When Your Spouse Wants a Divorce and You Don’t

16 RELIABLE TOOLS FOR MAKING POSITIVE CHANGES NOW

BY Kim Bowen

www.EngageWithLove.com
I hate divorce. I mean...I really, really hate divorce. Marriage is risky business. Divorce is a real threat to EVERYONE who says: “I do.” I realized “everyone” included me when I almost lost my own marriage. I married my best friend over 23 years ago. I knew then that half of all marriages fail, but I thought I would never be on the wrong side of that equation. We had the kind of marriage our friends wished they had. Until one we day didn’t.

Looking back, I still don’t know when things started going wrong. It was so gradual neither of us noticed. But there actually came a day when I looked at my husband and realized that I didn’t even like him anymore, much less love him. I said those fated words that make me cringe when I hear them today: “I love you, but I’m not in love with you anymore.”

When I said those words to my husband, I believed them. I didn’t want to hurt him, but I didn’t want to live with him anymore either. We tried marriage counseling many times over the years, and it never worked for us. All the failed attempts to make things better only reinforced my belief that we were done.

Fast forward a few years...and I’m more in love with my husband now than ever before. What changed? The difference is that now we are connected again on an emotional level. I learned how to keep our love alive...how to engage my husband with love. I learned that loving him was a choice I could make, even when I didn’t like him all that much.

If you are in a marriage that feels distant, I hope you will learn how to engage your spouse with love. If your spouse is telling you that he or she wants a divorce, it doesn’t mean that it is time to give up. It means it is time to get serious about saving your marriage.

My mission is to change the way people view love and marriage. I’m taking a stand, because I’ve lived it, and I know there is hope even when it feels hopeless. I want to show you how you can fall in love with your spouse again...even when you think there is nothing left. I want to help you re-engage your spouse when you are the only one trying. And, I want to teach you how to divorce-proof your marriage, so you never have to go through the horrible pain of that particular loss.

Having a great marriage isn’t a great mystery. Let me show you how to go from hopeless to hopeful. I invite you to look at my website: www.engagewithlove.com
Are you in a marriage you want to save, but your spouse is ready to call it quits?

You aren’t alone.

Just before couples separate, partners usually get to a place where one of them is fed up. That person is done talking...and doesn’t want to work it out. For that partner, it is over.

But as the other partner, who wants to save the marriage, you see your world falling apart and you begin to panic. For you, it’s time to dig in and fight harder. Invariably, you do all the wrong things to try and save the marriage. In the heat of panic and desperation, you cannot see how your actions are actually pushing your partner even further away. It’s human nature to pursue what you instinctively need and want, and you actively fight for it. In this case, you must act counterintuitively to get what you want and do the opposite of what your instincts are telling you.

If you’re the person who wants to try and save your marriage, now’s the time to start making some drastic changes. Keep in mind that there are no guarantees and that you cannot control the decisions your partner makes. However, I’ve seen amazing things happen when one person in the marriage begins making positive changes.

To help you out, I’ve put together a toolkit featuring 16 reliable tools to help you with your last-ditch effort to save your marriage. If you use these tools, you have a much better chance at getting to a place where your spouse, once again, sees the hope that things can be better. When your spouse is hopeful, that person is willing to try one more time to get it right. As soon as that happens, our coaches know exactly how to move you and your spouse into the next phase. Together!

Please understand and remember that these are actions YOU need to take. It would be a big mistake to ask your spouse to read this or print it out and leave it for them to “accidentally” come across. It’s time for YOU to make changes...and for right now...that means YOU alone.
1. **Stall for time**

No matter what your situation looks like, the most important asset you own right now is time. That’s why I encourage clients to stall the divorce, using any way possible. Just make sure that you aren’t being pouty, obstinate, or argumentative about it. You can do this with statements like: “I need some time to figure things out”... “I understand you want a divorce, but I just need to think through some things”... “I need to see a counselor/coach to help me wrap my brain around this”...or, “Just give me a little time; I didn’t see this coming.”

