



When to End It, When to Stay

ALINA FRANK AND CRAIG WEINER, DC

When to End It or When to Stay" is a phrase that points to the dilemma and choice that many individuals and couples must face after living for years in a relationship that clearly has not been working. Some couples find themselves after years with tremendous silence and distance between one another. Others often find themselves in regular confrontations and arguments over the pettiest of details. Either way, individuals in these relationships know that something has to change, but they are not sure what that change looks like. Will s/he ever finally live up to the potential that they could be? Will s/he finally accept me the way I am? Does the best psychic

see us in the future together or apart? How do you know what the right choice is, for you for the both of you, especially when there is so much shared history? Is there a perfect relationship workshop, a magical couple's therapist, or the best romantic vacation that will reignite the spark that was there when you first met? After all, the passion and friendship was once there!—but perhaps it has slipped away while you've been busy raising children, changing careers, moving homes, following spiritual callings or living through the painful experiences of loss or betrayal. These experiences may have changed the very bedrock of your relationship so that you no longer recognize

the light in the other person that you once saw so clearly.

This see-saw dilemma affects most relationships at some point in its duration. Most couples wonder what needs to change in order to re-establish joy and connection in their relationship. In a society where divorce is commonplace and relationship dissatisfaction is rampant, clearly something that should be a source of safety and nurturance is not working in this critical arena. While there is no single path or one correct answer that will be right for all couples, it is not up to other family members or friends to say what the fate of any one couple should be. No one outside of the two people involved can really know all the details of what happens behind closed doors. No one else can know for sure what is right for you. Only you have the final say. Finding a way to know what your inner self needs is a journey that is critical for life satisfaction and finding inner peace and joy within a relationship.

It has been our experience that there are some steps that can facilitate this journey, which can be fraught with pitfalls of behavior altering emotions, including frustration, anger, guilt, shame, disappointment, betrayal and more. Amidst these intense feelings, clear thinking is not always easy. Pain and disappointment can go on for many years and adapted to. People put up with unhappy marriages for many reasons: the children, financial security, the fear of being alone. The suffering that stems from relationship disconnection and a stalemate state of "should I leave or shouldn't I" has a significant impact on the physical and emotional well-being of both people in the relationship. It can also have profound effects on any children living amidst the pain, whether they hear it expressed or not, they clearly feel it. It is our contention that remaining for a prolonged period of time in the indecision of "staying" versus "leaving" is a destructive choice that often does harm to a person's self-esteem as well as to their partner and children.

When disappointment dominates our attention, it is important to learn how to step back and see how our current state of mind and heart may be influenced by subconscious connections of which we are not aware from both the present moment as well as past connections and situations.

Our brains learn primarily through the law of association. This is both good and bad news. The good news is that by shedding light on the subconscious associations you may have created between your current relationship distress and past experiences, you may find powerful keys for releasing pent up resentment and anger that can create room for finding real forgiveness that heals. Acknowledging these subconscious

*“As they say,
the only thing common
to all of the relationships
you have, is you.”*

connections may also allow you to hear your inner voice that empowers you to make the choice that you need for starting anew. The bad news is that these associations to the past are often well hidden and not always so obvious.

There are many different ways for finding these subconscious connections. Counselors and therapists use a wide variety of techniques to help gain insight into why certain behaviors trigger us more easily than others. We find one particular set of techniques to be very useful, and they are known as the Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT). When performed with skill, it can be powerful and effective for uncovering these patterns. Exploring why you repeatedly choose partners that treat you in a certain way, perhaps with disrespect, or that they always end up being not trustworthy, is worth the time to discover. As they say, the only thing common to all the relationships you have, is you.

Neuroscience research demonstrates how our brains wire together experiences and memories that may not be related in time, though they have some aspect in common. Memories of betrayal for example can anchor themselves in our brains with great power because experiences tied to strong emotions are notched stronger into our brains. Our current relationship does not exist by itself; it is wired synaptically to past relationships, to childhood memories and even to friendships other experiences that influenced what we believe about what relationships should look like. If you are feeling helpless about not having your partner treat you with kindness then you may need to look to past times in your life that others treated you with disrespect, and you will begin to see how your current sense of helplessness is just the tip of the emotional iceberg.

