time while they were pregnant. Don't mess with a nasty temper. It will always come back to haunt you.

**Related:** [Hollywood Portrayals of Domestic Violence](#)

## **3. You get cold feet before the wedding.**

Stories of commitment phobes and runaway brides who left their partners at the altar abound. It is often assumed that "cold feet" before a wedding is normal. While it may be common, anxiety before marriage is nothing to sweep under the rug—it's a manifestation that something isn't right about the relationship. Maybe it really is as simple as a commitment problem, and you need to get some tips from a professional about how to manage your impulse to run. But it's something that has to be worked out before the wedding, not afterwards. Just remember, an embarrassing day is much better than a life of misery or a divorce down the road.

Most of the time, it's best to give your partner the benefit of the doubt. But when you encounter a cheating heart, a bad temper, or feelings of anxiety, it's better to be safe than sorry.

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*author of Hope After Divorce and Full Bloom: Cultivating Success. Amy and her husband, Jeff, have five children and look forward to welcoming baby #6 in April 2012. For more information about Amy, please visit [amyosmondcook.com](http://amyosmondcook.com).*

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## Relationship Advice from the 'Hunger Games'



By Amy Osmond Cook, Ph.D.

If any of you saw the *Hunger Games* recently, you were in for a bloodbath—a very entertaining, very well produced bloodbath. I'm a huge fan of Suzanne Collins, and the movie was one of



the best I've seen in a long time. But while I cheered for Katniss, cursed the gamekeeper, and threw popcorn at President Snow, I couldn't help but notice that some of the lessons of *Hunger Games* could also be applied to relationships:

### **Hunger Games Tip #1: Don't Let Him (or Her) Own You**

Before going into the *Hunger Games* arena, Peeta and Katniss spend a quiet moment looking over the city. With a wistful glance at his would-be lover and soon-to-be fellow Gladiator, Peeta tells Katniss, "I keep wishing I could think of a way . . . to show the capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than a piece in their games." And show them he does.

Healthy relationships are built on equality. If you feel owned or used, there's a good chance that you are being played in someone's game. You may be their most important game piece. But regardless of whether you are a queen or a pawn, if your relationship feels like a chess match, run!

**Related:** [Can Celebrities Actually Have Enduring Healthy Relationships?](#)

### **Hunger Games Tip #2: Don't Eat the Berries**

While Katniss is out hunting for food, Peeta tries to be helpful and unknowingly picks poisonous Nightlock berries to eat with the meal. Foxface watches Peeta and picks berries of her own, thinking they are edible. She dies instantly upon ingestion.

Affairs, abuse, and drug and alcohol addiction are common forms of relationship Nightlock. While they are possible for some couples to overcome, they can be instant relationship killers. So if you are tempted to stray, to use, or to be otherwise despicable, be aware that you are putting your relationship seriously at risk.

**Related:** [You've Cheated, So Now What?](#)

### **Hunger Games Tip #3: Just Be Yourself**

When Katniss first arrives at the Capitol, she is told that she needs to make people like her. Sponsors, Haymitch (her mentor) states, can make the difference between life and death. Katniss fails miserably at this until Cinna, her stylist, tells her, "Don't try to make people like you . . . Just be yourself." When she forgets about public opinion and is true to herself, she becomes beloved by district and Capitol people alike.

It goes without saying that it's important to be yourself in a relationship. There's nothing worse than sushi and ballet when all you really want is barbeque and line dancing. Don't pretend to be someone you're not, if for no other reason than it's just plain tiring—and it's impossible to keep up the façade forever. When the walls come down and the real you shows through, don't you want someone who shares your secret passion for all things Woody Allen, or at least loves you for it?

Suzanne Collins is more about opposing the Man and the media than providing commentary on romantic relationships. But forging relationships based on equal power dynamics, avoiding toxic situations, and having personal integrity are lessons as applicable to the bedroom as the Hunger Games arena.

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# Katy Perry and Russell Brand: What Went Wrong?



By [Amy Osmond Cook, Ph.D.](#)

The fairy tale marriage of Katy Perry and Russell Brand is over, fourteen months after it began. Katy and Russell join the ranks of celebrities whose wedding nuptials were . . . temporary. Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries lasted only 72 days. Britney Spears and Jason Alexander lasted two.

