



How to Let Your Spouse Down Gently for a Divorce

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Instructions

Difficulty: Moderately Challenging

Divorce Talk

1. According to Dr. Gail Saltz, psychiatrist and author, a public place with some privacy is the best setting for these conversations, especially if there is a history of past aggression. In addition to acknowledging safety issues, it also encourages emotional restraint. Another important setting consideration is time of day. The morning hours are considered the best time to relay this type of news.
2. If the subject of divorce comes as a surprise to your spouse, expect a request for an explanation. Brette McWhorter Sember, J.D., author of "The Complete Divorce Handbook," suggests that before you start the conversation, decide whether you want to get into "reasons" or to focus on "where things go from here." Be prepared to state the efforts that have been made to save the marriage, but also acknowledge your role in the marriage's failure. Simple and honest explanations are best. Too much detail may sound like finger pointing that places her on the defense and may escalate into an argument. Communicate in the first person: "I feel that this marriage no longer works for me" and not "You are no longer the man I fell in love with."
3. Anticipate verbal abuse even if it has never occurred before. Even be prepared for anger that is channeled into physical threats. According to Gayle Rosenwald Smith, J.D. and Sally Abrahms, authors of "What Every Woman Should Know About Divorce and Custody," being able to detect anger cues is important to using compromise techniques. There are advance warning signs of escalating anger, such as a racing pulse, clenched fist, and contorted or red face. Listen and show empathy to your spouse. Acknowledge his feelings, but remember that consent to obtain a divorce is not being sought, only his understanding. Be prepared to disengage if anger becomes unmanageable. Have an exit plan.
4. Prepare to manage your own emotions by anticipating your responses. You will still feel loss and a host of other emotions even if you initiate the divorce. Be sober and drug free when you initiate this conversation. This is a difficult situation, and you can anticipate being invited on a guilt trip or the promise to change. Plan your response. Also, know and be ready to manage your own hot buttons. Do take deep breaths to release your own tension. If you have children, do not get into an argument about residence and visitation at this point. This can be worked out in more detail in a subsequent conversation.
5. Before having the divorce conversation, it may be best to consult with a divorce lawyer first. Some provide free initial consultations. Ask the lawyer about communicating the divorce to your spouse. For instance, although it is typically advised to effect an immediate physical separation after the divorce conversation, there may be legal repercussions specific to your state if you leave the marital residence, if you plan to subsequently ask your spouse to leave.

References

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- Honey, I Want a Divorce! How to Have the Talk

 - "What Every Woman Should Know About Divorce and Custody;" Gayle Rosenwald Smith, J.D. and Sally Abrahms; 2007

 - "The Complete Divorce Handbook;" Brette McWhorter Sember, J.D.; 2009