2. **Stay put**

When you are in this situation, it’s easy to think that moving out will calm things down or make your spouse happier. Because you want to please your spouse, you might be tempted to give that person what he or she wants. While you want to remain agreeable when possible, DO NOT move out. Your spouse doesn’t want to HEAR words. That person needs to SEE action. So, it will be harder for your spouse to see you changing and growing if you live in separate places. Don’t buy in to the idea of a trial separation, either. That move is nothing more than a trial divorce.

3. **Cool your jets**

Get your emotions under control. You will alienate your spouse if you appear unstable or you explode in anger when everything in your relationship gets to be too much. Talk to a therapist or coach, journal your thoughts, take a walk, or scream in your pillow when no one is around. Do whatever you can to self-soothe, but DO NOT lash out at your spouse. I completely understand that beneath all your fears there also may be a lot of anger as well.

Maybe your spouse is having or did have an affair. That certainly contributes a great deal to the marriage problems. Maybe there are lots of things your spouse needs to atone for. But right now...that person wants out. I had one client almost blow it because his wife had an affair and he was faithful. He was so concerned with standing on the moral high ground that he almost lost everything. You have to keep in mind that this isn’t about who is right and who is wrong. This is about getting to the point where both of you see the marriage as salvageable, and both of you want to work on healing and growing. Then, when both of you are working towards the same goal, is the time when your spouse has to be accountable and take some responsibility.
4. **Stop begging for another chance and promising to change**

Your words mean nothing right now. You have to convince your spouse with your actions. No amount of crying, pleading, or offering to do back flips will make things better. The truth is that begging makes you look desperate, and there is nothing more unattractive than a desperate mate hanging on for dear life. I know from experience that your pleading and begging will make your spouse want nothing more than to get far away from all of your emotional tugging and pulling.

5. **Get a grip...control your anxiety**

Anxiety keeps many clients from being able to follow the plan using these tools or wait out this process. It’s natural to be anxious, scared, and worried. This anxiety causes a problem for some clients, making them difficult to work with. Personally, I would think there’s something wrong with you if you didn’t have moments of panic. But wanting reassurance from your spouse that things are going to be better will derail you from your goal.

You are, understandably, looking for any possible signs your spouse still loves you. So you see positive signs one minute, and then have your hopes dashed with the next breath. As difficult as this is to deal with, it is imperative you get a grip on your anxiety. If you can’t sleep, can’t stop crying, or can’t eat, make an appointment with your doctor and see about temporarily getting on anti-anxiety medication to help you get through this difficult time.

Of all the tools in this toolkit, controlling your anxiety is probably the most important one to get help dealing with, because uncontrolled, it can lead to the end of your relationship. One client was so anxious she couldn’t stop pacing my office. She was throwing up almost every day, and she would ask her husband over and over, in every way possible, if he thought their marriage had a chance. Her husband kept telling her that he couldn’t promise anything. Finally, this client filed for divorce herself because she felt getting it over with was better than worrying about it ending. This particular marriage had a better than average chance at success, but the wife couldn’t see it through and would not get help with her anxiety.

6. **Own it**

No matter what your situation, you certainly have things you need to apologize for. Even if the apology is simply for not noticing that your spouse was unhappy. Before you utter another “I’m sorry,” get the book *Five Languages of Apology* by Gary Chapman. It is, hands down, the best book I’ve read on how to form an apology that will give you the greatest chance at being heard. Apologizing is dangerous ground for you, so make sure you are adequately prepared. But remember that at the same time, it’s when you can make the most progress all at once if you do this right.
7. **Keep quiet**

Do not speak to other family members or friends negatively about your spouse or what you are going through. This is tough for many people, but there are good reasons to stay silent. Your spouse will feel ganged up on if everyone becomes your cheerleader. This will not work in your favor. Also, your friends and your family are not experts on saving marriages. Their advice may seem like a good idea at the time, but it could backfire on you. Remember, they are going to feel protective of you, and they don’t want you to keep hurting. Their advice will likely be biased because they care. Also, if you do heal the marriage, you will move past all of this hurt, while your friends and family will have a tougher time. Holidays and get-togethers are going to feel awkward for your spouse, and this awkwardness will create even more tension. So even though it might feel good having someone confirm that your spouse is being impossibly difficult, it could cause you more harm than good.