We've all heard a jumble of less-than-educated guesses as to why many celebrity relationships don't last: "They spend too much time apart." "They have intimate scenes with other people." "They're too obsessed with themselves." "They only care about fame." But what are the real reasons for so many celebrity break-ups?

According to Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Balkelee, authors of *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts*, all good marriages have one thing in common: Both partners feel *respected and cherished*.

In a study of 50 married couples who described themselves as “happily married,” Wallerstein identified nine building blocks that created a foundation for a good marriage, which we can condense into three major take-home recommendations for a happy relationship: (1) create your own space; (2) fireproof; and (3) go organic.

### **Create Your Own Space**

Happy couples carve out their own little piece of the universe—a place where only *they* have the final say. They listen to mom-in-law pontificate about the advantages of hardwood floors, but choose carpet if their partner has a penchant for shag.

Happy couples enjoy each other’s company but support independent hobbies. They watch *Vampire Diaries* together—of which separate viewing constitutes a personal betrayal—but also welcome independent golf trips and weekends at the spa. In essence, they build togetherness, but foster autonomy.

Katy and Russell certainly had autonomy, but they had trouble staking a claim and prospecting together in the gold rush of marriage. Katy’s parents may have been toxic. Russell may have sown his seed in places it didn’t belong. But certainly, as time went on, it became clear that the couple didn’t have a real sense of “place.” They failed to make the transition from “you and me” to “us.”

### **Fireproof**

To prevent a house from burning down, you take certain precautions. You blow out the candles before you leave the room. You don’t leave the dishrag next to the gas stove. And

you certainly don't let your three-year-old play with matches.

Happy couples fireproof a relationship in much the same way.

They create a safe place for conflict by avoiding inflammatory communication like name calling, stonewalling, or derogation. They deal with an issue specifically and avoid making blanket statements. Pizza on the wall after Monday Night Football? Game on. But it doesn't snowball into, "You don't pull your weight in this relationship." And the pizza on the wall five years ago after a bachelor party? Off-limits.

As Katy and Russell's marriage progressed, it was clear that they lacked fireproofing skills. According to Rick Mahr, a music executive and friend of Katy, their communication skills needed an overhaul—they fought almost every time they were together. It was clear that their reactions to life's stresses were creating a wedge (not the hoped-for solidarity happy couples experience) as they spent more and more time apart, even on holidays.

### **Go Organic**

There's something about growing your own food that makes you appreciate nature's magic. It's exciting to see the first tendril break ground, then another, and another. And when those sorry little tomato plants in chipped clay pots are weighed down with ripe, red fruit—well, that's something to celebrate, especially when you find out how much better homegrown tomatoes taste than their store-bought lookalikes.

Much the same way, happy couples know that a relationship needs constant nurturing—emotional, sexual, and social—to grow. If even one of these areas is neglected, the relationship can become diseased and die. Happy couples rally when they're really too tired for sex, because their partner is in the mood. They say, "You do not look fat in those jeans" for the thousandth time and still manage to sound

sincere. And they laugh at the same old story that their partner has been telling at parties for years, even when everyone else groans.

It is clear that Katy and Russell felt passionately about each other; but their frequent fighting and long stints apart prevented them from cultivating a relationship in which they both felt respected and cherished. (Russell's tweeting of unflattering pictures of his wife probably didn't help matters, either.) Their relationship withered because they weren't able to give it the nutrients it needed to grow.

## **Conclusion**

Now, there's no doubt that Katy and Russell are exceptional people. They exude talent, personality and charm. Perhaps the time wasn't right for this couple to make a go of it, or perhaps they still have more to learn about creating happy relationships. But we *can* learn from their all-too-public divorce. Create a space for your relationship, fireproof it, and cultivate it into something special.

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# **Demi Moore Proves There's**



# Hope After Divorce



By Amy Osmond Cook, Ph.D.

It's unclear as to whether Demi Moore is going to file for divorce from Ashton Kutcher after he allegedly cheated on their sixth wedding anniversary. At least, that's what the *Vancouver Sun* and other media outlets are reporting. Though both parties have declined to confirm the split, it's certainly apparent that this is a difficult time for both of them.

