

But I Still Love Him

by BJ Mann

Very few couples come into my office on the same page emotionally. It's pretty clear there is a "trailing spouse." It shows up in body language, tears and a look in the eyes that pleads "I do not want to be here." And yet there is also courage and a willingness to at least listen. During that first consultation, sometimes healing begins with starting to accept the situation.

What I share in those circumstances is that there are two parts of letting go.

On one hand: The Spouse

There is letting go of the spouse; the actual person, the human being. In most cases, letting go of the partner is not that hard. One or both have concluded that the other just does not have the partnership qualities the other needs for a relationship. They have good and fine qualities but not the ones needed to sustain an adult relationship. Often both people acknowledge that this is true.

At the very least, a relationship requires being with someone who wants to be with you. If you wake up every morning feeling you have to thank your spouse for staying with you, you deserve more than that. This realization may come all at once or happen over time.

On the other hand: The Marriage

Letting go of the marriage is hard and complicated. It takes time. The issues to consider include the kids, the money, the family and friends shared for many years, and how to handle holidays. For many people, the perceived stigma of divorce is a difficult issue with concerns about the opinions of others or simply the desire not to be in that "club." The end of a marriage also ends dreams, fantasies and illusions about the relationship and the future that is no longer possible.

Mourning, grieving, and healing from these losses often takes two to three years. It takes time to learn that the healing, attitude and choices are all in a person's control, even though having the marriage itself no longer is.

Confusing Loving the Other Person with Loving the Marriage

People can confuse loving the other person with loving the marriage. They will declare love for the other, but, in fact, they are clinging to the marriage. When people separate these two issues--partner and marriage—they begin to heal more clearly and more efficiently.

A Final Question to Consider

Would you want your children to have the same type of marriage? No couple has said, "Yes this would be fine for our children". When imagining their children experiencing similar feelings in a future relationship, couples always want more for their children.

You both also deserve to have more. Living separately may be the pathway to having a better life.