8. **Put on your happy face**

Look happy. Even if you have to fake it. Even if you were crying in the bathroom an hour before. You are trying to attract your spouse back to you again, and that won’t happen if you are moping around and looking like you are barely making it through each day. Your spouse already dreads being around you. It is uncomfortable and stressful for everyone. Watching you mope around simply reinforces your spouse’s belief he or she would be happier without you. That person also doesn’t want to see your unhappiness and feel responsible. Your spouse often is already in denial about a lot of things that help justify a negative decision. Don’t do anything to reaffirm that negativity. I once had a client ask me if this was some kind of Jedi mind trick. He said after a few weeks of pretending to be happy, he realized he actually was happier. There really is something to be said for the idea of faking it until you make it.

9. **Don’t ask...don’t tell**

You probably have a long list of things you would like your spouse to do or say differently. Do not make any of those demands during this time. If that person wants out, he or she already views you as a burden and living with you as stressful. Don’t ask your spouse to talk to you or spend time with you. Don’t ask if he or she still loves you. Don’t ask your spouse to come home directly from work or not go out with friends. Your goal is to get your spouse re-engaged. It is a known fact in human behavior that pursuing people only encourages them to run further away. Again, there will be a time for all of this once both of you are on the same team, but that time isn’t right now.
10. **Friend-zone your mate**

Stop telling your spouse that you love him or her. I know. It is counterintuitive. But think about it. Anytime someone says "I love you," there is this brief but awkward pause that demands a response of some sort. Telling your spouse "I love you" reminds that person of what he or she isn’t feeling for you right at that moment. It helps reinforce to your spouse that there is no love left and that it is time to go. I hope it goes without saying that you do not ask for sex either. If your spouse wants to continue a physical relationship, be careful how you proceed. I can’t give specific advice here, because every situation is different. I would definitely talk to a counselor or coach before proceeding. It may seem like a good sign and a positive thing to do, but it may actually cause more harm. Run this by a professional.

11. **Don’t be a detective**

This one can be tricky for people. If you think your spouse is having an affair, you are going to want to know for certain. When that person comes home late, you’re going to want to ask where he or she has been. You have probably already checked phone messages, texts, emails, or Facebook. This isn’t helpful behavior and it isn’t going to get you what you want. Let’s say you find out your spouse is having an affair. What are you going to do with that information? Do you expect the affair to stop instantly and have your spouse re-commit to the marriage because you found out about it? Do you think shaming your spouse will make that person think more about his or her actions and be remorseful?

Let me tell you how this usually plays out. You find out about the affair, and you confront your spouse. Now remember, your mate has already said he or she wants a divorce. Your spouse does not want to work it out, so the marriage or your anger isn’t going to motivate faithfulness. Instead, it motivates the unfaithful person to get better at lying or to go ahead and move in with their lover. Spying will also make you crazy, and you don’t want any more distractions from your goal. Many marriages survive infidelity. It does complicate things for you and it probably means this is going to be a longer journey than you want to make, but the truth is...most affairs end naturally within 12-18 months. You have every right to be offended and insulted with this type of betrayal. No one would blame you for kicking your partner to the curb. But if you want to save your marriage, it’s important to stay focused. You have to decide if you want to be right or be married.
12. To be or not to be

