

Creating a happy marriage is possible and this site is dedicated to providing resources to help couples who want to stay together. By providing information about qualified marriage counseling, we hope to encourage couples to get the help they need. The site also features articles, other websites, books, and workshops which offer the tools needed to create happy, lasting marriages.



## Dealing with Relocation Issues

*Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.*

*Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at [Rosen.com](http://Rosen.com).*

*This is Stay Happily Married for March 24, 2008, "Dealing With Relocation Issues."*

- 
- Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen, I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm here with Amanda Hardenbrook, a licensed professional counselor who practices in the Raleigh, North Carolina area. Welcome, Amanda.
- Amanda Hardenbrook: Thank you so much for having me.
- Lee Rosen: Now Amanda received her Master's degree in community counseling from UNC-Greensborough, and she's a licensed professional counselor, as well as a nationally certified counselor. And we're very fortunate to have Amanda helping a lot of our clients at Rosen Law Firm that are going through the divorce process. And Amanda, you are in private practice, and I just want to -- before we even get started I want people that want to write this down -- because I'm guessing some people are going to want to talk with you after they listen to your advice. You can be reached at (919) 946-3853, right?
- Amanda Hardenbrook: That is correct.
- Lee Rosen: Well, I am just so thrilled to have you with us today, to talk about relocation. I can tell you in our practice of divorce law, it is very, very common for someone to call us up and say, "Well, we just moved to the area, and now we need a divorce lawyer." And I get the sense that relocation just really puts tremendous stress on a marriage.

Amanda Hardenbrook: It is a whole lot of tension for a couple to have to work through, and so it seems pretty logical to me that you would be getting a lot of those calls. Sometimes the result was not as joint as people think it was, and oftentimes one partner was really pushing for it while the other was sort of going along. And then other times both partners were very happy to do it, and then when it comes right down to it, one partner is miserable.

Lee Rosen: Oh, so they get here and they realize, "Well gosh, this wasn't everything I'd dreamed it would be."

Amanda Hardenbrook: Exactly. That is so often the case.

Lee Rosen: Do you feel like people -- like you'll sit down and you'll have a serious conversation with your spouse about, "Hey, should we take this job," or -- and they act like they're okay with it and they're not, or have they not thought it through, or what's going on there?

Amanda Hardenbrook: Well sometimes it can seem like a good idea. Sometimes the place where a couple is originally located, the job economy may not be great, the school system may not be great, there might be a whole lot of reasons that relocation might seem like a great idea. However, very often we forget about some of the very positive things that are happening in an area, such as the natural supports we might have, family, friends; church, if we go to church. There are a lot of things that are actually helping us that we don't always give credit to. So sometimes we think we're making a great decision, and then actually we get there and, "Uh-oh." I feel the person can just feel very lost.

Lee Rosen: Well now, I have read that relocation is one of the three most stressful experiences for people, is that true?

Amanda Hardenbrook: I would believe that. I don't know the statistics, but I would believe that.

Lee Rosen: Right. It is an inordinate number of people that call us up and tell that story about having just moved to the area. We have to become experts on how you establish residency and how long it takes, because so many clients are brand new to the area.

**Amanda Hardenbrook:** Exactly. And it's just huge -- very often too I think that sometimes people feel like if their marriage was not great where they were, I think sometimes people feel like, "Well, maybe a new beginning is going to be what it takes to really give our marriage new life." And then, in fact, it is a stressful event for anyone, whether you're married or not. And so just add that stress to what maybe was already a shaky relationship, and it's not actually usually very helpful.

**Lee Rosen:** Let's assume we're just thinking about taking that new job, or moving to that new area. We haven't done it yet. Is there a way to have that conversation, and actually have it work, so that -- are we able to be better at predicting what's going to work and what's not going to work, so that we don't make these decisions in the first place?

**Amanda Hardenbrook:** Well, I think that we can try. I think that it's really important to have great communication with your partner, and that takes some work. You have to be willing to sit down and be honest with yourself and not say what you just think maybe your partner would like to hear, or maybe what even sounds like it would be easiest. You have to be willing to say, "I have some fears," or, "I have some concerns around this," and then you can talk about them, and you can brainstorm about whether or not this is going to be helpful for your marriage long term, or whether or not the strain is going to be too much initially.

