

I want:

1. You and me to have a relationship in which we feel valued by one another.
2. A loving, mutually respectful, and financially successful marriage that lasts our lifetimes.

Right now, I do not feel these things are possible.

However, there are some changes that could be made that may help me feel more secure in our relationship and more hopeful for our marriage. If I see evidence of these changes explained below, then perhaps what I want would become possible.

I wrote the list knowing that I am not an innocent person. You are definitely not “all bad” and I am further from “all good”. I know full well that neither of us are or will be perfect, but I expect both of us will have to work harder if our marriage has a shot at lasting.

Will, you may add to this list but I feel strongly that what I’ve contributed is of highest importance to me. If you cannot agree to this list, or I cannot agree to your additions to it, then we will proceed with the separation and divorce.

If at any time you reconsider and would like to reconcile, I will be open to your suggestions. However, the following list is important to me and it isn’t going to go away.

Like you said, “love” isn’t the question...the question is whether we can “live” together or not.

I. Behaviors That Must Stop Immediately

- A. No physical violence. No pushing, grabbing, shaking, choking, hitting, etc.
- B. No physical intimidation. No hitting tables, cabinetry, walls, etc. with fists or objects; locked doors stay locked and if one of us says we need space the other one gives it by leaving the area and refraining from muttering or attempting to continue the conversation indirectly. No bodily encroachment into personal space during any argument or tense discussion. No threatening behavior and if one person says they're feeling threatened or afraid, the actions that person takes to remove themselves from the situation will be respected.
- C. No verbal assaults or verbal abuse. No name-calling directly or indirectly where it can be overheard by the intended target or other people. No covert verbal abuse implying one person is less valuable than the other due to differing opinions and beliefs. No labeling of one another as unappreciative, uncaring, unfit, irresponsible, dishonest, etc. No word games, no rephrasing of another's words to change their meaning, no more technicalities or meaning-splitting (i.e. "You didn't say not to do that on the list!"). No attempts to control through tone or word. No abuse disguised as a joke.
- D. No emotional abuse. No hinting to each other or to the children that one person is somehow deficient as a parent or a person because of differing beliefs. No implying that one person's feelings are less important or somehow "wrong" due to deficiencies in character or mental health. No withdrawing emotionally to punish one another (although it is understandable that abstinence from sexual activity or physical proximity is at times an appropriate response). No attacking one another's character or values.
- E. No mental abuse. No extended conversations designed to wear down the other person's defenses. No lying about how one feels or thinks in order to gain compliance on any issue. No insinuating that one person is more valuable than another due to income, technical skills, experience, etc. No condescension or righteous anger due to one's desire to visit a mental health practitioner. No denying events or statements with the hope of making the other person doubt his/her perceptions. No blaming the other for the actions we take, feelings we feel, or words we speak.
- F. No abusive anger. No yelling or swearing – if we're angry enough to yell and swear then we stop communicating until tempers aren't so high. No getting in one another's face, no walking up fast and then stopping inches away from one another, no flailing of arms or stares meant to intimidate, no tools/knives/instruments held while angry, etc.
- G. No alcohol abuse. No driving under the influence of alcohol alone or with family members. No avoidance of relationship or any other issues by remaining under the influence of alcohol for extended periods. No attempts to have important and/or sensitive conversations while drinking.

II. Behaviors To Begin or Continue

- A. Couples Counseling
- B. Individual Counseling
- C. Relationship Abuse Education (therapy, courses or classes, reading material, etc. but must be on more than one occasion and with regularity)

III. Outward Signs that Changes are Taking Place (some things I'm looking for)

- A. We verbally acknowledge the abuse in our marriage and family to one another and our boys. We say we are willing to change and start planning, individually, how to create the changes needed.
- B. We attend regular counseling sessions as a couple. We attend to our own self-help issues with qualified professionals via therapy or some other form of guided support.
- C. We willingly take responsibility for our individual contributions to the cycle of abuse in our relationship and family.
- D. We share what we feel we must change about ourselves and dedicate ourselves to improving communication in our marriage without abusing one another in any way.
- E. When we disagree, we respectfully disagree and then work together for a compromise without browbeating one another to accept our opinion as "right" and theirs "wrong"
- F. We accept that there are many changes to be made and that it will be hard work and will probably take some time.
- G. We are patient with one another, but we hold ourselves accountable for our own change without pointing out any possible deficiencies in our partner's change process.
- H. We respect for one another's need to feel safe and secure in our home; we don't have to agree with one another's feelings in order to respect them.
- I. We take time out as a couple even when there are other pressing responsibilities because there will always be other pressing responsibilities.
- J. We take time out as a family and work together to create a tension-free environment for our children.
- K. We do not harbor anger and then explode in a fearsome rage; anger deserves attention, but it is not always deserving of our constant attention. We no longer feed our anger by guessing or assuming what our partner is thinking. Instead, we ask them what they are thinking.
- L. We share our changing needs and desires with one another. We support one another's dreams and goals even if we do not want to pursue them or see value in pursuing them ourselves.

Will, if you choose to work with me to save our marriage, please consider this timeline of reconciliation. I think it will help us to "not rush" and carefully evaluate whether we truly want to reconcile or not without involving the children (to the extent which they can remain uninvolved).

IV. My Suggested Timeline (negotiable, but I think a year apart is about right)

A. Months 1-3: We continue to work on our separation agreement. IF we decide not to reconcile, we will need the agreement. I need some time alone without talking to you except in a “business” manner; I feel we should limit our contact as much as possible during this time. I am comfortable with email without attorney involvement.

B. Months 3-5: We return to couples counseling. We talk about whatever we need to get off our chests about what’s happened between us up to this point. We arrive to and leave from sessions separately for the first half; perhaps start talking on the phone more often during the second half.

C. Months 6-9: We continue counseling. We begin to “date” or see each other alone for dinner during the week. We see “how it feels” and decide if we enjoy being around with one another and can discuss where we think our relationship is heading.

D. Months 10-12: We continue counseling. We begin taking steps to seriously consider our future as a couple. Do we merge or separate? When? If we reconcile, are we going back to joint accounts or not? Do we think more separate time is required before we choose to reconcile or divorce? ...etc.