Use this tool with caution! When people get married, they become very predictable to their mates. They come home at the same time. They know who sits where at the dinner table. There is a routine to getting the kids to bed or cleaning up supper dishes. Your mate has come to rely on you or is resigned to the fact that he or she can’t rely on you. It’s important to know if your spouse is feeling smothered by you or feeling neglected. Whichever it is…act the opposite. If you are a server, you have probably stepped things up at home, because you want to make your spouse happy. One woman started setting out her husband’s clothes, fixing his favorite dinner, and packing his lunch. For her situation, this was a mistake because her husband had taken her completely for granted. He didn’t appreciate her added favors. In fact, it had the opposite effect. To him, she looked pitiful in her obvious attempt to make him love her. Once she stopped being so helpful, he started paying more attention. On the other hand, another client was always emotionally distant and admittedly selfish with his wife. He never did nice things for her. His coach told him to get 30 light or funny cards that weren’t heavy on sentiment. He immediately bought 30 cards and wrote funny or thoughtful comments. Each morning he got up early and made her a pot of fresh coffee. He put one card on top of the coffee maker and left for work. It took more than three weeks, but his wife finally showed some signs of softening. The point is…be different. What you have been doing isn’t working for you. If you keep doing the same thing, you are going to keep getting the same, unsatisfactory results. Which in your case right now…is divorce.

13. Be patient

Settle in for a long winter. Patience is your new best friend. You are going to need your new friend because this process can take weeks or months. That’s a good reason why you might consider hiring a coach to help you through this difficult time. You are fighting for your marriage, and you are going to need every resource you can muster to help you stay focused and motivated. A coach can also help you measure what is working and what is not working. I promise that you will have days when you think things aren’t getting any better. On those days, it will be tempting to quit. I was working with a client last month who called me and told me that he was tired and losing hope. He wasn’t sure he could continue or even if he wanted to continue. I had been working with him for months, and I had seen signs things were turning around…but at the same time, I didn’t want to give him false hope. I suggested he go away for a weekend alone and rejuvenate. He was reluctant, but he went camping in the mountains and had plenty of time to get his thoughts together. He came back and told me he was strong enough to continue. One week after that phone call, his wife sat him down and said she wanted to give the marriage one last shot. This man almost quit at a time when success was just around the corner. Now they are both in phase two of our program and doing well.
14. Don’t freak

Trust me, there will be times when you blow it. You will have good days and bad days. If you break down in a sobbing fit one night, it doesn’t mean you have ruined everything. Just get back to the plan as soon as possible. No matter how hard you try to keep your emotions under control, something will get to you and you will go off the rails.

15. Love yourself

Now is a good time to “get a life” if you don’t already have one. Join a gym. Take classes. Learn photography. Join a book club. Get out and get active. It will take your mind off all your misery and, who knows...you may once again become the person your mate once fell in love with.

We tend to lose parts of ourselves when we are married. Reconnect with old friends. Reclaim some of your passions. And if you don’t have one...now is a good time to find something that is just for you. It will help the time pass more quickly, and if your marriage can’t be saved, you will have taken a huge step toward healing and moving on, which will be necessary for your survival.

16. See it through

Listen closely to me now. You are probably going to see signs things are getting better. Do not go off the plan. If your spouse is getting friendly again, it will be tempting to think you are out of the woods. Clients make a mistake when they start to feel close to their spouse again and in their excitement, they start talking about the future as if the divorce isn’t happening. This can cause a sudden retreat from your spouse if that person isn’t yet ready to re-commit. You aren’t out of the woods until your spouse tells you he or she wants to give this relationship another try. When that happens, Engage With Love coaches will put you on a new plan. But the 16 tools in this toolkit are your plan until that day comes.

However, you can take heart because those positive signs are evidence of what I call the “internal struggle”. This is exactly where you want to be. Up until this point, your spouse had his or her mind made up. That person was done. No more negotiating. No counseling. Done!

