SURVIVING YOUR PARTNER’S MID-LIFE CRISIS

RELATIONSHIP RECOVERY SPECIAL REPORT
by Rachel Rider
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Introduction

Hello.

Consider this email I received from Beverly:

“Hi Rachel,

Three weeks ago, my husband of 6 years moved out. We have been together 12 years. Shortly before that he expressed that he was unhappy, that we were not on the same page, and that he didn’t think that we could get back to what we once were. He was also very angry about everything, including big and petty things. Imagine being angry about the weather! He’s says that he’s ready to throw it all away. He claims that he didn’t hate me, but couldn’t say that he loved me. I was blindsided by this. We were not a high point and not at a very low point, in my view. My husband says that he is very overwhelmed and doesn’t know where his heart or head are. This weekend he told me that he has been emailing a woman in another country, a stranger, for the past several months. He says it’s just a wire connection and he hasn’t done anything. But she has stated that she wants to meet him and has suggested that she come and visit. On one hand he wants to meet her but on the other he doesn’t. He says it is not, but I say this is an emotional affair and if she visits it more than likely turn into a physical one.

He visits basically every weekend. Initially we were not intimate, but I have purchased several books and explored many articles on the internet, and have tried to put some of the ideas into play. I signed us up for individual counseling. He went to two sessions and gave up just like that. I have continued and have also begun sessions for our young daughter. In the last several weeks he stated that he was willing to try seeing the counselor again.

I am trying to take responsibility for my part in our problems but at this point I think that I have to stand up and say if he is going to continue to pursue a relationship with her or allow her to pursue one with him then he is no longer welcome here. What can I do? I don’t want to lose him and I am trying to work through our problems, but I just get the standard pat answers. I don’t understand him. I wish he would realize that what he’s doing is wrong. Thanks, Beverly.”

We receive a lot of emails like this. So much so that we felt it was quite timely to tackle this pressing issue.
Beverly’s email describes a certain type of situation: one where a partner or spouse suddenly changes in personality and starts behaving in confusing ways. Now, while each person and each relationship is different, I couldn’t help but be reminded of something I came across years ago while my partner was going through something similar. It’s called a “mid-life crisis.”

The term “Mid-life Crisis” is not entirely unfamiliar. We hear it around, often as a joke or some self-made psycho-analysis we do for someone else. Within counseling and professional circles, it is actually quite a controversial term with some experts saying that it is a valid psycho-emotional phenomenon; with others proposing alternatives; or still some others who don’t even consider it real.

Whether a mid-life crisis is scientifically real or not is not a debate we want to get into. What’s most important to us is that it’s real TO YOU.

It’s real TO YOU and to up to 26% of individuals surveyed in various studies. These respondents believe that they are going through or have gone through a mid-life crisis. They report unexplained feelings of loss, confusion, depression, escape and low self-worth.

Moreover, in a survey of divorced individuals, as much as 13% point to their or their partner’s mid-life crisis as the reason for the deterioration of their marriage.

Given these numbers, perhaps we can indeed say that mid-life crisis, for whatever reason and in whatever form does affect people, and most importantly, relationships and marriages.

Here’s the thing. The fact that you have opened this special report means that some form of a crisis has hit too close to home.

Perhaps you are just like Beverly, a woman whose life has been turned on its head, whose partner seems to no longer be the man she first fell in love with. Or perhaps you are like Jack who writes:

“My wife told me two months ago that she wanted to separate, she said that she had been considering it for a number of months and that she felt that we were making each other miserable. There were problems in our marriage but I didn’t think that they were that bad. Anyway one of the issues was that she suddenly started to change her appearance, lost weight, started wearing makeup each day, change of clothes style, and was going out with work colleagues more often. I was fine with this until I found a business card of an ex boyfriend in her bag one day. When I confronted her about it she said that she had simply bumped into him one day and he had started a new business and gave her a card, so she just dropped it in her bag. A couple of days later I found his number in her work mobile phone she then said that she had
put the number in her phone but it didn’t mean anything and I shouldn’t get jealous of her having male friends and that I was being stupid.

Is she in denial or am I? I just want her to stop and get back to the way things were!

What do you do now?

Before anything else, ask yourself this: is it possible that what your partner is going through right now is a mid-life crisis? How has it affected your relationship?

First, you need to know that you are not alone. You are one of many men or women who are confronted with this situation. And yes, it happens to both men and women.

Second, you need to arm yourself with knowledge.

Honestly, there is a lot of information out there about mid-life crisis. Books, articles and websites abound. However, sifting through all those materials can be daunting and it may take you a while before you get to the information you need.

This special report gives you a concise, practical and informative guide to “Surviving your Partner’s Mid-Life Crisis.”

Just like Beverly’s email, when we receive letters about “mid-life-ing” spouses, it’s usually from wives who are alarmed over the seemingly overnight change in their husbands. We’ve heard of the clichés: sports cars, motorcycles, young secretaries, gym memberships, and new clothes. They sound like a bad joke but, these clichés can’t be all fiction. Like rumors, clichés come from somewhere and are often founded on reality.

But, a mid-life crisis goes beyond the outward displays of working out and buying new cars. Much of it is signaled by negative emotions and changes in personality.

Read Beverly’s letter again. The frustration and confusion she is going through is quite marked. If there’s anything she really wants it’s for her husband to snap out of it. How about Jack? Can you relate to what he is going through? Wouldn’t you want things to go back to the way they were?

But are these really viable solutions? How can you change someone who’s going through something confusing, frightening and overwhelming themselves?

When our spouses start changing, it’s very easy for us to resort to blame, self-pity and even denial. But what we need to consider is that perhaps all these things that are happening is not our fault, that
we are just confronted by a partner’s personal crisis and we are collateral damage.

