

# F\*\*\* It. Get A Divorce



*The guide for optimists*

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# Welcome



*We're living one of the greatest experiments in the history of humankind, to try to create what has throughout history been considered a contradiction in terms: the passionate marriage. We're asking so many things from one person. We're asking one person to give us what once an entire village would provide. And couples are crumbling under the weight of so much expectations. Very few people achieve marital bliss. A lot more are miserable from it. They think they're deficient.*

—Esther Perel

# I ♥ marriage



## **I'm very in favor of marriage.**

Straight, gay and otherwise.

I buy the “traditional values” view that marriages and nuclear families are essential to a successful culture, to creating a society that provides an optimal foundation for people, particularly kids, with the love, education and support humans need to try to pursue happiness.

And that view is more than just a totem—it's a fact, supported by science and empirical data.

But I also have an open mind about what is a “family,” and what makes a family functional, best able to offer such foundations.

**So I'm also *very* in favor of divorce.**

Of people breaking up unhappy relationships.

I think the alternative—staying—is worse. For nearly everyone.

A successful family does not have to have two adults, let alone two “committed” ones. Or the same two adults for eternity. Or, well, anything in particular. Whatever works, works. We’re homo sapiens, an unusually intelligent, resourceful species. We invent, explore and engineer the universe as our default setting. We can have successful societies and great lives and families whether we stay with one partner or not.

There, of course, I depart from some of the more strident notions about “traditional values.” Most important, I don’t care what culture, religion or history have to say about, well, much of anything. Call me crazy, but I prefer to make up my own mind. For example, I reject that marriage, or any form of lifetime couple-dom, is an end unto itself. That there’s some ultimate reward or dignity gained through relationship perseverance. Instead, I buy the cliché—the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results.

I likewise reject that relationship persistence is a form of altruism. We can take care of others *and* ourselves. We can be selfless yet not deny our *self*—a unique organism with but one life, and complex emotions and thoughts that are not ennobled by denying them. Or by acting as though “sucking it up” makes us a more mature or better person. Or by turning from the world, persuaded that denying longings is more enlightened than acknowledging them.

Of course, I don’t live in any time or culture other than my own, so I won’t—I can’t—judge too broadly. I acknowledge that, today and throughout history, most humans say, do and believe what they think is right at the time. But as I live here, and now, in what by most measures is a blessedly modern, liberal culture, I *will* be judgemental about that:

**For modern humans “til death do us part” may be the dumbest oath ever.**

I mean, *‘til death? Really?* No matter how long we live? No matter how unhappy a person is? No matter how many indignities one may suffer?

Sorry, no.

*F\*\*\* it, get a divorce.*

It’s not virtuous to suffer. No one gets into paradise based on how masochistic they are. It’s not heroic to limit one’s own potential—or let circumstances or others do so.

In truth, for some of us, “til death” is an archaic, unrealistic pledge, *even as we say it*. We live in the modern world, getting more so by the nanosecond, and we know what that can mean to longterm relationships. So some of us say those words out of nostalgia for simpler times, or some aspiration to banish loneliness, but we *don’t* say such things out of a belief that we won the lottery—that, somehow, we randomly met another human who’s *so* right for us they’ll make us content day in, and day out, decade after *decade*. We certainly hope and pray for that, but we also know that far too often time changes everything and everyone.

Now, I’m not saying we should abandon ship at the first sign of rough weather. On that, I am a *traditional* “traditional values” person. Functional relationships and families aren’t received. They’re manufactured, through continuous recommitment, honesty, communication, humility, self-awareness, and hard work—and a willingness to forgive, then forgive again.

So no, I don’t think you should quit your relationship easily. You were happy the day you got hitched and for good reason—your partner is a good person who you loved that day, and on so many other days, and who loved you. It’s absolutely worth it to work

hard to sustain that blessed state, that flickering candle of human harmony.

But let's be real: Sometimes the candle flickers out. Actually, it does so quite often. And sometimes we run out of matches—one or both partners has irretrievably lost their basic emotional attachment. The candle is never getting relit.

So then what? Do nothing? While away what may be eons of remaining life in longing and resentment?

No.

*F\*\*\* it, get a divorce.*

It's ok to have not won the lottery.

More important, it's not only ok to want to move on from an unhappy coupling, it's normal and wise to do so. Our right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" doesn't end or get restricted when we pair off. Hopefully, that pairing is an exciting, core part of that pursuit, but if it turns out the relationship has stopped being fulfilling, no longer provides the comfort, security, inspiration—the love—which was our expectation when we entered it, then, well, *duh*. We really do only get one life. Why would someone who *can* move on, can start over, can return to the basic human quest for a little happiness, choose to *not* do so?

As you're undoubtedly thinking: *For all sorts of good reasons.*

Loyalty. Fear. Money. Kids. Inertia.

That was me and my ex, alright. And we made the worst decision: To be righteous. Hang in there. Dig deep. Persevere. Keep it going if not for ourselves then for the family, the kids, the image.

Whatever lofty words are used to describe it, truth is, it was *dumb*. And a path to hurt. Our marriage was done and we knew

it. But we wouldn't face it. *We're not quitters. We're taking one for the team.* Even though "the team"—us and our kids—became happier as a result of our *divorce*, not the slog years. Our ostensibly noble motives were actually a pressure cooker, which made our ultimate break up much more painful than it would have been had we just been honest and said:

*F\*\*\* it. Get a divorce.*

What stopped us? We caved. To fear. Cultural pressure. Internal personal pressure. Anxiety over being perceived a failure. Of hurting the kids (a false fear, as you'll see.) And of course, we caved to inertia. The devil we knew. That *devil*.