Also, I think that you can be very prosaic about it and very pragmatic. Lists are wonderful to me and there are some very common factors that you would want to think about as you do your list of pros and cons. You want to think about whether or not the school system -- if you have children the school systems are important, and how they compare to the ones where you're at. You want to think about, if church is important to you, what is the sort of religious community like where you would be moving to? If the job market is important to you, if you'll be looking for a job as well, you'll definitely want to investigate what sort of career opportunities for the spouse who is moving along with the partner, who might be taking a new job.

So just the housing market, what size of a house are you going to be able to get? What kind of location are you looking for? And those are some very concrete things that you can be thinking about. And then you add on to that, can we be willing to talk about this? If I'm scared and nervous, is my

partner willing to hear that? And that's actually a very good predictor about if you can get support, emotional support, before you move, you might be better able to count on having emotional support after you move.

Lee Rosen: I guess that also tells you a little about how your relationship is going.

Amanda Hardenbrook: Absolutely. If you can have that talk, that's pretty significant.

Lee Rosen: Is it safe to assume that when people have moved here, or relocated, and things are not going so well, do they generally assume that it's the move? Is one spouse walking around saying, "I hate it here," or does it pop out in a lot of other ways.

Amanda Hardenbrook: I think it pops out in a lot of other ways. One spouse might be saying, "I hate it here," and they may even be blaming their spouse for why they hate it here, but usually it pops out in a lot of ways; frustrations that come out; little snapping at each other. Snapping at your partner can be a big issue. Frustration with maybe not making friends, or maybe not feeling connected as quickly as you might like. Those are little things that it's much easier to snap at somebody else in those moments than it is to think, "Okay. This is going to take a while, and I just have to be prepared for it to take a while." And if our partner is not supportive in those moments, and our partner kind of is wanting to snap back, then the potential for enhanced communication is sort of diminished there.

Lee Rosen: Less enhanced communication, right. Meltdown occurs.

Amanda Hardenbrook: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: What do people do on their own? I know obviously the smart people come and see you, but before they figure that out, what are they trying at home? How are they trying to fix this problem?

Amanda Hardenbrook: Well, very often they are trying to fix it on their own. Sometimes they're trying to just make things -- sometimes they're just trying to pretend things are better, and thinking that if we just keep going it'll work itself out. Sometimes what people are doing is not wanting to bother their partner, sometimes thinking, "Well, my partner's kind of stressed out," maybe with the new job that they relocated with, and,

"I don't want to add this to the mix." Sometimes they're thinking, "Well, I should just be able to do this." And we're not super-people, so that often doesn't work as effectively as we might like. So that's often one of the things -- sometimes people just start getting depressed, too, which is a sad outcome.

Lee Rosen: Are people able to take action? Are there things they can do?

Amanda Hardenbrook: Absolutely. And I think that the more empowered you start to feel, it only enhances your relationship. No matter who you are, if you've moved to a new area, there are a couple of things that each of us has to take responsibility for, and one of them is connecting to new people, connecting to our environment. There are organizations, and a lot of various -- like the Newcomers Club, where you can go to the monthly meetings, and get introduced to new people, as well as to some of the resources that are available, some awareness of the culture that's around, and some of the -- if you're interested in kids' things, there are opportunities to learn about what's available for your children, as well as museums and history and all of that sort of thing. So I think that that's one thing that everybody can do, is look for ways to forge connections with your new environment, because it's no fun to feel isolated, to move somewhere and feel alone.

Lee Rosen: Right. They start solving the problem by fixing each piece of it, is what I'm sort of hearing from you.

Amanda Hardenbrook: Exactly. That's exactly right. And when that starts happening, the temptation is to want our spouse to be everything for us. And in those moments when we have moved, when we are not feeling connected, well we really want to feel connected to someone. And typically that person is our spouse, and one person can't meet all of our emotional needs. And so, yes, as you start to feel more connected to your environment, as you start to form friendships, that sense of alienation can diminish and we're suddenly not as angry, and also not looking to our spouse to fill needs that really are not appropriate for them to have to be taking responsibility for.

Lee Rosen: So I go and I join the Newcomers Club, or I start attending the church, and that works. Are there other things that I really need to make sure that I'm pushing myself to do?

