

Breaking up is so hard to do



It is hard to escape the sense of upheaval involved in the break-up of any relationship. But the experience can be even more traumatic if you are on a foreign posting. In her regular Expatica column, Cultural Clues, Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich responds to a request she received over the phone about what to do when a partner wants a divorce.

"Hilly, I am one of your readers and I just had to phone," the caller said. "I need help for a friend of mine.

"She has just been informed by her husband that he wants a divorce, and that he is not coming back. They are here on an assignment. Help, what to do?"



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Now of course I know my limitations: I am no marriage counsellor. So I just tried to scramble my thoughts together on the spot to assist there and then. But then I thought, this may be useful for others who find themselves in a similar situations.

First, here is some practical information:

Although the couple is assigned to Germany, the relevant court will be in their home country.

So in the meantime, a consultation with a lawyer specialising in international law can be beneficial. These addresses can be obtained by calling your embassy or consulate.

But that is when really all is lost. You have to ask yourself whether anything can be done to save the relationship.

Now, trying to get both partners to consent to a counselling is like asking for a miracle. But if at least one of them is willing to go, it will help to gain a perspective on what is happening - a neutral voice amid the many partial voices of good-willing friends.

It was mentioned in the conversation that the husband works for an American company. Nowadays many international companies offer EAP services. EAP stands for Employee Assistance Programs, where counselling services are offered. They are normally free of charge and fully confidential. This could be an in-house service or, as in most cases, an external specialist. This is a service made available to all staff and in particular to their expatriate employees.

But why do foreign postings cause such pressure on relationships?

Relocating abroad can cause all kind of stress in our daily life. This includes in the workplace as well as in our relationships. The result is that many a marriage takes a battering.

For trailing spouses who have given up their career or their local community, the expat life can come at a price. They can sacrifice their self image. They can experience a sense that their independence is crumbling and that their status over time has been traded in against the attributed identity of being a dependant.

Strong words? You will find even more candid talk about the stress on relationships created by children, careers, money, sex, and the international life in a book by Robin Pascoe called

A Moveable Marriage: Relocate Your Relationship without Breaking It. You can find info about at www.expertexpert.com.

In addition it is worth noting that some providers who offer worldwide EAP services. They can be found at:

www.FGIworld.com

www.icasgroup.com

www.fps.de

The more advanced global providers will have 0800 toll free number to ring and operate a manned 24/7 hotline to answer any burning issues, including offering face-to-face counselling services on location on all family matters. This ranges from substance abuse though to marriage counselling.

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Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich is managing partner of CONSULTus. Her website is www.Consultus.net. She reserves the right to decide which questions she considers relevant for her column. She will, however, not answer any questions dealing with tax or legal matters.