



How did this happen to me?

No-one, and I mean no-one, embarks on a relationship with the intention of ending it. So, while “conscious uncoupling”, as Gwyneth Paltrow so eloquently described her separation from Chris Martin, is the dignified end to a partnership to which we all aspire, few of us are able to achieve it.

Relationships end for all sorts of reasons. Incompatibility, infidelity, growing apart, lack of intimacy, addictions such as gambling and substance abuse, violence, financial pressure, cultural differences, family interference – the list is endless. Of course, if you and your partner decide to tackle these problems head on through counselling, in the hope the relationship can be saved, then focusing on the reasons is essential. But if separation is inevitable, the best advice I can give you is to surge into the future, not wallow in the past.

I recall one of my earliest clients crying in my conference room (most people do – there’s no shame in that) and saying “but I don’t want a divorce, I want her back.... how do I get her back?” I had to tell him, brutally I suspect, that she had probably been thinking about this for 6 months or more, that she had already probably checked out of the marriage way before she actually told him she wanted to separate and that there was

probably no way of getting her back. I don’t think I went as far (at least I hope I didn’t) as saying “you’re just going to have to suck it up”, but that was the gist of it. Some months later the same client returned. “Best advice I ever got” he said. “Made me get on with things instead of trying to fix something I couldn’t”. I’m pleased to report that he is now remarried and happier than ever.

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If you’re reading this article, the whole “this is a mutual decision” probably doesn’t apply to you. And you’re not alone. One of my clients told me that her husband left while she was walking the dog, leaving their two young children to break the

news to her when she got back! No... I’m not kidding. Another found out her marriage had ended when she discovered her husband’s marriage certificate declaring his marriage to someone else – yes that’s bigamy and yes that’s illegal in Australia. Another came home from the gym to discover that her husband had been sexually abusing their 12 year old daughter – their marriage ended at that moment.

Marriages mostly don’t end overnight, but more often than not, one person in a relationship makes the decision to end it well before the other. So, when the bombshell is dropped ... “look, I don’t think I can do this anymore... I’ve been unhappy for years... I want to separate... it’s not you, it’s me (eventually they’ll tell you it was actually you)... my bags are packed and there’s an Uber waiting outside...” they’ve already made up their mind. It’s going to take you – or if you’re the initiator - your partner, some time to catch up.

So, what next? If you’re the one on the receiving end of the fatal blow, how do you get through those first crucial minutes, hours, days? How do you manage the anger? How do you deal with the hurt? How can you face the humiliation? What are you going to say to the children – this will break their hearts? How do you face your fears? The answer?

One tiny step at a time. Facing a separation and all that comes with it is overwhelming. It is well known that divorce is second only to the death of a life partner on the scale of stressors.

So in the first minutes.....

- 1 Make a cup of tea. If you’re a drinker, pour a glass of wine (it doesn’t matter if it’s not 12 o’clock – it is somewhere). Note - If you’re a recovering alcoholic, don’t pour a glass of wine;
- 2 Phone your best friend/mother/sibling (or whoever will listen and not judge) and tell them - saying it out loud the first time is the hardest. If you’re a person who needs company at a time like this, ask them to come over – they will. If you’d rather be alone, tell them – they’ll understand;
- 3 If you work, talk to your boss about having a few days off. If you’re the boss, and you can, get your 2IC to take over for a couple of days;
- 4 If you can, avoid telling the children or letting them see you distressed, until you have figured out a plan with your ex (yes that’s what they are now – get used to saying it). Children need you at this time to be in charge and to make decisions for them. Try not to use the kids as your confidantes, regardless of their ages;



- 5 Write a list. It will help you to think. It will force you to be calm and ordered and it will be a useful way of breaking things down into bite sized pieces in terms of how you will tackle the days and months ahead. This is the first step towards taking back control.
- 6 Speak to a specialist family lawyer. One appointment can be

enough to give you some much needed advice about the basics and preparing you for what’s ahead.

- 7 If you’re the one who calls the end of the relationship, be patient and kind so your ex can catch up. This will be the most effective way of achieving what you want – a clean break with as little angst as possible.



Fiona Reid is the Managing Director of Reid Family Lawyers, a boutique specialist family law firm with offices in Brookvale and Surry Hills. She is supported by a team of expert family lawyers. The firm has a wealth of experience in all facets of family law including complex property matters, parenting matters, child support and spousal maintenance issues, relocation, de facto and same sex issues, surrogacy and adoption.

FREE 20 Minute Consultation

Fiona is offering a FREE 20 minute consultation to prospective clients who mention this article when they make an appointment for their initial conference. Call Fiona on **9091 0220** or email fiona@reidfamilylawyers.com.au.

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