

# This Marriage is Over for Me

By BJ Mann

When people call me regarding the first mediation consultation appointment, they often ask: “What if my spouse won’t cooperate?” That’s when I ask, “Does your spouse know you want to end your marriage?” Often the response is, “Well, he should know, we fight all the time.”

**My Coaching:** When you have concluded that your marriage is over, and you are sure, you need to say to your spouse: “This marriage is over for me.” You have to be clear and gentle. Not over for him/ her, or us, just over for me. At that point you need to focus on HOW you are going to process the end of the marriage, not IF. The choices are generally mediation or attorneys, cooperatively or punishing; those are the choices.

It’s likely your spouse will go into one or modes of defense or attack. If you are sure your marriage is over, following these four rules will help you move the situation forward.

1. **No Defending Yourself:** Your spouse may start blaming you, calling you names and labeling you all sorts of things. Your response is simply, “OK, that’s who I am.” You say it gently, kindly and let it go. You do not defend yourself. Every time you defend yourself, try to correct the record, or otherwise disagree, you are fueling the same old conversation you have been having for months or years.
2. **No Persuading:** You will not persuade your partner by reminding him or her that your marriage has been over for a while, or neither of you are happy, or the kids are miserable, or we’d be better off not fighting. Those points just fuel more of the same conversations that you have already had. Do you actually imagine that he or she will stop, listen, and say: “You’re right, that makes sense, we should end our marriage.”?
3. **No Negotiating:** Another typical reaction is: “Fine, you want a divorce? You’re not going to get anything. No house, no retirement money, no nothing.” Your response should be: “I don’t know, we have to figure that out.” You don’t say that’s not fair, that’s not legal, you can’t do that. Your spouse is looking for your fear and your Achilles heel, which is a useless conversation. You will have a guide to help you, either a mediator or an attorney. You do not want to negotiate at your kitchen table when you are both scared and angry. Do not sign anything until you have spoken with a mediator or an attorney.
4. **Next Step:** You then say: “We can choose to do this cooperatively or not. We can meet with a mediator or we can both make appointments with separate attorneys. It’s your choice. We just need to get on the train by <choose date>.” And then stick to it. During this period, your spouse may attempt to draw you into one of the above kinds of conversations. You need to stay cool and kind and determined; do not engage in the old conversations.

**Managing these discussions is like being on a diet.** You need refrain from engaging in those old conversations just like you refrain from eating a cookie when you are on a diet. Some times are harder than others, but if you stay determined and firm, the choices for moving forward will emerge. As with a diet, ambivalence will sabotage you. You need to have a plan every day to not engage in the old conversations.

**Counseling:** If you want to explore the “why” and “if only” of your marriage, then both of you need counseling, not mediation or attorneys. You need a guide to help you navigate the issues and their resolution. If you could have mended your marriage at your kitchen table by yourselves, you would have done it already.

If you choose counseling, consider agreeing to a finite number of appointments, usually between 4 and 6. You both must commit to show up at the meetings and be open and honest. The other half of the commitment is for both of you to agree to reevaluate your relationship at the end of the designated number of appointments. Having a timetable forces the decision and increases the urgency of deciding your future, whether together or separate.

Being the initiator of ending a marriage is a difficult position to be in. The guidance I provide here is a path to moving forward for both of you.