

# The Basics of Deciding to Stay Married or Get Divorced

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I feel prompted by the Spirit to reach out to both of you. My intention in this note is to summarize the basics of deciding to stay married or get divorced – what’s going, what your choices are and where things can go for you.

**Basic #1.** You both appear to have concluded the status quo doesn’t work anymore. Marriage is essentially a cooperative agreement to live together under certain common terms, conditions, expectations and values. I hear you both saying, “These terms and conditions don’t work for me anymore.” That means you need a new deal. Since you have children, that new deal will always include the other person in your life, even if you separate. So, you can make a new deal to live separately under specific terms guided by Family Law, or you can make a new deal to live together under specific terms guided by fear or by love. You decide that part.

**Basic #2.** Your issues are buried in hailstorms. Neither of you is able to focus on the speck because the plank is so large (Mt 7:5). [Judgmentalism](#) is rampant and Jesus words of warning are being revealed daily. Ping pong is in high gear. It is impossible to discuss and agree on a new deal so long as this is the case. Whether you need a day, a week, a month or three months, you need to stop the hailstorms of emotional upset.

**Basic #3.** Your kids are being harmed. Every child takes the fighting of their parents personally. In their minds, they caused it. “If only we were more lovable and better kids, mom and dad wouldn’t fight.” You can reassure them a thousand times that it has nothing to do with them and your words will be empty and meaningless. Only your actions count. Like osmosis, your hailstorms, no matter how well hidden they are in the privacy of your bedroom or not, will and are infecting them. If you separate and the fighting continues, they will continue to be affected and infected. Only cooperation and mutual respect will stop this cycle from continuing, whether together or apart.

**Basic #4.** You are having a classic Near-Far power struggle. Far wants to control Far (wants independence). Near wants to control Far too (wants cooperation). Both of you cannot control what Far does. That is impossible. Far wants Near to change by letting him/her run their own life, even if Near feels hurt and lonely along the way. By contrast, Near wants Far to change by giving Near what he/she wants from the other, even if Far feels smothered along the way. Both of you could change. Neither of you wants to. Far could surrender and do it Near’s way. Near could surrender and let Far do it Far’s way. Hence, back to point #1.

Overall, if you are both done with your marriage, then you need to see lawyers. Not to start a huge legal battle, but to understand your rights and obligations under family law legislation so you can negotiate a new deal to live separately. Financial terms and child access and custody decision-making rights will be the three main issues.

If instead, you are both taking a hard line on “these are the terms and conditions upon which I will stay married to you,” then be honest and call it that. It’s a negotiating process and threatening to leave is a tactic designed to get the other person to move. That’s okay. We all have our limits. I recommended to you yesterday to use the [Who’s The Driver](#) process to negotiate a new deal. It spells out in detail who’s driving what and how much decision-making power the passenger has over the driver, from a little to a lot. That’s what this and all marital fights are – a negotiation over who has control of what and how *much* control. The end result is a new deal that is clear and specific. It has to have teeth and commitments that must be honoured and respected or trust will break down and the marriage will end. Dents will occur and repentance and forgiveness are mandatory or love can’t exist. (Jesus tells us so and I believe Him...)

You are both in my prayers. May you both lean upon the Holy Spirit at this time when your pain is so great.