While it takes two to tango, so they say, a mid-life crisis certainly complicates any relationship. But, don’t lose hope. There are still some things you can do. I do need to warn you right now, though – they may be contrary to what you expect. So keep an open mind and be willing to learn.

Want to learn more about this thing they call a “mid-life crisis”? Want to know how you can survive it?

Read on!
“Mid-Life-ing” – What is it?

Mid-life or middle age is a normal part of life. All things being equal, we all have to go through the ages of 30 and 60.

Carl Jung and Erik Eriksson are some notable psychologists who have identified mid-life as a normal stage of transition. During mid-life, most people will experience some form of emotional change. At mid-life, different milestones take place. You are probably already years into your marriage. Your kids have gone off to school. Either your job is transitioning rapidly or you may be considering retirement. You may also be experiencing menopause (for women) or andropause (for men).

Most individuals work through this transition stage smoothly and without too many emotional upheavals depending on your personality types, personal experiences and background. It has been discovered that people who actually live their lives happily AND to the fullest, who have pursued their dreams and who have found a purpose in life, these people are less likely to confront a crisis during their middle years, in spite of challenges, negative feelings or even hormonal changes.

But, experts point out that if any of these factors have been present:

- if your personal needs have not been met
- if you’ve sacrificed your own happiness for others’
- if you have had seriously negative experiences growing up
- if you have not found meaning in life even after years of trying
- If you have been unable to previously manage stress or adversity in a healthy manner

then you are at risk for a crisis when transition comes.

What exactly IS a “mid-life crisis”?

The term “mid-life crisis” has been attributed to Canadian psychologist Elliott Jaques who first coined it in 1965. Technically, it describes serious personal doubt and anxieties experienced by some individuals between the ages of 30 to 60 years old. Other experts describe it as a turbulent stage of psychological and emotional change.

According to Jim Conway, in his book *Men in Midlife Crisis*, mid-life crisis ranges an average of 2-7 years. However, there are studies that show that male mid-life crisis can last from 3-10 years, while female, 2-5 years.
Many of the examples we see in films or TV often depict men in mid-life crisis. The award-winning film “American Beauty” is perhaps one of the most direct portrayals. We are all too familiar with stories of men having affairs, buying sports cars and going back to the gym.

Maybe this is why we understand mid-life crisis as a time when a person “acts out” – becoming depressed, rebellious, confusing, moody, emotional or a whole lot of other behaviors. That idea is not too far off. Erik Erikson’s studies into the stages of personal development that, during mid-life, unresolved childhood or adolescent issues resurface. Hence, the need to act like a teenager again and go after childish pursuits. Then again, this model of a mid-life crisis has long been associated with men.

In recent years, there has been increasing evidence that women experience mid-life crisis too. Remember the statistics we mentioned in the introduction? Here’s one more – of all those who report that they have experienced or are going through a midlife crisis, nearly 31% are women! Women report feelings of boredom, depression, loss and confusion when they suddenly find themselves home alone, with the kids and the husband gone to their daily activities. Aside from this, due to women’s liberation and the changing gender roles of men and women in the last 40 years, women have been participating more and more in society and culture outside of the home. This means that they are subject to much of the same pressures that men are at work, or are even under more pressure as they try to live up to the new female stereotypes of the “superwoman” who “has it all.”

Hence, like men, many women also start questioning their happiness when mid-life or transition time comes.

But, here’s a valuable insight. While studies show that men often struggle against mid-life, many women are seeing it as a time of change where they can break free from the monotony of their lives, and that can be a good thing – for the woman.

In either case, imagine that you are the spouse of a man or a woman in mid-life crisis. Wouldn’t you be feeling lost, confused and overwhelmed too? Whatever happened to the man or woman you first fell in love with?
What causes mid-life crisis?

This is the part where I would like to issue a caveat - don’t think that just because you reach a certain age that you’re due for a mid-life crisis.

For one thing, a majority of experts believe that mid-life crisis is primarily a phenomenon in Western countries or in countries with Western influences and values. Research shows that there are very few, if any, Middle Eastern or South East Asian individuals who go through mid-life crisis.

Perhaps it’s because, in the West, an individual’s sense of worth is measured by their youth and accomplishments – now true for both men and women. In contrast, in most Eastern countries, there are beliefs about ageing as related to growing in wisdom and respect. These countries also practice rituals that mark rites of passage, making the transition into later stages of life smoother and more integrated with the parts that came before.

Now, if you need to figure out whether you or your partner is going through a mid-life crisis, these are some of the initial questions you need to ask: In your particular culture and milieu, how is aging perceived? How are accomplishments measured? When identity is so tied up with what you do and not who you are on the inside, what happens when you lose those which make you who you are?

Let’s say that your society is so much into the “youth culture.” Media will be feeding you with images that to be happy, you have to be young, toned, accomplished and beautiful.

These, mixed in with certain TRIGGERS in your personal life, can set you up for a mid-life crisis.

First, there is the fear of aging. When a person starts seeing gray hairs, when he or she starts questioning his or her attractiveness, when the first wrinkles start to appear – extreme stressing over these can be the first signs of a crisis.

There are also those other transitions that start showing you that the world is moving on without you. Let’s say you’re a man and that position you’ve been eyeing at work was given to this hot, young buck...

Let’s say you’re a woman - perhaps your kids are now grown, with their own lives, and you feel that they don’t need you anymore.

Or, let’s say that your marriage is in a lull...

Or maybe you recently went through the death of a parent or close family member.

Not to mention this: perhaps you’ve discovered that you’re now feeling those aches, pains and
illnesses associated with aging and, in relation, started to confront your own mortality.

These can all trigger a crisis.

Before we move on, however, I would like to point out a very important discovery: midlife crises in men seem to be triggered by different things than in women.