The internal struggle occurs when mates have moments where they let their guard down. They start wondering, even if only slightly, whether things really are hopeless. Yet they are afraid to trust the changes they have witnessed, so they pull back when they notice they have softened. Sometimes they pull back when they are afraid they are giving their partner false hope. This is the tipping point of this whole process. It’s the point when things can really go either way. When you see the internal struggle, you need to be very observant and make sure you not doing anything to scare your spouse off. Personally, I love to see the internal struggle. It means all the hard work is paying off!
I am Kim Bowen and I founded Engage With Love because at one point in my marriage I was the spouse who wanted a divorce. You can read about my story at the beginning of this ebook. I truly believed my marriage was over and there was no hope for reconciliation. Today, my husband is once again my best friend and lover. I cannot bear to think how close I came to losing everything I once loved and learned to love again.

Someone asks me every day if I think there is hope for them and their marriage. Most of the time, I try to reassure them that there IS hope, but I can tell that they are skeptical. That’s why I interviewed two clients I just finished working with a few months ago, who agreed to let me publish their story. John came to me alone 5 months ago. Marcy joined him about 8 weeks later. This is their story.

John and Marcy Share Their Story

Kim: Hey Guys! Thanks for letting me share your experience.

Marcy: Thank you for giving us the chance to share it. I hope someone else gets encouragement from it.

Kim: Marcy, remember when you sat in my office and told me marriage counseling would be a waste of time? You made it very clear you didn’t want to be here.

Marcy: I do remember. If you told me 5 months ago that I would be here today giving this interview, I would have thought you were crazy. But here I am!

Kim: Okay, don’t let me jump ahead of myself. John, can you tell everyone why you came to us for help?

John: Absolutely. I read your blog post “When Your Spouse Wants a Divorce And You Don’t.” That was my situation exactly. Marcy was getting ready to move out, and I was feeling desperate. You told me to breathe and stay calm. I remember you talked to us quickly because I was so upset.

Kim: Of course, I remember.

Marcy: I did NOT want to talk to you. I did only because I wanted you to help us get through a divorce, still be parents to our kids, and at least not hate each other.

Kim: Yeah...didn’t work out that way though, did it?

Marcy: No! You said you would be the last person in the conversation still fighting for the marriage as long as one of us wanted to save it. I was so angry with you then. I was afraid you were giving John false hope. I told John later that you just wanted to take his money!
John and Marcy Share Their Story (continued)

Kim: Oh! Wow!

Marcy: Yeah...sorry about that.

Kim: No worries. Can you explain to everyone why you were so convinced coaching wouldn't work?

Marcy: John and I had been having problems for two to three years. I tried many times to tell him I didn’t think things were going well for us but he didn’t seem to pay attention. He would try to do some things differently for a while, but it wouldn’t be long before things were right back where they started. I got tired of complaining and feeling like nothing was ever going to change. I threatened to leave him about a year ago and that got his attention. We tried counseling but it didn’t work. The counselor was okay, but it felt like all we did was talk about all the problems. We left most sessions feeling worse than when we went in. We did that for about three months before we quit. It just felt like a waste of time. Once we stopped, everything just went downhill. I told him I was moving out this last time, and he must have gotten online because he read your blog and then asked me to come with him. I agreed but I didn’t want coaching. I truly believed it was hopeless and a complete waste of time. I felt no romantic feelings for John at all. I felt he was smothering me, and I only wanted to get away from him. So I told him I wasn’t coming back and the next thing I know, he is coming by himself. I remember being irritated because I thought he was wasting time and money and I didn’t want to drag this out any longer.

John: Ouch! I don’t like hearing that, but I know it’s true. I did all the exact wrong things before I read your blog, Kim.

Kim: I know, but thankfully, you were a quick learner!

John: You told me to stop chasing Marcy, and that desperate was not very attractive. When you told me to stop telling her I loved her, I started wondering if you knew what you were talking about!

Kim: But you followed the plan.

John: I didn’t have a choice. I was about to lose the person I loved the most.

Kim: When did you start to notice that things were working?