It's no surprise that many marriages crumble when there is a serious betrayal. For most Americans, marriage remains the highest expression of commitment that they can imagine. Most also believe it's unacceptable to cheat, lie, or keep secrets in a marriage—and that number has continued to fall over the past 40 years, according to Stephanie Coontz, the author of

the article *The Origins of Modern Divorce*.

While the difficulty of this situation cannot be overstated, Demi has navigated this terrain before with grace and poise.

If she handles a divorce from Ashton like she did her divorce from Bruce Willis, we can expect the couple to stay friends and find happiness amidst the devastation. So, what can we learn from this actress?

**1. Keep it classy.** Demi has yet to talk about her situation with Ashton in a public way. Until a final decision is made, she's probably going to keep quiet about it. She and Bruce were models of restraint during their divorce and continued to build each other up even as they separated.

**2. Remember that love conquers all.** Somehow, Demi and Bruce continued to love each other while no longer remaining "in love" with each other. Bruce told *Vanity Fair Magazine* in 2007: "It's hard to understand, but we go on holidays together. We still raise our kids together—we still have that bond. . . . I love Demi, and I know she loves me." We can expect Demi to go through a grieving process, but then come out on top—choosing love and forgiveness over bitterness and acrimony.

**3. Put the kids first.** In 2007, Demi stated: "I'm the product of divorced parents, and my brother and I were the pawns in my parents' game. I never wanted that for my kids." She explained, saying: "You know, I didn't get married and have children so I could get a divorce, get remarried, and get along with my ex-husband. But since that is what happened, I am grateful it turned out this way." Ashton has been a father figure to Demi's children for years, so Demi will most likely continue to support that relationship.

Divorce is certainly difficult. Many of us know that from personal experience. But if anyone can handle a public divorce in a classy way and continue to find the good in her

relationships, it's Demi Moore.

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# Can Celebrities Actually Have Enduring, Healthy Relationships?





By Amy Osmond Cook, Ph.D.

Cheating. Scandal. Divorce. Too often, celebrity relationships end as a result of one of these unfortunate scenarios. Just this summer, George Clooney and Elisabetta Canalis, J.Lo and Marc Anthony, Derek Jeeter and Minka Kelly, and Cameron Diaz and Alex Rodriguez called it quits. Even Buzz Aldrin and his wife of 23 years couldn't make it last.

As celebrity breakups continue to provide headlines for the supermarket tabloids, we are sometimes left wondering, "Does anyone stay together, anymore?"

Fortunately, the answer is "yes." Celebrities who take "for better or worse" seriously may not make the headlines, but they are out there. Two of those people are my aunt and uncle, Donny and Debbie Osmond.

Donny and Debbie were married in 1978 and have survived the highs and lows of show business together for 33 years. I asked Debbie how she and Donny have made their relationship last when so many have failed. In characteristic humility, she credits God and her family for helping to keep their

relationship strong. But she also has a few practical tips:

### **Keep the Pressure Low.**

Donny is a perfectionist and rues over a single note gone awry. While he was performing in *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat* on Broadway, he was struggling with considerable anxiety. Debbie eased his stress by keeping the pressure low.

Every afternoon as he left for work, she would say, "Go have an average night, tonight." She made him feel valued as a person apart from his performance on stage; and as a result, their relationship and his vocals were both stellar.

### **Keep Your Personal Life Private.**

Sometimes celebrities (like everyone else) allow work to consume them. As Debbie said, "The business can really take over your life if you allow it to. I enjoy having my family away from Hollywood so Donny can come home to a bit of reality, like enjoying the kids' school activities, hiking, and just being a father. It helps everyone feel like show business is not our life, but just a job."

### **Love the High-Tech Communication.**

When Donny is away, he and Debbie constantly talk via phone or webcam. As Debbie says, "I love Skype! We laugh because we have a virtual dad!" It helps Donny, Debbie, and the kids and grandkids to feel connected when they can see and hear each other every day.

Unfortunately, there is no magical recipe for making a relationship 100-percent breakup-proof. But there are many celebrities who continue to keep their relationships strong—it's just that we may not hear about them very often.

Regardless of whether we are actors or actuaries, keeping the pressure low, guarding our personal lives, and utilizing technology to communicate are great practical tips that we can

all use to make our relationships strong.

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