



In the eponymous words of Cher - "If I could turn back time..."

How to understand and survive your partner's mid-life crisis.

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You've been married for double digit years, had your kids, finally reached financial stability and are looking forward to the next stage of the relationship life-cycle – enjoying life as a couple without the stress and distraction of bringing up ankle biters.

Seemingly, your life is comfortable and you feel secure and content.

Then you wake up one morning to the realisation that your partner doesn't love you – anymore. The truth hits you like a hammer blow to the chest, leaving you distraught, reeling from the reality and reaching for the Prozac. It's natural and instinctive to feel outrage for the suffering spouse, but give a moment's thought to what the other person may be going through in order to feel unhappy with his lot.

For the purposes of this blog, I will refer to the put upon spouse as 'she' and the mid-life spouse as 'he'. Statistics also point to more men suffering some form of mid-life crisis than women and this may simply be a reflection of the fact that women are more self-aware and have an incredibly supportive network of girl friends with whom to share angst and a box of tissues. Sure men have the lads, but the dynamics of these groups are very different and quite often it's seen as being 'soft' and 'weak' to talk about feelings and emotions.

There lies the crux of the problem.

Men who have grown up with the Horatio Alger myth who were taught to worship money and success, be good providers and responsible husbands; they had great ambitions for the future and even greater expectations. Crafted into a rigid male mould from an early age, to keep a stiff upper lip, being channelled into the path of duty and achievement, and denied the opportunity to be spontaneous and free. Well put like that, can you blame him for approaching his mid-life years feeling more than slightly miffed that following the rules hasn't led him to the promised land? In fact, it's left him feeling angry, resentful and desperately looking around for quick fixes to make him feel better; perhaps a new sports car, an updated and wholly inappropriate wardrobe which has left your teenagers running for cover, or simply wanting to regress back to his carefree, youthful days.

The important point here is that it's NOT YOUR FAULT. This is the culmination of years of social conditioning by his parents, peers, society, the media and stereotyping. The signs were probably there through the year's but as with all simmering pans, you don't pay attention to it until it boils over.

So what can you do to support your partner and survive the maelstrom?

- **Be supportive but not directive.** Only he knows what he's going through. Unless you can place yourself inside his head, don't even try to think you understand. Offering platitudes will only serve to make the situation worse. For example, if he wants to change career path, sit down and discuss how not why.
- **Be proactive not reactive.** For the first time in his life, your partner will be going through a period of self-analysis and introspection. You may not be happy with the change in behaviour and personality that follows but you'll have to accept that this is a natural and necessary process that he needs to follow in order to come to terms with his dissatisfaction and his own solutions.
- **Think Win/Win.** The best solutions are those where everyone wins, not where one person wins over another. If your partner suddenly decides he 'wants a life of his own' and as long as this doesn't compromise on the fundamental values and principles of your relationship, discuss with him how you could help him to have the time and space to follow his own interests whilst still keeping an active and healthy relationship with his spouse and children.
- **Think first to understand and then to be understood.** Unless you truly understand what is driving your partner's unhappiness and his unique situation and feelings, how can you possibly support or counsel him?
- **Don't be tempted to play chess.** No matter how justified you feel or aggrieved, don't use children or other people as pawns. It's not fair or helpful and ultimately will damage your reputation and the relationship you're trying to save.

- ***Be kind to yourself.*** Support yourself physically, emotionally and mentally. You'll be no good to him, your children or anyone else affected, if you don't look after yourself.

Of course, some of you reading this will be way beyond salvaging and supporting your mid-life male and for you it's more about accepting and moving on. These principles apply equally to that situation as well.

For the rest of you nip it in the bud I say ! Grab your baby boys, toddlers and pre-pubescent; encourage them to acknowledge and embrace their feminine side, to be more self-aware and most of all – throw out those stereotypical manifestations of all that is male and bring up your little boys as well balanced, rounded individuals with no hang ups and a boulder on their shoulder. Your future daughter-in-law will thank you for it!