John: Well...it was really small things at first. You told me to journal the experiments and keep track of all the results. I did that. Some days were better than others. But I kept talking to Kim and kept working at it. You asked me to write down the first sign that I would see from Marcy that would tell me things were improving, and I wrote, ‘She will sit in the same room with me for longer than 5 minutes.” That sounds pathetic to me now, but things were so bad she left the room every time I entered it. When that first sign happened, you asked me for the next sign. Things just kept improving slowly, a little at a time.
John and Marcy Share Their Story (continued)

Kim: John, it may have felt like it was going slowly, but 8 weeks is pretty quick. Some people work that plan for months. Marcy, what did you experience when John started changing his behavior?

Marcy: It was weird. At first I wondered what he was up to. I knew he was talking to Kim, but all he would say was that he was working on improving himself. The first thing I remember noticing was that we weren’t fighting all the time. I remember one day I realized you (John) were about to come home from work and for the first time in a long time, I wasn’t dreading it. Then later, I realized I was actually looking forward to talking to you. I knew then that something drastic was happening but I didn’t understand it. I just stopped being in a hurry to leave.

Kim: Marcy, do you remember when you wanted to seek coaching?

Marcy: I remember it! She asked me to have dinner with her and I told her I had plans with some guys from work. I could tell it bothered her. The next day she asked to talk to you!

John: He’s right. I wanted to see if we could enjoy a dinner out and have it feel like old times. I remember thinking, I had just a glimmer of hope that things could really get better. He hadn’t been home all that much and I actually was beginning to miss him!

Marcy: It’s her (Kim’s) fault I wasn’t home much. She told me to get a life!

John: That’s right! I did!

Kim: Well, it must have worked! We started both talking to Kim, and things started moving quickly in the right direction.

Marcy: Why do you think they moved quickly?

Marcy: I think there were several reasons. To begin with, you helped me see that I hadn’t fallen out of love with John. I was just focused on all the negative things about him that I didn’t like. I couldn’t see any hope, because I couldn’t see past all the resentment and anger. We had been talking to you for a while before we even began to address any real problems. But that was okay, because we had tried the other way before and that didn’t work.

Kim: You guys weren’t in a place to handle any more negative energy. It’s like a trauma patient coming into the ER, who needs surgery but isn’t stable enough to survive the operation. You have to get the patient stabilized before you do surgery.
John and Marcy Share Their Story (continued)

John: I know when we started talking to Kim, we had a long list of problems that we thought we needed help with. Once we got to that part of the process, most of those problems weren’t an issue any longer.”

Kim: I love it when that happens! I see it all the time! Getting couples reconnected emotionally is oftentimes enough to get things back on track.

Marcy: Seriously! Some days it seems surreal that we are where we are now. We can’t possibly express just how grateful we are that God brought you in our lives. I think this is a special place.

Kim: Thanks Marcy. I really appreciate your kind words. But you guys did all the work. Just remember what you learned is not a once-and-done thing. You now have healthy habits in place that will keep you guys connected for as long as you do them. So DON’T STOP DOING THEM!”

John: We won’t. I was a little hard-headed in the beginning about some of those exercises, but I’m a believer now.

Kim: You also know to talk to me every three months for this next year to avoid relapsing into old behaviors. You guys are awesome! Thanks for letting me work with you.

What’s Next In the Fight to Save Your Marriage?

It is my great desire that this information is helpful to you in your fight to save your marriage. There isn’t a lot of support out there for someone like you.

Our society views marriage as a disposable commodity, and I’m disappointed at how many therapists, counselors and coaches actually encourage couples to divorce when things get really difficult. Instead, we are very “pro marriage” at Engage With Love.

It is our mission to change the way the world views love and marriage.

If you have enjoyed reading this or think the information is helpful to you or someone else, please share this on Facebook or Tweet about us.

Or, if you have questions or would like to discuss your own issues, please contact us.

You can also download our Re-Engage Toolkit.
ENGAGE WITH LOVE
YOURSELF, YOUR PARTNER, THE WORLD

WITH Kim Bowen

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