

Should I leave?

Perhaps you're wondering about leaving. I'm not going to decide for you.

Every couple is different. However, I do have some general guidelines:

- If your partner is violent, abusive, or controlling (for example won't let you go out, or won't let you have money), and won't work on it, you should seriously consider leaving.
- If your partner repeatedly has affairs, or has a destructive substance addiction and refuses to get help, you should seriously consider leaving.
- These things put you in danger. And in these cases, you will need to do some serious thinking about how you chose that person, and the red flags that you didn't see. How this happened to you. But you can't do that until after you are out.

I hope those things don't apply to you. Perhaps your situation is more like "we are bored" or "we never have sex any more" or "we argue a lot".

If so, my advice is: stay for a while. Don't try to change your partner. Make some changes **in yourself**. Make yourself a genuinely better person. See whether your partner responds to this. You don't have to tell them about it – they'll probably notice. If they respond, maybe things will get better. If they don't respond, the changes you've made will help you manage better without them, and perhaps find someone better next time. Either way, the work you've done on yourself will pay off. Stop trying to get your partner to change, for now.

And when I say "*make yourself a better person*": that might mean kinder, or it might mean firmer. It might mean tidier, or it might mean more tolerant of mess. Maybe more considerate, or maybe more assertive. It rarely means more self-sacrificing. Come for some counselling with your partner, to get feedback and help you understand what needs to change. If you are unhappy enough to consider leaving, but you don't want to tell your partner so, then *that's part of the problem*.

With counselling, if you *do* decide to leave in the end, you'll be clearer about *why*.

Here is some more advice: Leaving *for someone else* is often a bad plan. Maybe you've met someone else who seems better, and you want out. You know you were a bit unhappy before, and you sometimes thought about leaving, and now you've met this new person. My experience, for what it's worth, is that **this usually goes badly**, unless your current relationship is nothing more than "dating". My advice is, if your current partner is bad enough to leave, then leave them cleanly, regardless of anyone else. Don't make a deal with the new person, or have an affair with them, or betray your partner by discussing the problems in the current relationship with the new person. If they are willing to take you from your current partner, that's a bit of a red flag about their character in itself.

"Trial separations" often lead to an end of the relationship, so if you have hopes of fixing things, beware of doing a "trial separation" unless you negotiate very carefully what it means, why you're doing it, and what the rules are, before doing it. I can help with that.