

is your relationship in trouble?

Approximately 40 per cent of separations in heterosexual relationships are initiated by the woman. In these cases, sometimes the decision to separate comes as a complete surprise. Many men do not recognise the warning signs that their relationship is in trouble, or ignore these signs in the hope that things will get better.

The experience of separation or family breakdown is distressing for all concerned. It is particularly devastating if you are taken by surprise and are not the one who initiates the separation – the person who initiates the break-up will usually experience greater distress beforehand.

Each relationship is as unique as the people involved. There is no sure way to predict whether a relationship will end. What one couple will put up with, can drive another apart. However, there are always clear signals that all is not well.

Watching for and recognising these signs, and acting promptly, is vitally important for the health of your relationship.

Some common signs that your relationship may need attention:

- Communication is minimal and often negative
- Differences are criticised rather than enjoyed
- You are spending less time together
- One partner indicates the relationship is in trouble
- One partner is rarely prepared to listen
- Conflict leads to resentment, not resolution
- There are fewer fun moments
- Put-downs are more common than compliments
- Humour is often at other's expense

If you recognise any of these warning signs, have you been:

- Burying your head in the sand and acting like nothing is wrong?
- Blaming your partner for what is happening, hoping the problems go away or expecting your partner/wife to do something about it?

Problems don't usually go away on their own if they're not talked about. It is often during this time that someone makes the decision to leave. Responsibility for the health and wellbeing of a relationship rests with both you and your partner.



This tip sheet is part of a series of self-help tools for men. More tools can be found at www.mensline.org.au. For more information and assistance, call MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78.

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MensLine Australia is a professional telephone support, information and referral service for men, specialising in family and relationship concerns.

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Some tips for getting things back on track

- Make time to talk and connect on a regular basis
- If your partner says she feels things are not OK, listen to her
- Take responsibility for past behaviours and make changes, where appropriate
- Pay attention to what is not said, as well as to what is said
- Use “I” statements like: “I feel hurt when you say that”
- Show interest in the other’s life; know what’s important to them
- Be clear, but realistic, about what you need and want from them

- Do something kind. The favour is often returned
- Contact MensLine Australia for specific tools and information to assist you in strengthening your relationship.

Sharing a good friendship, enjoying one another’s company and having more positive moments than negative ones are signs of a good relationship. The tips above are about how to change the balance by maximising the positive moments and minimising the negative ones. It’s not fighting that damages a relationship, but how we fight.

If couples keep the quota of positive experiences high, and minimise the negative experiences by managing conflict in a healthy way, they are much more likely to enjoy a rewarding and resilient relationship. You may also find the MensLine Australia Managing Conflict tip sheet useful.



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