

January is ‘divorce month’ — a lawyer breaks down the top signs a marriage is about to dissolve

By Emmie Martin

It’s divorce season.

The antithesis to December’s engagement season, divorce filings begin to spike in January, peaking in February and March.

But it’s not the gloomy weather that does couples in. It’s the post-holiday jolt back to reality that has them questioning their future together.

“What I find is that most people in December want to get through the holidays. Nobody wants a divorce summons put into their stocking,” Jacqueline Newman, a managing partner at a top New York City divorce law firm, told Business Insider.

But once the holiday glow has waned and spouses settle back into old habits, many people flock to Newman’s office to get a better idea of what a divorce would look like. She calls it “keeping your options open” month.

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a position to make an educated decision,” Newman says. “They come in and they say, ‘What would happen with my kids? What would it look like financially?’ It’s the information-gathering stage.”

From there, clients are able to digest the practical sides of a split, and many return in February and March ready to commit to the decision. But not every person who consults an attorney ends up actually filing for divorce.

“One of the first questions I ask clients is, ‘Are you sure you want to get divorced?’” Newman says. “Because I suggest trying everything you can before you come into my office because you never want to look back. Divorce is financially expensive, emotionally expensive, and you have to make sure that this is exactly the choice that you want to make.”

Though the numbers look different for every couple, divorce typically costs between \$15,000 and \$20,000 — not too far away from the \$32,000 price tag of the average wedding.

So how can you tell if you and your partner are on the precipice of a permanent split?

While there are no hard and fast rules — by no means do any of these indicators guarantee you’re destined for divorce — there are a few signs that could indicate you’re in troubled

waters.

YOU STOP TALKING

Newman often sees clients who have experienced a complete breakdown in communication. Spouses stop sharing their issues, let alone talk them through.

“It gets to a point where you’re not speaking anymore, and then you start to not care that you’re not speaking anymore,” she says. “Or one person cares and they get angry about it and the other person doesn’t want to deal with the anger because they’re exhausted or they have their own anger issues. That will lead to ultimately indifference.”

YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF MARRIAGE AREN’T MET

Failed expectations of what marriage should like can leave spouses feeling unhappy or unfulfilled, a trend that especially holds true for men, in Newman’s experience. “It doesn’t pan out the way they want,” she says.

For example, after kids come into play, oftentimes one parent will want to stay home to take care of them, leaving the other parent as the sole breadwinner. While the money-earning spouse is under pressure to support the family themselves, the one who stays home feels the stress of raising kids and managing the household. This change in dynamic can cause

both partners to lose sight of where the other is coming from.

“It gets into this whole terrible cycle when their expectations aren’t met and that leads to the breakdown,” Newman says. “The factors definitely feed into each other, and they end up in my office.”

YOU’RE FIGHTING OVER MONEY

“Money is one of the top reasons people argue over things,” Stanley Corey, a certified financial planner and managing director at United Capital in Great Falls, Virginia, told Business Insider.

If one spouse hiding money, making large purchases without discussing it with their partner, or buying things that don’t benefit the marriage, such as a boat or a new car, it leads to distrust and tension. Overspending and taking on debt can also put stress on a marriage, Corey says.

“It comes down to the breaking of trust,” Corey explains. “If you’re carrying a lot of debt, it creates a lot of anxiety. Money is a very emotional issue.”

BOTTOM LINE

Divorce isn’t a decision to be taken lightly. It’s important to think through the practical aspects of it and not jump into any decisions purely out of emotion.

“As much as you feel like someone’s not contributing to your marriage, there’s an element of them contributing,” Newman says. “Not to say that that’s enough that you should stay married, but you have to really weigh in what it’s going to look like.”

Newman recommends therapy and counseling to any couple considering a divorce — not only is it cheaper, but it can potentially spare you the emotional cost as well. ■