

LL21-Getting Back Together With Your Ex

Hi I'm Alvean Lyons,
and I'm Doug Weiss, and this is Love Life.

OK Douglas, last week we talked about having the crazy vindictive ex's which we certainly would never want to get back together with, but this week we're actually going to talk about the opposite end. What happens if you have an ex you want to get back together with? Should she do it, under what conditions should you do it, what warnings might you give people about doing this, and you personally have had this experience before so I'm particularly curious about what your wisdom is.

How do define wisdom? In all seriousness, I think one of the hardest things in a relationship to restore are the conditions for a relationship to prosper when it has foundered, because you've set up a kind of emotional muscle memory. And that's where you go to when things during those early days when you're trying to get back together again that's where you're likely to go. You are likely to read into every word, every action with a memory of what transpired in the past. There are no blank slates. I'm not going to say it's impossible because I do know of at least one couple that was able to do that. But what happened in the circumstance I think tells the story. They went through a traumatic, and I would argue cathartic experience that profoundly changed them both. It reoriented them, and made them I think truly aware of how important they both were to each other. And I think that set up a set of conditions that was so powerful it was able to overcome the natural inhibitions. That grew out of a long and fruitless period. What about you?

Well of course I get to deal with lots of couples and lots of relationship experiences in my line of work and the first question I would typically ask people if they're deciding to get back together with their ex's why did you break up in the first place? Depending upon why you broke up what has happened that is going to ensure that you don't have the repeat of that same experience all over again. So if we broke up for instance because of infidelity, somebody cheated, well the question is always are you dating someone who cheated or are you considering getting back together with a cheat? Because there is a difference between someone who cheated and someone who's a cheat. Almost anyone under the

right set of circumstances, the right pressures, the right pain, the right feelings of vulnerability and isolation could potentially cheat because we're designed for companionship and when we are inside of relationships in which we feel more alone with someone than we do by ourselves almost anyone could cheat. Not everybody does, but almost anyone could. If you're dealing with a cheater that is a character issue and it is very hard to fix something that is ingrained in someone's character. There's this beautiful quote I saw on social media that says there are some guys, and women to be fair, that no matter how bad the circumstances will never cheat. And then there are those that no matter how good the circumstances are will never be faithful. And that is the difference when you're talking about the character issue. We all struggle with temptation but how we respond to that temptation is different. So when someone says to me that I'm considering getting back together with my ex, I want to be clear. Have we done anything to heal what caused the fracture in the first place or are we just going back to a place that is familiar like an old blanket with holes in it? Is that what we're doing because of our fear that we will be alone.... and a lot of times people equate being alone with loneliness and they're not the same thing. You could be alone and feel fairly fulfilled and you can be with someone and feel completely alone. So my counsel is it really is an issue of what is the origin of the fracture.

Judging from both my own experience and what I've observed there have to be some ground rules that you are willing to make explicit with the other person. Because there is so much subtle mind reading going on in both directions and interpretation without some agreement that we can safely discuss what's really happening so I can ask questions and get answers I'm going to get answers like, nothing when I ask what's bothering you.....nothing I'm fine I'm fine. Or vice versa. I mean this is not exclusively a male prerogative by any means that that the two of you are going to be adult. You're going to sit down, you're going to talk about it and you're going to be willing to listen to the other person; hear them out. Come without an agenda, without a portfolio. Don't carry around the gunnysack of.... and ten years ago when we were at your mother's house this happened. You have to be willing to let go of things and literally make a fresh start. But I think the most important thing is that you have to be willing to invest a great deal in rediscovering the things that you loved about someone. What was it that attracted you in the first place? Because we often lose sight of that in time in a relationship, the things that were fresh and new and wonderful about that relationship have become either expected or maybe not so fresh and new

anymore they've become a little tired and the blush is off the rose.

Yeah the new car smell is gone.

Well we care about it but there is that. Let's face it that the firstI don't know what it is, but there's some period of time when the honeymoon period... when you're together with someone and everything is wonderful. And there's nothing that that person could do that would make you feel in any way bad about the relationship; but a little bit down the road some of those things can become irritants or minor annoyances or even provide a growing sense of cause for ending the relationship. So to put that all back together again, to fix Humpty Dumpty is very hard.

And even worse than that, sometimes in terms of being able to get over the things that happened previously and letting go of the past is when you have friends that were all around when things went wrong that one or both of you have spoken to about the details of what went wrong. Although you are over it, they are not and if we want to put steroids on that what happens, when you've told family about what has happened and you got over it the family never gets over it because they hurt with you. Now they feel they need to protect you from that hurt and in so doing when you moved on and you guys have agreed that we're going to start over the family is still frozen and the pain that you experienced previously is something they won't let you get past.

Right, they're giving you the proverbial eye roll over. What are you thinking?

In those moments of hurt, anger in the wake of breaking up are now coming back and haunting you. I have adult daughters and I often tell them, listen don't tell mommy that you're getting rid of him unless you're really getting rid of him. Because if you're not over it and you tell me that he is a horrible human being, and then you bring him to dinner..... I'm not going to be over it. Now I was well raised so I will treat him kindly, but every time he gets up to go to the bathroom I will have a lecture for you. I highly suggest just as a general rule, if the relationship isn't really over be careful what you share with people who adore you because they are going to want to protect you from yourself.

Well there's a general maxim we should probably follow but we won't. That says how much should you share in general about any relationship with your circle? What do you keep private and what do you make public because everything that you make public can and will be used against you.

Around a dinner table.

A court of law may not be a court room.

I'm not trying to speak for you but I think if we could sum up our views on this it would be this. If you're going to go this route go with some caution and go slowly, go carefully, go openly, transparently. Thoughtfully reach out and be willing to talk and share your feelings with each other in a very honest way.

That's another episode of Love Life and in the weeks to come we'll be talking about these kinds of subjects a bit more, so stay tuned and hang in there with us. Thank you for being our listeners.

We want to thank Barbara Hamm Lee, our producer, Todd Washburn our recording engineer and everyone who's part of our love life family. We look forward to being back with you next week.