Some studies show that male mid-life crisis is more likely to be triggered by issues that have something to do with career and sexuality.

On the other hand, Sue Shellenbarger’s book “The Breaking Point” implies that women’s mid-life crisis is triggered by a change, whether physical or emotional, where a woman realizes that she has suppressed and sacrificed so many things in her life to care for spouse, family and career.

There are so many more factors that can trigger a crisis. What they have in common is that they all signify CHANGE. And, we all know that CHANGE is a powerful MOTIVATOR.

Change can make you think twice about your life and, without a strong support system and a positive attitude, can put you into crisis mode. If you are stressed by all these changes, you may find that you are unable to manage life effectively.

Whatever the causes are, the bottom line is that a person experiencing external change also goes through an internal upheaval. If a person lacks understanding of the process, he or she may find themselves making irrational decisions they may later regret. People in mid-life crisis have been known to leave a job, divorce their spouse, become unfaithful and leave their past life behind as they seek to rebrand themselves as something different or more exciting than what they believed they were before.

Admittedly, a lot of these are created by feelings of fear and anxiety. A person in crisis often does not realize the causes of their negative feelings, or even that these feelings are present.

All he or she knows is that they have to escape, in some way or another.

Because of these negative feelings, a person in mid-life crisis often believes that they are a victim – of circumstance, of their present life and, even, of their partner’s control.

Mid-life crisis brings with it intense feelings of insecurity and hence, they want to exercise control over other aspects of their lives. They want to be heroes or heroines and feel a sense of accomplishment that they haven’t experienced up to now.

It is this cycle of insecurity and validation that determines a lot of a mid-lifers behavior – their anger
at the world, their desire for comfort elsewhere, their refusal to be the person their spouse and children expect them to be.

Many men in mid-life crisis experience these changes negatively. In contrast, many women, as Sue Shellenbarger discovered and as was reported in a recent issue of Time Magazine, actually see these changes as an opportunity to reinvent themselves. This is not to say that women in mid-life crisis won’t act out. In fact, many of them behave in the same way men will.

The problem is this: either way, a person in mid-life crisis WILL affect those around him or her. And many don’t have the skills to be aware of this, to communicate their feelings to their partner or even to manage them.

If you are the spouse of a person in mid-life crisis, whatever gender you are, when things change there is that temptation to blame yourself and to start trying to figure out what you did wrong, what you lacked in, and what you could have done better. There is also an urge to hurl accusations and point the finger at your partner for causing all this hurt.

On the other hand, it is also possible that you want to convince yourself that it is all just a phase and may make the mistake of ignoring that there is really a serious situation that requires your attention.

Don’t give in to the temptation. Don’t jump to conclusions.

Instead, be proactive. Learn and listen more. Read this special report. Do all this so that you can have a better handle on the situation and discover ways to work through it.

We all know relationships are not perfect; couples encounter conflicts and issues all the time. In the same way, people are not perfect. At a certain point, you must realize that you have not always been fully present, loving or giving towards your partner. That’s not to take the blame for the midlife crisis, only to accept your culpability as a human being. It’s okay to be imperfect, in fact, it’s to be expected. But the first step forward is in recognizing and acknowledging imperfections and the roles each of us play in life as a step forward to healing issues.

Normally, these issues can be resolved or worked on – through awareness, communication, realization and even professional help. When a relationship is floundering under problems of conflict or relating styles, there are tools that can be used to turn things around.

But a mid-life crisis is a different animal. Unlike other common causes such as financial struggles, conflict or infidelity, a personal crisis really gives credence to the claim “It’s not you, it’s me,” making it harder to resolve. Much of it lies with the individual. And it requires great care, patience and even, tough love.
Mid Life Crisis – Top Symptoms

- Does your spouse say he/she is bored with life?
- Has your wife been saying that she needs to find herself/figure things out?
- Does your husband think about having or actually have had an affair?
- Has your wife withdrawn from you, been emotionally and sexually detached?
- Is your husband suddenly making major decisions about his career, lifestyle, or finances, without consulting you?
- Has your spouse started hanging out with new, single and younger friends? Has he/she withdrawn from significant relationships with old friends and acquaintances?
- Has your wife been avoiding spending time with you and the kids?
- Has your spouse changed their appearance drastically, started dressing or acting differently or made comments about wanting to?
- Does your wife say she feels empty and unhappy but does not know why?
- Has your partner said “I love you but I am no longer in love with you”?
- Has your husband started drinking, gambling, taking drugs or simply spending their time on a particular activity to the point of obsession?
- Is he or she depressed, restless, losing weight, sleeping less, or is more often morose or apathetic?
- Do they show or claim that they do not care what you think, feel or say?
- Does your wife blame you for the sacrifices she has made in her life? Does she say you have held her back and that it’s about time she became independent?
- Do they talk about wishing they could have lived their past life differently?
- Does your partner show that they don’t care about how you feel throughout all this?

If you answer yes to two or more of these questions, then it is highly possible that your partner is going through a mid-life crisis. What is most painful is that they don’t seem to care how you feel, only that they are unhappy with who they are and that they want to make some changes.

The thing is, a mid-life crisis involves more than just thoughts and emotions. Studies show that there is also a hormonal or physical component. As men and women mature, different hormones kick in. At a certain point, women’s menopause and men’s andropause can influence our emotions, behavior and judgment.
So, in a sense, it is difficult to control mid-life crisis. However, if you are fully aware of what is going on, it is possible for you to confront it objectively. If your partner is going through it, it is important for you to understand exactly what mid-life is doing to him or her.

A lot of new studies reveal just how different a mid-life crisis is for a man and a woman. Given that the triggers for a crisis are also different for each, it stands to argue that the symptoms for both, while some overlap, will also be different.

Here are the top symptoms of a mid-life crisis. In each one, I will describe under which gender they most apply while also illustrating the similarities as well as differences.

**Regret**

A person in mid-life crisis is bombarded with feelings of regret. Whatever happened to my lost youth? Why did not accomplish what I’ve set out to do? How has my life come to this? What did I give up?

The problem with regret is that sometimes, it can be a sign of denial. A person in mid-life crisis could have had all the opportunities in the past, their lives could have been as good if not as great as they had set them out to be. However, when regret sets in, all the good things that came before can be erased from their minds.

Then again, the person’s life may have really been not all they expected it to be. They may have sacrificed and suppressed a lot, just like many women, to get to this point.

A person who regrets will do two things. Either they will struggle against his or her present life – a common enough behavior for those in mid-life crisis – or they will dream about another life, to the point of daydreaming.

If your spouse is in mid-life crisis, listen to their common scripts – is there a lot of regret there? What did he or she believe they missed? Observe your partner’s behavior – is there a lot of struggling against the present? Do they daydream a lot?

Remember that many of these behaviors are really beyond your control.

**Identity Crisis**

Who am I? Am I really the wife/husband/partner/parent/boss/employee/job that they say I am?
Who was I before and who am I today?

Mid-life is a period of transition and often, related to feelings of regret are questions of WHO the person is.

For many individuals, identity is tied up with accomplishments, roles and even appearance.

When these things start changing…

When you no longer look like the person you once were…

When roles such as mom and lover start losing meaning – since the kids have left home or there is sexual inadequacy…

When you realize that your biological clock is ticking…

When you realize that you did not accomplish what you set out to do…

Who are you then?

Depression

When we go through personal transitions, we can’t help but do some form of reflection. We start looking at our lives asking ourselves where we did right and where we, sadly, did wrong.

For someone going through mid-life crisis, this personal evaluation can bring with it depression. If you listen to what your partner is saying – they feel overwhelmed, they feel lost, they feel confused – it is highly possible that he or she is depressed.

Now, there are individuals who are depressed because of a medical or hormonal condition. In a mid-life crisis, these can be present as well since menopause and andropause may be part of the equation.

All the more is the crisis confusing for a person in the midst of it. Aside from emotional and psychological upheavals, he or she has to contend with unexplained depression that could very well be caused by hormonal imbalances.

daydreaming, questioning the self, boredom, frantic energy, irritability, compulsive behavior, changes in sexual desire and changes in ambition
Escape

Since a person going through a mid-life crisis is assailed by all sorts of fears and anxieties, many of them desire to escape. The problem is, as they escape, they often feel the urge to abandon their past life and seek out something new.

This need for escape can also be seen as a need for reinvention, particularly for women in mid-life crisis.

However, not too many of these individuals actually understand why they feel like escaping and what they are really escaping from.

It is not a surprise that a man would tell his partner that he wants out, or wants a divorce, or at the very least a trial separation.

It is not surprising that a woman would ask for space to “figure herself out”.

All of these are part of the need to escape.

A partner caught unaware may feel the injustice of it all, especially when your partner starts saying that it will all be temporary and things will go back to the way they were, eventually.

Again, a person in crisis can’t seem to consider the feelings of the significant people in their lives. In their desire to escape, they do tend to become self-centered. Somehow, it is possible that they realize their words mean very little – to them and to their partner – and that the future is in fact uncertain. What is apparent is that they feel that they must go and these feelings are really beyond their control.

If managed well, however, escape does not have to be cause for destruction. Transformed into reinvention, a person in crisis and even, his or her significant others, can be presented with new options and opportunities. What’s important is that each one is aware that this is possible.

Blaming and Projecting

A lot of individuals who go through mid-life crisis blame it on their relationships – they suddenly believe that they’ve always been unhappy in their marriages and that they are trapped, catching their spouses by surprise.
This is more typically a case of selective perception. Since the mid-lifer is feeling a whole lot of discomfort now, then it is often assumed, rather incorrectly, that they must have been feeling this discomfort all along.

Even if someone in crisis is not aware of it, experts theorize that these mid-lifers behave this way so that they don’t have to confront themselves and take responsibility for their actions.

Do you find your partner rewriting history? Has he or she accused you of being the one to blame for what they are feeling? Do they claim that you are in denial or are confused? That you are out to “get them”?

Another way that blame manifests itself is through projection. A person in mid-life crisis will be suspicious, jealous, paranoid and accusatory. Experts claim that when a person in crisis does this, they are actually subconsciously revealing the things they feel about themselves.

**Personality Changes or Mood Swings**

Are you getting whiplash from your partner’s changing moods? Do they say sorry one time, only to accuse you the next?

For a person in mid-life crisis, mood swings bring about all sorts of confusing behavior.

You may start thinking that your partner has some sort of medical condition, such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. But, before you jump into these ideas to explain your partner’s behavior, a person in crisis does not necessarily have a medical condition.

Truthfully, some do change moods as fast as they change clothes, while others may take weeks. Whatever these moods are, they swing from anger to passivity and from one decision to another. They can even make your partner change their personality and outlook altogether.

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If your partner is going through a mid-life crisis, a majority, if not all of these characteristics will be present. In the next two segments, we will explore in detail two major symptoms that create the huge problems in a marriage where a mid-lifer is involved.

Now, we are not saying that your partner in crisis will go through all these symptoms. Or that they will experience them in the extreme. There are those, who still have the presence of mind to resist these feelings, especially those that go against their beliefs.
Someone I know couldn’t fathom being unfaithful to his wife, even if he couldn’t explain why the temptation was so strong to do so.

Another resisted the regret and depression by focusing on the positive.

Suffice it to say that these individuals managed their mid-life crisis quite well. However, there are those who plunge headlong into crisis without any filters, processing, or even resistance. It is these who sadly embody the stereotypical man in mid-life crisis mode of fast cars, fast girls and even faster lifestyle, or the stereotypical woman who reinvents herself through botox, a makeover, a toy boy, and leaves her family to “find herself.”
Mid-Life Crisis: Replay

Author Jim Conway describes a mid-life crisis as a slow progression that starts with the person starting to feel negative and confusing emotions. Then, they start denying that those feelings exist, progressing to anger, then avoidance.

Sound familiar?

Somehow, a mid-life crisis goes through almost the same stages as a grieving person would:

- denial
- anger
- avoidance
- bargaining
- acceptance

It’s understandable, in a way, since mid-life can signal grief over the end of the old and start of the new.

The difference is that a mid-life crisis is characterized by a “replay stage” – this is where these negative feelings actually become a full-blown crisis.

According to one expert, in male mid-life crisis, the Replay Stage can be likened to one big bachelor party. This is where a man in mid-life looks back at his youth and tries to hold on to it just a little bit longer. Confronted by the reality of ageing, retirement, or simply boredom, a man in full-blown crisis can’t help but be attracted to the fun, freedom and fantasy that revisiting his youth have to offer.

Like a teenager, he will want to test the boundaries; after all, the risks he is taking actually make him feel alive and wanted. The thing is, with his behavior, he leaves behind a life that took years to build and that expects him to be the person he once was.

It is at this stage where most partners discover that there is something wrong. After all, at this stage, a man is going back to the gym, pursuing younger women, drinking, going out with friends and buying that new sports car. It is no wonder that a partner who tries to stop this behavior turns out to be the “villain.”

At this stage though, a male mid-lifer often thinks that it is all too late and that he is already having too much fun. Only until he realizes that he is really not finding happiness this way can there be hope for your man to turn himself around.
For a woman going through mid-life crisis, this stage signals a lot of regret – that her life has not turned out the way she wanted, that she had sacrificed a lot, that her biological clock is ticking, that she had failed to have the kids she wanted or that she had too many.

Like men, women in this stage can also be tempted to escape, go out with a fast crowd or even have an affair.

Some, on the other hand, force the issue of adopting or having a baby and others withdraw from the family they already have. Many husbands report that their wives in crisis avoid spending time with the kids, even when she was a great mother before.

For a person in mid-life crisis, the goal is to come to some form of acceptance. They need to understand what they are going through.

However, it is not up to YOU to force that realization on your partner. A lot of this depends on him or her. A person going through a midlife crisis is going through a lot of internal changes.

On one hand, they can see these changes as an opportunity for growth. If your partner is enlightened in some way, he or she can look at these changes from a healthy perspective, making it easier for them to manage mid-life.

However, if they are not the type who can look deep inside themselves and work through their feelings, expect a bumpy ride from here on out.
Mid-life Crisis and Infidelity

Because a mid-life crisis carries with it a lot of feelings of confusion, low self-worth and questions of identity, it is no wonder that many men and women often become unfaithful to their spouse. Somehow, in spite of the life they have built, there is now a void there aching to be filled. And a person in mid-life crisis assumes that the void can be filled by someone or something else.

It is highly possible that the mid-lifer feels that they sacrificed a lot for their marriage or existing relationship. He or she may be feeling neglected or unappreciated. They may also be feeling as if their life is a dead end and that something new may just give them that kick start they have been so desperate to feel.

What does a person in mid-life crisis find in an affair? Well, contrary to what you might think, it is neither the affair nor the sex.

When a woman or man discovers their spouse is having an affair, they can be very quick to assume that the problem is the affair itself – or that he or she’s just plain selfish and immoral.

In a mid-life crisis, there is another motivation to infidelity: the attention, appreciation and validation that a mid-lifer feels they are not getting in their real life.

He or she craves that feeling of being special, wanted and admired.

Since a mid-life crisis is a crisis of identity, a person in crisis is looking for other ways to validate who they are or who they want to be – because, if you get down to it, they actually no longer have any idea.

One expert puts it this way:

“The person he/she has been is not working out; they may feel like a failure having failed to achieve his/her goals, disappointed in the goals they made and achieved or like an imposter having achieved beyond his/her dreams and status. They may feel stuck at the bottom, lost in the middle or lonely at the top.” (From http://www.midlifecrisismarriageadvocate.com)

The problem is that a person in mid-life crisis only sees the surface. He or she claims that they are unhappy and hence, an affair may be able to give them happiness. They assume that the unhappiness is caused by their existing life. But this will only camouflage what is really happening, that they are simply not fully aware of what is happening to them and where the negative feelings are coming from. They jump to all sorts of conclusions in trying to find a way out of the confusion. Confusion
and unhappiness leading to infidelity means a lot of conflict and tension in the existing relationship. No wonder that it is at this stage where many marriages suffer and fail.

Unfortunately, infidelity is quite common during a mid-life crisis. Many have affairs even while still living with their partners. Many separate or divorce due to the affair. As a consequence, a lot of second marriages happen during mid-life.

For many, the advice is this: Don’t think that catching your partner cheating will cause them enough remorse to end the affair and go back to you. Remember, you cannot change the way your spouse’s crisis is going.

Hence, don’t expect that they will change, even if caught cheating.

For many, it may even validate for them that there is a problem and thus, they really need to get out. It gives your spouse or partner an excuse to break free.

If your spouse digs their heels in and even starts defending their affair, don’t be surprised.

Affairs during a mid-life crisis are often accompanied by a lack of guilt, remorse and an all-around moral compass. Their favorite line? “I don’t love you anymore, I love him/her.”

What I am saying here is not meant to scare you or make you lose hope. For many of you reading this, your partner may not yet be at that point where they throw caution to the wind and insist on pursuing an affair, no matter how painful to you and your children.