Amanda Hardenbrook: Absolutely. Some of the other things -- and again, this is for anyone, married or single. You really have to take the sort of

jobs, or tasks associated with moving to a new place, and break them down for yourself. You have to be able to say, "Okay, these are the big things I want to be able to do. I want to decide on a new church. I want to decide on a new school for my child. I want to decide on a new job." And those are your big goals, but then you have to be able to break it down into smaller tasks for yourself. So that you can give yourself credit as you move through the process.

For example, if you're looking for a preschool for your child, you wouldn't want your job to be point blank to find a preschool and register. It's actually several different tasks that -- if you give credit along the way with -- a) of all, researching, what are the preschools; then b) of all, looking into actually taking tours and visiting maybe your top three choices; and then finally at the end, registering for the preschool. Well, you've actually done multiple tasks, and if you can break it down that makes it manageable, and it also allows you the opportunity to be able to check it out, to be able to give yourself credit for what you have accomplished, instead of feeling like, "Oh my gosh, I have all these things to do, and it's never going to happen."

Lee Rosen:

Your solutions make so much sense and they're so practical. I'm guessing that a lot of us just don't see that it's that practical stuff that's getting in our way; that we're too busy blaming the other spouse for making us move here, or being upset about -- just being upset. We have a tough time getting to the point where we can see these things.

Amanda Hardenbrook:

Exactly, because it is emotional. We move and it's not just, "Wow, this is hard." It's, "Wow, this is hard, and I feel lonely, and I feel scared, and I don't really want to be here right now." So it's much easier to blame. And when we do become emotional, we're not using the part of our brain that is logical, and that is problem solving-oriented. We're just getting stuck.

And so if we can take that deep breath, and if we can decide, "Okay. I am miserable, let's give myself credit for that. But, I can get happy, and there are some steps toward that. I can at least try to get happy." And then just take a deep breath, or five deep breaths, and then be ready to take those steps. And know that it's not going to happen overnight. When we have inappropriate expectations, it's easy to have all that anger, to have all that frustration, and be overwhelmed. But when we have more of a sense of what is realistic, then we can be happier with ourselves, and then also with our spouse.



Lee Rosen: So, do some people come to you before they move and ask you for help in making the decision about whether they ought to relocate?

Amanda Hardenbrook: I wish they would. I have never, ever had that happen, but I think it's a great strategy to be proactive. I think that any time you sit down and really discuss the nuts and bolts of what that process is going to look like, about how life would probably change, and to do that with your partner, I think it really enhances the chances of being successful in the move.

And I think that that's very similar to like when we parent. One of the things I think is remarkable is when you have children, each parent has this intuitive idea of how they want to parent, but very often they're not communicating that to the other person. And it's so much more successful when we can sit down and draw up a list of what's important to us, what do we want to communicate to our child, what values do we want to instill, what kind of activities are important for us to share? I think you can do exactly the same thing in preparation for a move.

What is it that we want to do? What kind of location are we looking for? What kind of lifestyle? Do we want to be in the city? Do want to be in the country? Are we ready to make a fresh start with completely new people, or is that really scary to one or both of us? I think that's a huge advantage to do for yourself.

Lee Rosen: It's interesting to hear you talk about it, because I really -- when I would have thought about relocation, I would have thought about moving. I'm moving from one city to another. And all the ramifications that it has are really not things that I think, for me anyway, that would have occurred to me. I wouldn't really think about all the work I'm going to have to do. And listening to you it also connects with, "Okay, now we've moved and somebody's starting a new job, if not both of us." So there's that whole source of stress. And I'm beginning to appreciate why it's on the top of that list of stressful activities, and why so many people are calling us after they move.

Amanda Hardenbrook: It is tremendous. I think very often people think, "Okay, well this is --" it's not so much a process as it is an outcome. They think, "Okay, I'm going to move." And they pack their boxes, and they move their family, and they're done, that's it; when

in fact that's just the beginning. And in fact it's hard for both people. The person who is taking the new job is under lots of stress to learn the new job, to impress their new colleagues and their new boss, and to really continue to build a reputation that they're proud of, and that is in addition to all of the other stressors associated with the move.

Lee Rosen: So now when they call you, I assume they don't call and say, "Oh, we relocated and we're stressed out about it." They call you with, their marriage is in trouble, and they need help.

Amanda Hardenbrook: Exactly. That is exactly right. Because it is so -- and sometimes, to be honest, sometimes if the marriage wasn't great to start with, and then you move, well, wow -- that is a huge catastrophe sometimes for the marriage. But very often even just the stress of the move on the marriage that was essentially feeling pretty good before, can feel like the end of the world, and it can feel like your ally is not the person that you thought that they were, and in fact maybe you don't feel like you have an ally at all.

Lee Rosen: So then suddenly you're listening, and you're hearing, "Oh gosh, they just moved here," and it triggers your investigation of how all these other pieces are fitting together.

Amanda Hardenbrook: Exactly. And very often it becomes again an issue of maybe re-exploration of what is it that you want your marriage to look like, and what is it that you were hoping to get from your spouse. And sometimes those expectations are very reasonable. We want to feel like we have an ally, we want to feel like we have emotional support. But if it was that we expected our partner to entire by our emotional backbone, we'll that's not going to happen. And that isn't an appropriate expectation. And to normalize that, say, "Nobody could do that for you."

Lee Rosen: Well I've lived in the Triangle now for I think 22 or 23 years, and I think you've convinced me that we just need to stay here forever.

Amanda Hardenbrook: Well, if you have wonderful opportunities somewhere else, it's definitely something to investigate, and to share discussion in with your partner. But I think that that's the key, is to be really willing to be able to talk openly with your partner from the beginning.



Lee Rosen: Do you see people that have moved here and that come in and they're having a lot of trouble, and you figure out that it has to do with the relocation, or at least that's a piece of the puzzle, are you able to get them back on track and help that marriage work out?

Amanda Hardenbrook: Very often. And I think what it often comes down to is if the couple wants it to work out. If they are committed -- and I think that tells you a lot of information about what was going on in the marriage from the beginning, or for a while. If they want it to work out, then yes, we can do the work that will help to ease some of the frustration, that will help to diminish some of the sense of alienation, to help build connections to again, to recreate an environment where the couple feels also more able to communicate in a way that feels safe.

However, that requires commitment on each person's part, and a willingness to be vulnerable, a willingness to work, a willingness to commit to that process. And so when both partners are willing to do that, the tendency is to have a much better outcome than -- obviously, if one partner or both partners are resistant, and they really just want it to be a problem. They want the move to be an issue; they want the move to continue to be an issue. And sometimes people have decided they want to be unhappy in their relationship. And so in those cases, we can certainly talk about it, but it's not as likely to have that kind of positive outcome.

Lee Rosen: Right. But it sounds like a positive outcome is very much a possibility, and there's reason for hope. In a way, I almost think that people who have moved to the area and find their marriages in trouble might have an easier time getting back on track than people that just are having trouble and haven't moved recently.

Amanda Hardenbrook: I think that's very true. It is something where it's solution-oriented. There are very pragmatic things, that if you're willing to sit down and do that work, that can be done. Those are ones that are harder to work through, because there's not a quick fix to that. This is just one of those things where there's a much -- it can be very solution-oriented.

Lee Rosen: Well I'm all about the quick fix.

Amanda Hardenbrook: Yeah. It's nice when it happens.

Lee Rosen: So much easier than having to do all the work.

Well Amanda I very much appreciate you being with us, and my take away is don't relocate if you can possibly avoid it, and if you do, you sure need to talk to somebody ahead of time and take in all of these ideas and all this information about the things you really ought to be planning for. And if you have relocated then gosh, go and get some advice if it's stressing out your marriage, because it sounds to me like a relocation without getting this kind of advice is almost a formula for disaster.

Amanda Hardenbrook: It certainly can be; it certainly can be. So, absolutely. I think that moving can be a fantastic change for people, and a fantastic opportunity, but don't forget that it can also put a huge stress -- even when it is fantastic -- it can still be a stress. So definitely give your marriage the opportunity to work through those stresses.

Lee Rosen: Well thank you for joining us Amanda.

Amanda Hardenbrook: Thank you so much for having me Lee.

Lee Rosen: And I hope that all of you have learned some things about relocation. I certainly feel like I have.

You can get additional information from Amanda. You can reach her if you'd like to talk with her, at area code (919) 946-3853.

I thank you so much for joining us, I hope we've helped you in your marriage. We'd love to hear your comments about Stay Happily Married. Please feel free to call our listener comment line and leave us a message. The number is (919) 256-3083, or if you'd like to email us, the email address is [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com).

Thanks again, and we'll talk to you next week.

---

*Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the web at [stayhappilymarried.com](http://stayhappilymarried.com). We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please e-mail us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com) or call us at (919) 256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.*