Current memory research continues to advance our understanding on how similar experiences, especially emotionally charged ones, can be re-triggered by remote but

[continued on page 19]




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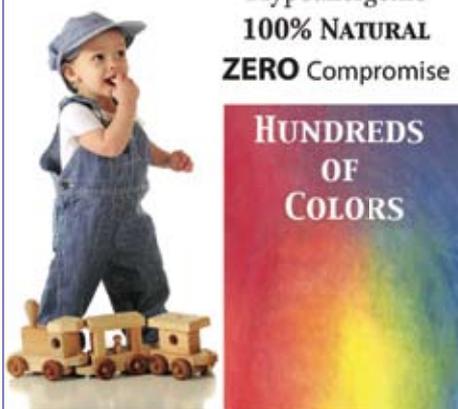
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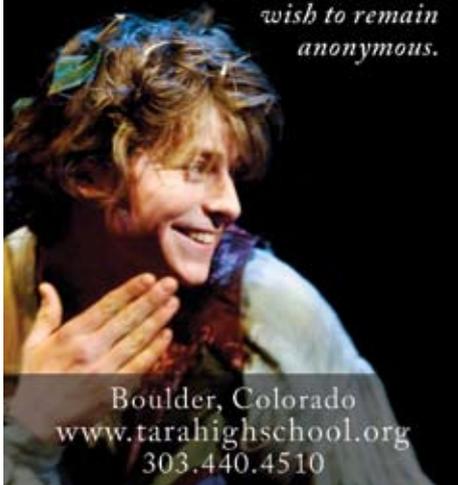
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When To End It *[continued from page 17]*

similar events. So if you wonder why someone's joke about your appearance can make you enraged, or how a sideways glance can drain all the energy from your body, look to painful experiences from your past that are connected to your current strong emotional response. It is as if each painful experience creates thematically connected stacks, growing higher and higher until a collapse becomes inevitable.

Using EFT, one can find the origins of lifelong repetitive relationship patterns. Often they begin very early in life, long before the idea of romance enters one's life. Irritated and angry at your spouse? Maybe the origin goes back to you having viewed incident of your mother being mistreated by your father. Though it occurred 30 years ago, memories can show up as if they are occurring in the present moment. However, during an EFT session, the same neural pathway that gets activated in both the current situation and the buried original memory is healed. This is accomplished by physically stimulating meridian acupuncture endpoints by gentle tapping instead of inserting needles. The physiological effect of this is a reduction in stress hormones to the point where the triggering events no longer bother you. It's as if our minds recapitulate a situation over and over again, throughout our lives in a futile attempt to create a sense of completion. EFT resolves those hamster-wheel like attempts.

It is helpful to find the first memory you have of feeling the way you do about your relationship and work with that. For example, if you are feeling "set up," as if your spouse deceived you and then you discovered the truth, look to the first time that you remember being lied to. This may be an original powerful experience that altered your view on whether you could trust people as a whole. It may have been a trusted friend, a boyfriend who wanted more than he was willing to say, a relative who seemed to be generous but was really being selfish. These original events may not be what we call "traumatic," but if they occur in childhood they can leave a powerful mark. From birth until about age seven years old, it has been said that we live in a hypnogogic state. This is a brainwave state where what we experience and learn becomes significantly hardwired in our brains. Our amygdala and hippocampus are the brain's sentinel and repository for emotionally charged alarm signals and memories; especially with regards to feeling safe, secure and nurtured. As an adult, we may not consider an angry, red-faced person telling us that we are always wrong to be life-threatening, but as a child we may feel and think just that. Once that memory is wired in our emotional memory banks, any time someone, like our partner, gets frustrated or angry to

the point of physically being scarlet-faced, all the self-defense mechanisms that may have been learned and acquired through one's lifetime, may engage immediately. This occurs even before the rational neocortex part of one's brain can actualize and generate any understanding or empathy.

We often don't look to our childhood for the keys of why we act the way we do in intimate adult relationships, but often there are jewels of insights lying there to be picked up and revealed. Childhood experiences of being told by a parent or teacher that you weren't smart enough, pretty enough, or that you were too fat, or you slow learner, or a liar, all potentially lay down land mines that may be re-triggered in future vulnerable relationship episodes. Early adolescent and teenage experiences involving the development of self-image beliefs, especially regarding one's physical body and early sexual experiences, are powerful territory for early decisions about what intimacy should or should not look like. These significant emotional experiences may become what we refer to as Core Beliefs. Core Beliefs are the primary directives we create based upon our interpretation of our early life experiences and they can rule our lives. Examples of these may look like: People can't be trusted; I'm not loveable; eventually those you love will leave you; I'm not worthy; the world isn't safe; I will never get what I need.

When uncovering these personal Core Belief statements, the use of words like everyone, always and eventually, are the types of generalizations that reinforce the absoluteness of these beliefs; no one can really be trusted, people are always selfish, etc. These can have a powerful influence on how you see your partner when you hear yourself saying: he is always late; she never remembers how I like the toilet paper hung, etc. These Core Beliefs underlie our relationships and are the way we observe our world, though usually unconsciously. When our current partner shows up in our brains looking or sounding like the father that always forgot mom's birthday or the first girlfriend that cheated or the first husband that promised that family was his highest priority when it wasn't, the combination of the present and the past emerge as a powerful force that seems to be targeted at you and more than you can reasonably stand.

Past traumas and disappointments that result in our Core Beliefs are critically important to unearth, but there are other drivers that influence our relationships. Many of our ideas about what relationships should look like formed early in our lives. These early ideals and preferences often came from image-makers that had profound impacts on us. The love and

When to End It [continued from page 19]

marriage department of our neocortex are filled with stories of happily-ever-after and of princes on white horses. Scores of movies have utilized the power of the Cinderella story (think *Pretty Woman* with Julia Roberts and Richard Gere) with the knight on a white horse coming to sweep the maiden off her feet and carry her off into the sunset. Our earliest concepts of relationship usually come from our parents, grandparents and extended family. Unfortunately, it is a rare set of parents who instruct their child about the reality of relationship expectations, how to handle relationship disappointment, forgiveness, compromise, non-violent communication skills, child-rearing, cooperative goal planning, financial cooperation, etc.

After childhood, the primary relationship modeling influence shifts from family and parents to peers and media. During pre-pubescence and adolescence, research shows these sources become the predominant instructors in relationship advice. A research study found that 73% of top forty music songs had love and romance as their central theme. A 1996 study showed that 90% of teens look to movies, while 94% turn to television for information about love. Only 33% of teens turn to their mother and 17% to their fathers. A study by Tanner in 2003 reviewed 26 animated Disney films and the single major theme of the movie was "Love at First Sight" with eighteen of the twenty-six movies having couples falling

physical attraction and sex is the primary reason for "hooking up" with a partner.

After adolescence, one can hope that relationship maturity begins, but that would be optimistic. The Rating/Dating Complex refers to the observed late adolescent and early adult dating years, especially during the college-age time period. During this time of life, research has shown that students in relationships expressed more concern about the social status of their dating partner than how the person made them feel, and of primary importance, was the status it conferred to them by being with them. Marriages, especially when entered into at young ages, often involve naïveté and innocence as to what will be necessary in order to make a long term marriage really succeed. While trends in the United States are showing the average age for marriage to be climbing, 28 for a man and 26 for a woman (in Great Britain the average woman is now 30 years old), divorce rates still remain in the 50% range.

By understanding why situations repetitively show up in one's life and relationship, one can begin to gain self-understanding. Finding ways to explore the connections between past painful events and their relationship to the current situation helps to clear a space for moving forward. In uncovering the connection between past and present, we can find the ways to either forgive and re-connect in a loving

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in love within minutes, then getting married and of course living happily ever after.¹ Another study in 1995 reviewed the 15 most viewed movies by teens and all had a major theme with the notion that "love just happens" and that somehow you just end up married. These studies and others point to the unrealistic relationship concepts such as the expectation of mind-reading, that notion that love just somehow happens, that any disagreements are destructive and that of course

way, or to create a path towards establishing a new beginning with clarity and completion. 📌

¹ Tanner, L. R. (2003) Images of couples and families in Disney feature-length animated films. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, doi:1080/01926180390223987

ALINA FRANK and **CRAIG WEINER, DC** are the creators of *When to End It*, *When to Stay* (www.WhenToEndIt.com) and *Path2Passion* (www.Path2Passion.net). They are instructors of the Emotional Freedom Techniques (www.tapyourpower.net) and are happily and passionately married.