At best, your partner may just be entertaining the idea of an affair, moving out of your home or even considering whether they still love you or not.

Whatever stage he or she is in, what we seek to do here is to expose to you the reality of self-doubt and cheating during a mid-life crisis.

You may be tempted to ask yourself: what does their lover give them that I am not? If you’ve gone to counseling, you may have heard your counselor ask you YOUR contribution to the crisis in your relationship.

While this is valid in certain aspects, in a mid-life crisis, a lot of these feelings of being neglected stem from the person themselves, often without you having done “anything” to cause those feelings.

If you try to dig deep inside yourself to find just where you’ve been lacking towards your spouse, you may be met with feelings of guilt and uselessness that shouldn’t be there in the first place!
Are you doing or have you done something wrong? Maybe.

**But, at this point, your willingness to find out more indicates a desire to make things better.** You have taken the first step to confront this issue productively. Whatever problems you may have had in your marriage, the point is you are not perfect and you will not fulfill every need your partner has.

What you are doing now is being proactive. However, if your partner is really going through a mid-life crisis, you will discover that he or she may be unwilling to accept or even acknowledge that you are doing something right, right now.

Rather than ask what you lack, ask what your partner sees in the other person that validates something lacking in your partner.

The negative feelings your partner is going through, their search for a new sense of identity – these can point out character traits that they find lacking in themselves. An affair may be a way for your partner to build themselves up and feel that they are still worth something.

It’s the wrong way to go about it, surely, but because it’s a stage of “me, myself, and I”, someone in a mid-life crisis is only out to make themselves feel better.

In a nutshell, why does a person in crisis resort to infidelity? Well, truthfully, their reality is no longer cutting it for them. There is something now missing in them that seeks escape and fantasy and your partner may seem to think they will see it in someone else.
Surviving Your Spouse’s Midlife Crisis

How then do you survive your partner’s mid-life crisis? Is there anything you can do to change, force, bribe, or manipulate them to change?

The answer is NO.

Whether your spouse is able to manage their mid-life crisis well, or destroy everything in their path, they will go through changes.

Don’t be surprised when these changes confuse you, stress you out and make you want to help your spouse.

Right now, you may be afraid for your relationship and rightly so. Mid-life crisis is no joke. It can spell the end of your marriage or it can change things 180 degrees.

What you need to be is prepared.

This next segment gives you valuable tips on how to survive your spouse’s mid-life crisis. Notice that it’s not about solving this crisis but weathering it.

Think of it this way: only your spouse can solve their crisis. But that in itself is going to take time, patience and a lot of self-awareness.

What you can do is to learn how you can find a way through their crisis for your own peace of mind. *It doesn’t have to cost you too much emotionally.*

If your spouse is going through a midlife crisis, is having an affair, or has asked for a divorce, you are most likely under a lot of stress. You may be feeling as if you are losing control and are uncertain how to respond. You may be thinking that the usual solutions may help: counseling, communication, confrontation.

However, while they can give you valuable tools in other scenarios, you may find that the usual methods hardly make a dent. During a mid-life crisis, your partner will be resistant to counseling, will resent your desire for communication and will definitely avoid confrontation.

You need to know this: nothing you do or say will make your partner “snap out of it.” What you need is to focus on you. You need to strengthen yourself and maintain your personal stability.

To be honest, there is that great possibility that your relationship may not survive. But this doesn’t mean that you should lose hope. Transformation happens and people surmount trials on a daily
basis.

The question is, are you going to let the stress rule your life? Whether you get your partner back or not, ask yourself how will you choose to live? Positively or negatively?

Here are some ways you can survive your spouse’s life crisis, that keep you in control of your life and that maintain your peace of mind:

1. **Focus on yourself and your children.**

You need to accept the fact that you cannot control your spouse.

You cannot second guess them.

You cannot stop them from behaving the way they do.

And you definitely cannot force them to love you again and “snap out of it.”

Fixating on each and every behavior your partner exhibits will definitely not help. It will only make you feel depressed, unwanted and frustrated.

What you still have is yourself. You are capable of controlling your reactions to your partner and to go about making a dignified and peaceful life for yourself and your kids, no matter how your partner is behaving right now.

Focus on the things you can control. It will be good for you and good for your children (if you have any).

Since their father or mother is setting a bad example, it is up to you to balance that by showing them what it means to be a mature, self-controlled and upright individual.

It’s not going to be easy but it’s not impossible.

You have every opportunity to do what’s best for you, to excel at your work, to be the greatest mom or dad you can be.

Fill your days with activities that make you happy. Take your kids out and support them at their own pursuits.

You and your children don’t have to be victims of your partner’s crisis. You can surmount this
with your own fortitude, strength of character and acute awareness of what exactly is going on.

Focusing on you also means making personal changes if necessary. If you discover personal issues that have come to the surface due to this crisis, get help for them.

It will do your spouse no good if you too are falling apart due to their crisis.

Go to counseling. Get therapy. Find a support group. Do what you can to strengthen yourself and to grow, in spite of what you are going through.

2. Choose what is right.

A mid-life crisis can go to extremes. It can lead to great pain, violence and even financial ruin.

You need to be aware that you have choices through all this.

What are some of the RIGHT things you can do?

First, rather than hang on to your partner, you CAN stand up to the situation and choose the path that will be most beneficial to you, even if it means separation or divorce.

However, whatever happens, you DON’T have to be driven out of your own home. If your partner wants to leave, let him or her do so. The right thing for you to do is to stand your ground and not to disrupt your children’s lives.

Think of it this way, it will be unhealthy for you and your family to live in an unbearable situation. You don’t have to sacrifice your health, dignity and peace of mind just to “keep the peace.”

Disabuse yourself or any deeply-held notions about sticking by your husband or wife and sacrificing yourself. What you are doing is making yourself and your kids out to be victims.

