

3.2: Thinking About Commitment in My Marriage

As we discussed in this chapter, there are two elements of commitment: constraint and personal dedication. Constraint commitment includes those things that keep you in a marriage, even if things aren't going well, like financial worries or concerns about how a divorce might affect your children. In the long run, however, constraint commitment is usually not enough to hold a marriage together; dedication commitment is needed. Dedication commitment is a real desire to be with your spouse, to build a life and a

future together, a willingness to sacrifice for each other. Consider your situation and both elements of commitment and write down your thoughts.

A. Constraints Against Divorce. Think about each of the following and whether it would be a big constraint, a little constraint, or not a constraint against divorce (circle your answer). Then briefly write why it might hold you back from a divorce.

Possible Divorce Constraint	3 = Big 2 = Little 1 = Not a Concern (circle one)	Why?
1. Fear it would hurt my children.	3 2 1	
2. Fear my spouse wouldn't stay involved with the children.	3 2 1	
3. Fear my children would lose contact with extended family members (e.g., spouse's parents).	3 2 1	
4. Financial worries (money would be tight).	3 2 1	
5. Might lose our home and have to move.	3 2 1	
6. Not sure if I could get a good job to support the family.	3 2 1	
7. I might lose health insurance or other benefits from my spouse's job.	3 2 1	
8. My spouse might not pay regular child support.	3 2 1	
9. Fear of what family or friends might think if I get a divorce.	3 2 1	
10. It will feel like a personal failure.	3 2 1	
11. Religious concerns (disapproval of divorce).	3 2 1	
12. Uncertainty about what the future holds for me.	3 2 1	
13. Fear of ever finding another love.	3 2 1	
14. Don't want to have to date again.	3 2 1	

Possible Divorce Constraint	3 = Big 2 = Little 1 = Not a Concern (circle one)			Why?
	15. Fear that arguments with my spouse will get worse if we divorce.	3	2	
16. Fear of getting abused if I try to get a divorce.	3	2	1	
17. Other:	3	2	1	
18. Other:	3	2	1	
19. Other:	3	2	1	
20. Other:	3	2	1	

Now, stop and think about your responses. What have you learned about the constraints that may or may not hold you back from getting a divorce? Write down a few thoughts.

B. Dedication Commitment. Next, think about your situation and dedication commitment. Even though you may be having some serious problems, how dedicated are you to your spouse? Answer these questions as honestly as possible by circling the number that best describes you. (These questions were developed by prominent researchers who study commitment in relationships.¹¹⁵)

Dedication Item	Neither Agree nor Disagree						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some- what Disagree	Some- what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1. I don't make important commitments unless I will keep them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. My relationship with my spouse is more important to me than anything else in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I like to think of my spouse and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. My marriage to my spouse is clearly part of my future plans.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. It makes me feel good to sacrifice for my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I want to have a strong identity as a couple with my spouse.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I want to be with my spouse a few years from now.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I am not seriously attracted to anyone else right now.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I do not think about what it would be like to be with someone else (romantically).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Now score your dedication commitment by adding up the numbers you circled. Your score: _____

- If your score is higher than 50, you are probably dedicated and committed to your spouse, even if you are having serious problems at this time.
- If your score is 50 or less but more than 30, then you are probably struggling somewhat with dedication and commitment in your marriage at this time.
- If your score is 30 or less, then you are probably not dedicated and committed to your spouse at this time.

C. Increasing Your Commitment. How can you increase your commitment?

One way to increase your dedication commitment is to remember the good times and all the good things you have gone through together. When you are going through hard times, it is so easy to forget these good things. Write your answer to each of these questions.

1. What attracted you to your spouse at first and then later on?

2. What are 2–3 of the happiest times in your marriage? Why?

3. What are 2–3 of the most difficult times in your marriage that you have been able to overcome?

4. What 2–3 important values do you feel you still have in common with your spouse?

5. What 2–3 important goals do you feel you still share with your spouse?

6. What would be the biggest loss if you got divorced?

7. What would be the biggest gain if you can stay together?

8. What three things could you do to increase your dedication commitment and show more loyalty to your spouse? Write them down here.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. Your Spouse's Commitment. You have been thinking about your commitment to your marriage and your spouse. Obviously, your spouse's commitment to you is equally important. Low commitment from either spouse can make it hard to stay together. But if both are committed, your chances of solving your problems and keeping your marriage together are much better. Take a few minutes now and think about how your spouse might answer the questions in this exercise, "Thinking About Commitment in My Marriage." Of course, this can be hard to do. It's hard to know exactly what your spouse is feeling and thinking. But it may be helpful to try and honestly assess your spouse's commitment. What constraints would be on his/her list? How would he/she score on dedication commitment? How would he/she answer the questions above in part C? What have you learned by thinking about commitment from your spouse's perspective? Write down your thoughts here:

E. Putting It All Together. Considering all the information in this exercise, what do you think about continuing to try and work out the challenges in your relationship? Write down your thoughts here:
