

Have you survived lockdown but your relationship is in trouble?

As countries start to open up after, in most cases, many months of government-imposed self-isolation, couples are finding their relationships have significantly changed since the start of the lockdown. Some may find the time together has allowed for a new intimacy and a re-evaluation of what really matters in life, but for some it may have had a severely detrimental but honest effect in showing couples that the being together 24/7 may have magnified the tension and problems that existed before the pandemic, and forced them to address these issues.



For some couples, the time will highlight incompatibility differences or differing belief systems. As they emerge from post-lockdown some countries, notably China and Italy and now the UK is starting to come through, showing a spike in divorce rates as couples emerged from quarantine. Not every couple will weather this storm in a way that brings them closer to each other. Sadly, for some it will highlight previously unseen areas of incompatibility and desires in life which the pandemic has cruelly brought into their vision.

If you've survived lockdown but your relationship is in trouble, that doesn't necessarily mean it's not worth saving. Traumatic situations stir up all sorts of high-stress emotions, including anxiety, fear, and panic, that can trouble a relationship but have more to do with the individual and their own personal circumstances than with the relationship itself. I have seen that a number of marriages have had to face the grim reality that, what they thought was working actually isn't, and that in the past, time away on business for instance has merely been a 'distraction' that has allowed a non-functioning relationship to 'limp along'. Lockdown has

been stark. It has challenged couples; forcing them to function together in isolation and flaws in the sharing of responsibilities for instance has been the cause of much conflict.

Deciding on what to do as we ease gradually out of lockdown requires serious self-introspection. It's important to take stock of how you're feeling about yourself coming out of social isolation. What have you learnt about yourself, your life your goals during this time? What actually 'MATTERS' to you as an individual? Before you make any decisions about your relationship: Do you need to change your job? Do you want to change something else about how you live or spend your time or money? Make those changes first to see how this might impact your relationship before you make a decision to end the relationship. It can be easy to blame the other person in your life rather than make the changes you need to make for yourself.

Coming out of isolation it would be common for a couple to be facing challenges — things like one partner acting out, not taking responsibility for his or her half of the relationship, not feeling emotion-

ally safe, having the same fight over and over. You would be amazed at the amount of 'petty' arguing that has been reported to me during this lockdown period, a sure symptom of the unnatural circumstances we find ourselves in, but is this sufficient cause for a permanent split? Remember before decision making about the relationship be aware that neither of you have had an opportunity to release pent up anxieties and frustrations accumulated during lockdown. Work on yourself, first and foremost, and find a way to release your pandemic experiences. This may be an antidote to what you believe to be the end of your relationship.



**Janet
Winterbourne**
Couples, Family and
Individual Counselling

083 268 6566

Tokai/Westlake, Cape Town
janet@universe.co.za
www.janetwinterbourne.com