If you choose to stay with your spouse in spite of his or her behavior, at the very least you need to be aware that you are doing so because of a conscious, mature and objective decision.

However, you also have to be aware that if you condone your partner’s behavior, you may never get out of this situation and your kids may repeat the patterns later on in life.

What will you do then? Empower yourself and your kids to do the right thing or suffer in silence?
Weigh your options. Choose what is right. It’s ok.

3. Your ATTITUDE matters.

There are three attitudinal changes you can adapt during this time.

First, you need to accept the reality of what is happening – and the reality that you may need to make painful decisions. Stop thinking about all the things you can do to attract your spouse again. Instead, shift your perspective into acknowledging that there is a possibility of losing them. In acknowledging the one thing you fear most, you are able to empower yourself to work towards loving your partner and moving toward maximizing your chances of a positive outcome.

Accept that change will not happen overnight and that things don’t always go according to your schedule.

Secondly, patience is key. If you can, wait out your spouse’s mid-life crisis in the hope that you can support them through this period of flux. Take things one day at a time. Don’t expect quick and easy solutions. A mid-life crisis takes years to develop and resolve so if you’re willing to wait out your husband or wife, it will take a lot of patience. If you are able to stand by them, even in their weakest moments, your support may be the one thing that pulls your marriage through.

Patience, however, doesn’t mean submission. Patience can be proactive. You need to have the fortitude to do things that are productive for you, your spouse and your children. As we advised in #2, do what you can to make your life full, happy and peaceful – including going to counseling, reading books, and spending time doing things that you enjoy.

Third, you also will be feeling negative emotions of your own. You will be angry, resentful and disappointed at your partner.

Acknowledge that you will make mistakes. Remember, this is not just about what is happening right now – it’s about what you can make happen for the rest of your life.

Find appropriate venues that will help you work through your negative emotions. If you’re angry, you can release that anger through self-defense classes, exercise, sports, or other contact activities. If you’re depressed, seek help through friends, social support groups, your church, or a counselor.

Most of all, be strong.
4. Now’s NOT the time to confront your spouse, or talk about your relationship.

If your partner is going through a mid-life crisis, then he or she can be irrational, unmanageable, volatile and confusing. Do you honestly expect you can engage them in a reasonable conversation or confront them about his behavior?

Engaging them in conversation and reasoning may not deliver the outcome you expect.

Even if you may have had wonderful communication in the past, things have changed. Don’t expect that things will be the same as before.

Your spouse may not be in a position where they are able to care about how you feel, what you say and how angry you are. Conflict, confrontation, or even plain communication may only cause them to withdraw from you, resent you or even be vindictive towards you.

Telling them you love them and want to be with them may help clarify things once but repeating them over and over will only cause your partner to be irritated with you. Remember, it’s not your marriage that’s causing this. It is a casualty of the negative things your partner is going through right now.

The best thing you can do is to apply advice 1 to 3. Get a life for yourself outside of the relationship, through immersing yourself in hobbies, interests, and the support of friends and family. Stop engaging your spouse in conversation, seeking validation that they still love you. Understand what it takes to make yourself happy and work with that.

You may be surprised that your spouse may even begin to wonder why you’re no longer paying attention to them as you explore the world outside the midlife crisis.

5. Set boundaries.

When a partner is going through a mid-life crisis, it’s very easy for the other partner to start spewing invectives and judging the other’s behavior as immoral or just plain wrong.

Rather than struggling with the rightness or wrongness of your spouse’s crisis behavior, relieve yourself of the stress by acknowledging that there may be nothing you can do stop him or her from behaving this way. He will be selfish. They will be irrational. They will want to live like a
free-wheeling, fun-loving bachelor or bachelorette.

**Set clear boundaries with yourself – that you will maintain some emotional distance from the everyday vagaries of their crisis and not allow it to become too much your problem.**

Where possible, allow yourself to not be stressed by their behavior.

Remember, you cannot control the way they act, but you can control the way you choose to react to what is happening around you.

**Set clear boundaries with your partner to what you will and will not accept.**

All decisions have consequences, and if there are any behaviors that you find intolerable, you must make your partner aware of any subsequent choices you plan to make in reaction. Be firm and be particular about such things as sexual contact with others, sexually transmitted diseases, drug or substance abuse, consultation on large financial commitments, embarrassing you in front of others, or causing your kids confusion and pain. Even if they are going through a difficult time, there are limits to what you will tolerate.

Contrary to what you may think, you DON’T have to know about:

- all the details of what they are doing at all times
- who they are doing it with

And just because they are unhappy and unfulfilled, you DON’T have to be sucked down to their level.

Instead, you can maintain your dignity by clearly and calmly saying that while you disagree with their behavior, you would like to emphasize that you will do what you can to make your life as peaceful and productive as possible.

6. **You don’t have to close yourself off fully, you can LISTEN.**

This piece of advice is very important, especially for husbands whose wives are going through crisis.

Your partner may have a lot of complaints – about their lives, about themselves, about you, about your relationship. In the middle of all that is a kernel of truth. Learn to listen and read between
the lines.

What are their complaints saying about you? About your marriage? More importantly, what are their complaints saying about what they see lacking IN THEMSELVES?

In terms of face to face discussion, if your partner still wants to initiate communication with you, there is nothing stopping you from listening.

Learn to practice ACTIVE LISTENING. These means you hear out your partner without passing judgment.

Your partner may want to unburden themselves of feelings of loss, despair and frustration. Resist every urge to give advice or even try to fix things. Just listen.

Expect that your partner may be irrational and may say crazy things. It may even be impossible to keep their attention during the conversation. Rather than point out what they are doing wrong, detach yourself emotionally and be objective.

Don’t press them for answers or to make them try to listen to your perspective. Remember that your partner needs to figure out their own crisis.