By the way, please know, up front, emphatically: None of this is to blame or point fingers at my ex. She was—is—terrific. Charming, brilliant, loving, funny, generous. A great partner and parent. That's why I fell in love and married her. And despite many years and life changes she was still that basic, good, loving person. She still is. But even great loving people make that bad, keep-going decision, despite that after those many years, from dating to mating and marriage, kids, careers and all the rest... the thrill is gone. To put it mildly.

Now we're divorced, amicable exes and co-parents. Yay! But it sucked getting here. Expensively, awkwardly, destructively sucked, sucked, sucked and sucked. *It sucked.* And all because we were unwilling to just face reality and *decide*. To just deal with it. For the longest, stupidest time. And we paid the price.

But *you* don't have to.

*F\*\*\* it. Get a divorce.*



Let me tell you what this programs *isn't*:

It's *not* a textbook explaining arcane divorce issues. It's *not* a how-to manual for getting away with anything or besting anyone. It's *not* a bunch of tips on how to get more, give less or work the system. The premise here is, be amicable and generous regardless of circumstances. You're unhappy so end the unhappiness, but aim for the best possible split and new beginning. Get expert help, divide things fairly, leave kids out of it and don't do or say anything you may regret later—later arrives quickly and you don't want your old unhappiness haunting you.

Most importantly, this *isn't* a program where I pressure you to do what I think. Yes, I say what I think and lean on you a little. But only to try to help you *decide—what do you want to do?*

Is this you?

*I made a commitment. For better or for worse. I can't just walk.*

But I'm unhappy. And I have little certainty that'll change. Don't I deserve to try to be happy?

*Divorce is failure. I'm not a quitter. I'm resilient. Dedicated. Failed marriages are for failed people.*



But I'm exhausted. My relationship isn't satisfying anymore. It was hot but now it's cold. In truth, I don't even look forward to being with my partner. It's a chore.

*But I need to be an adult. I made my choices. Who said long term relationships stay exciting? Actually, everyone says all relationships cool. I'm acting like a spoiled child.*

But I miss intimacy. Holding hands and meaning it. Snuggling. Kissing. Pillow talk. And sex. I really miss sex. Is that wrong?

*I know I shouldn't, but I do care what other people think. If my marriage fails, people will judge me. I can't handle that.*

But I don't even have dreams anymore. I'm trapped. How can I stay in an unhappy place for so many more years? Decades!

*But I don't even know what it's like to be single anymore. I'm a couple now. That's my identity. My social circle. My life.*

But I'm missing out. Missing feeling life can be an adventure. I only get one life. Shouldn't I try to get as much out of it as possible?

*Who am I kidding? I can barely manage life with my partner pitching in. How will I juggle work, parenting, money and housekeeping on my own?*

If that's at all familiar, this program may be for you. It's a mix of the personal and practical—been-there-done-that reminiscences, plus some science and data, plus interactive exercises to help you start re-imagining your life in privacy and safety. How does one prepare for a breakup? What's it like to say, *It's over*? What happens next? And next? What are the hangovers? The emotional gauntlet we navigate *after* the breakup?

Spoiler alert, here's the whole enchilada: You want to go? Go. Unhappy relationships are normal. Messy lives are normal.

Trepidation and paralysis are normal. You're not alone. If you're guilty of anything, it's only of being human. No shame. You're off the hook. Free to do as you wish. You can reinvent yourself, over and over, and pursue happiness as you see fit. There's still time and opportunity. There's always time and opportunity. And with the right mindset and preparation, no one needs to get badly hurt. Breaking up is always a disruption, but it doesn't have to be a tragedy. And shouldn't be. The end result can be upbeat, a fresh start, a shedding of seething, resentments and unhappinesses, for everyone. In the end, it's *not* the end, it's a *beginning*, with relief and renewal, and not just for you.

So come join us other frail humans? All us reasonably well-adjusted, reasonably smart, reasonably functional folks who find ourselves in a rut, gripped by indecision, feeling isolated, hamstrung by anger, confusion, fear and shame? There's no magic remedy here but we'll breathe deep and mull over some of the issues involved with moving on from a longterm relationship. You're not obligated to do anything, except consider. Think.

And remember: There's no guarantee you'll make no mistakes, feel no pain. You will. Breaking up hurts. No matter what. It's one of the most profound life events, involving deep reflection, emotions running rampant, tempers flaring and people getting bruised. I wish I could save you from all that. But no can do.

Still, I say:

*F\*\*\* it. Get a divorce.*

I think for most of us the price is worth it. I think it's better to feel than to not feel. Which means life hurts sometimes. And avoiding hurt means avoiding *life*. Some years ago I was lucky to do work with the great life coach (and friend) Jerry Colonna. *My problem is I get too emotional about things*, I told Jerry, *I need to stop feeling everything so much. What should I do?*

*Nothing.* Jerry said. *You're human. An emotional being. That's what being human is. Turning off emotions is to be less human.*

*Is that what you want? We all know people who've done that. Do you really want to be more like them?*

I don't. So I embarked on a mission: To feel grateful for life itself. Hurts, indignities and all. It's a constant struggle. I fail often. When life sucks, it's hard to be thankful. But by at least trying, more living is possible. More opportunities. Because I spend less time brooding. It's not easy, but it's worth it. And the alternative—more anger and despair—is worse.

Ditto, unhappy relationships. Meaning, if we prepare ourselves, and try to stay focused on the positives, the hard breakup stuff can be lived more easily. Moving on needn't be a zero-sum game, with “winners” and “losers.” With forethought, and basic gratitude for life, everyone can emerge with love and dignity. A break up is not a death. It's a *birth*. Painful and messy, but also something new and wonderful.



So. Here's your first Exercise. Say this out loud:

*I'm in an unhappy relationship. I'm thinking about leaving. Which means I'm a normal, good person.*

Earth still turning?