



OPINION

By Dr Julie Hannan

What struggling couples can learn from Rory McIlroy calling off his divorce

Should you work harder at saving the relationship or is it beyond repair?

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Rory McIlroy has called off his divorce from his wife Erica (Photo: Mike Egerton/PA Wire)

The golfer [Rory McIlroy](#) has called off his [divorce](#) from his wife Erica, announcing they have “resolved their differences”, they are looking to a “new beginning”, and their best future is as a “family together”.

On the surface this sounds great: they’ve turned things around, they’re going to give it another go. In reality, people file for divorce believing they would be happier alone or with someone else and that the grass is greener outside of the [marriage](#). So deciding to do a U-turn and reconcile with the spouse they wanted to leave can be an enormous emotional challenge for both parties.

Rory's 360-degree about turn will no doubt resonate with unhappily married people as they consider: is the marriage worth saving? Have we given up too soon? Should we work harder at saving the relationship or is it beyond repair?

Making the decision to end your marriage and divorce your spouse can be one of the biggest emotional and financial decisions you'll ever make. Recently, divorce rates in the UK have fallen to their [lowest levels for decades](#). These figures haven't been attributed to couples reconciling their differences, but something far more practical – [the cost of living crisis](#).

People get divorced for many reasons, the most common being because they feel they have grown apart from their partner, lost themselves in the relationship, emotional or physical infidelity, lack of emotional support, increasing arguments and conflict, [a lack of passion, sex or intimacy](#), or boredom.

So is reconciliation really possible, can all these issues truly be resolved, or is it just an easier choice than going through the upheaval of a divorce? Well, whether you stay or go, here are some factors to consider to aid your decision-making process.

The first is clarity. Be clear about your reason(s) for leaving. Very often we can become obsessed by the 10 per cent imperfect part of our partner that drives us crazy, without appreciating the 90 per cent which works for us. Successful conflict resolution takes time, mutual respect, listening and brainstorming in a calm environment at a time when you can both fully engage without distractions.

Conversely, be clear about the reasons you are staying. Are you staying for the kids or are your reasons more fear based such as being alone, coping alone or a fear you may never find happiness again? As human being we are not built for change and it causes us anxiety, but professional support can help you view these limiting beliefs differently and move towards a new life together or apart.

The second factor to consider is responsibility. It takes [two people to make a relationship and two people to break it](#). Both partners need to take responsibility for their part in the relationship breakdown and cultivate an awareness of why you reached this point in the first place – blaming the other doesn't increase self-awareness. For example, if you didn't get your needs met, did you clearly ask for them? People aren't mind readers, no matter how long you've been together. Understanding why the relationship broke down reduces the chances of it happening again and of you repeating it in your next relationship.

Motivation must also be considered. If you decide to try again, identify what will have to be different this time and what has been lacking. You will both need to be on the same page and committed and motivated to change.

If the two of you are no longer in love with each other, but chose to stay together for the family, then be realistic. It's unlikely all of your intimacy and emotional needs will be met at home but they still need attending to through social networks and [friendships](#).

The final factor to consider is shared values. For a successful future together, you are going to need shared values and though you might have different goals in the future, committing to support each other to achieve individual goals is important, as well as a commitment to personal growth on both parts.

Like any relationship, marriages need constant attention, love and tending to. Reconciliation after ending divorce proceedings is possible but isn't an easy option. For Rory and Erica, like any other couple in a strained relationship, to stay together is going to take motivation, consideration and negotiation.

Dr Julie Hannan is a chartered psychologist, psychotherapist and author of *The Midlife Crisis Handbook* (Morency; £10.88).