7. Get help.

Needless to say your spouse will need to go to counseling or therapy to work through his or her mid-life crisis. But don’t expect that to happen easily, if at all.

Instead, go to counseling yourself.

You will need someone to talk to, to process your own emotions and manage your frustration. A trained professional can help you work on the issues in your own life that may be hindering you from confronting your partner’s mid-life crisis in an appropriate manner.

A therapist can also give you new insights into what your partner is going through and provide you with the tools, methods and approaches you can use to help your partner through their crisis.

If your own therapy proves beneficial to you, at the very least you are giving your spouse some form of inspiration to pursue counseling for himself or herself.

Even if your partner does not indicate that he or she wants a divorce, get the best legal help
you can find so that you can protect yourself and your kids.

This is particularly important if your partner is acting out through infidelity, self-destructiveness or emotional/verbal abuse.

A good lawyer or solicitor can advise you of your rights and obligations in cases like these and help you plan an effective countersuit if your spouse does file for divorce.

8. If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.

If your partner is willing, join him.

Your partner will want to go out, have fun and try new things. If their crisis is just starting out, you have every opportunity to keep them grounded by being there for them throughout.

Be present.

Where possible, you should join them in their new activities. It might be something new you can experience together. It might even be fun!

This is particularly important in a crisis where a woman wants to reinvent herself. Your support of her newfound zest for change may be influential in keeping your marriage together.

You know by now that it is not the behavior that is the real problem but the fears and anxieties behind them. If you can show your spouse that you are willing to be in this with them, you may still catch the crisis while it’s early. Your spouse will feel less alone and less compelled to escape. Or, even if they are feeling these things, he or she knows that they can rely on you to be there for them.

9. Reassure your spouse and focus on the positives.

Your partner needs to be reminded that there have been and are so many good things in your present life. However, you don’t need to shove these down their throat at every turn.

By being a good example yourself, by being above reproach, by being reassuring and supportive, you can show your spouse that you are still in this for the long haul.
On the other hand, it may be difficult for you to see the positives in this situation. For what it’s worth, TRY.

Change your perspective and stop struggling against your spouse’s behavior. Appreciate them for who they are today and not who you wish they were.

Reassure your partner that you will still love him or her no matter what changes he or she is facing.

Your partner wants to feel validated. Even if you feel strongly against what he or she is doing, short of cheating on you, try to see things from their perspective. Think of his pursuit of youth as their way of recapturing life.

Don’t ridicule or belittle what they are feeling and what they are doing about it. Instead, observe and understand. Don’t try to stifle them or control them. If your partner asks for your suggestions, then take the opportunity to communicate your love and support.

If your spouse is open to constructive criticism, you should know your partner well enough to know how well they will take it.

Now, your wife or husband may be resistant to praise and may even say that you are being fake, or that you are doing these things to woo them.

Ignore these comments. Learn to back off when necessary but it doesn’t mean that you can’t be a silent presence behind your spouse.

10. **It will never be the same.**

Whatever happens, even if you are patient enough to wait out your partner’s crisis, remember that it will never be the same.

Don’t expect it to be the same relationship you once had.

Don’t expect your partner to be the same as before.

This stage is characterized by change. Expect that change will be the outcome.

Even you will have changed by the time this is over.

Weathering this crisis depends on your ability to understand and accept this change.
Finally...

No matter what your partner says and no matter what you think about what you have read here, having a mid-life crisis is never an excuse to behave badly. Or, more importantly, to treat you badly.

Each person’s behavior has consequences. Your partner is no different. You cannot shield your spouse from the consequences of their behavior, even if it means losing you, your kids and the life they have built. You simply have to love them.

This may be a painful but it’s true.

Keep your self-respect, maintain your dignity and manage the things that are within your control. This is the only way for you to survive your partner’s mid-life crisis.

The good news is that there are relationships that pull through. Statistics show that 80% of marriages survive a crisis, whether it is mid-life related or not.

You just have to accept that nothing is perfect in this world. Every crisis is the opportunity to learn and grow as an individual and as a couple as well.

Your marriage is not immune to change, and the test of a successful marriage is one that both partners are able to meet and adapt to the challenges that are presented. The same goes for your expectations of the relationship and your spouse. Everything exists in a constant state of change. The sooner you can accept that, the easier it will be for you to sail through life with maturity and grace.

Think of your relationship with your partner this way – it’s a journey. It’s a series of changes and stops along the way.

But, just like in any journey, you have to be aware of the end. At a certain point, you have to be aware that there may be better opportunities for you out there, away from your spouse who no longer wants anything to do with you. Learn to let go when the situation calls for it.

Then again, there are those who have separated for a time only to find their way back to each other again – as mature, healed and more self-aware individuals.

Remember, you don’t have to sit back and watch but you don’t have to struggle against your partner’s mid-life crisis either. Find a balance you can be happy with – one that enables you to keep your peace of mind.
Your priority at this time, contrary to what you may think, is yourself and your kids, if any.

You can’t make your partner stop feeling unfulfilled with their life. It’s about perspective and process, all of which will change from day to week to month. Don’t make the mistake of nagging, whining, forcing your loved one to see it your way, or to make choices for them.

What is happening to your partner does not depend on you. You are not to blame, nor are you the key to their healing. However, what you can do is to be a good example and to realize that whatever you do or say can somehow influence the choices they may be about to make.

**The best you can be is an INSPIRATION – to your partner and to your kids.**

If they continue to do what they want then you would have done your part.

It’s not going to be easy to watch your partner go through this crisis. There will be a lot of testing on your part. This is why you need to strengthen yourself and focus on your needs.

The good thing that can come out of this is for you to rediscover yourself – to find your voice, your strength and the myriad of opportunities you still have – with or without your partner.