

First 24 Hours Emergency Protocol

By Dexter Montgomery

Tonight is not the night you solve the marriage. Tonight is the night you do not set fire to the next six months.

If you are thinking about suicide, or if any part of you feels like you will not make it through this, call or text 988 in the United States. This page can wait. 988 is the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. You do not need a plan or a particular level of pain to use it.

This protocol is free orientation for the first night. It is not legal advice. It is not medical advice. It is not a course, and it is not the \$297 course. Procedure differs by state, county, and case. Hire a lawyer in your jurisdiction before you sign, move, or agree to anything lasting.

What this night is

She left, or someone handed you papers, or you came home to a closet that is half empty. Your body is treating this like an attack. Heart rate up. Sleep gone. Judgment offline. The parts of you that weigh consequences are running at reduced capacity.

Every urgent idea you have right now (the long text, the speech, the grand gesture, the counterstrike) is being generated by a brain in emergency mode. That mode is useful for thirty seconds and catastrophic for the next thirty days.

The rule for the first night is simple. You do not make a single permanent decision while your body thinks it is being attacked. Not about the house. Not about the kids. Not about money. Not about the marriage.

The six moves

1 If you are in crisis, use 988 first

Everything else on this page assumes you are alive to run it. If the night is worse than confusion, if the thought has arrived that people would be better off without you, or if you have a plan, treat that as an emergency. Call or text 988. If you believe you might act, call 911 or go to an emergency room. Tell one person, in words, that you are not okay. Do not sit this out alone with a bottle and a phone.

2 Say almost nothing

If she told you face to face, your line is short.

I hear you. I am not going to respond to this tonight. We will talk when I have had time to think.

You are not agreeing or counterattacking. You are declining to negotiate the rest of your life while your judgment is impaired. If papers were served, acknowledge nothing substantive to anyone until you have spoken with a lawyer. Do not send the long message. Do not call her mother. Do not post. Do not draft the kids into the story.

3 Sign nothing. Agree to nothing.

Not a proposed schedule for the kids. Not who stays in the house. Not a handshake that you will just split everything down the middle. Informal agreements made in the first days have a way of becoming the baseline for everything that follows, and you are in no condition to know what you are giving away.

I am not agreeing to anything yet. I need time and I need advice.

Repeat it as needed. It is sane, not hostile.

4 No permanent housing move without counsel

If you need to leave the house tonight to keep the peace, leave for the night. Go to a friend's. Go to a hotel. Go breathe. Leaving for an evening is different from moving out. Packing your things and establishing yourself somewhere else can carry legal and practical consequences for custody and for the house. Those consequences vary by state and by situation. Cool off anywhere you like. Do not relocate your life tonight, and do not let anyone pressure you into it before you have legal advice.

5 Tell one trusted man

Not your whole family. Not the group chat. Not social media, which stays silent about this indefinitely. Pick one man you trust. Tell him what happened. Give him one job: do not let me do anything stupid for three days. You need a witness and a handbrake, not an audience. Once information is out, you cannot recall it. If you do not have that man, you still have 988, and you still have a lawyer's intake line in the morning.

6 Keep the body from wrecking the week

Eat protein even if you are not hungry. Drink water. If you train, train once. If you do not train, walk fast for an hour. Be in bed at a set time even if sleep will not come. If it will not, get up, write down everything screaming in your head, and go back.

Zero alcohol tonight. Not one beer to take the edge off. Alcohol lands on a nervous system already in crisis and is how the catastrophic text gets sent. Do not drive if you are wrecked. Food, water, sweat, bed. Run it even if it feels pointless.

What you are not doing yet

You are not deciding whether this marriage survives. You are not diagnosing what went wrong. You are not managing what she thinks. You are not telling the children in a panic. You are not retaining a war team, dividing property, or planning the next six months. None of that is a first-night problem.

This page is free orientation. It is not a substitute for counsel. If you already want the 90 days on a calendar, that is The 90-Day Rebuild.

The first morning

You will wake up, and for two or three seconds you will not remember. Then you will, and it will land again. Feet on the floor. Water. Food you do not want. Book a consult with a family law attorney this week, not because you have decided anything, but because you need the actual terrain in your state before you move on it.

Write down what happened while it is fresh. What was said. When. Who was present. Plain factual language. No editorializing. If you feel strangely fine tomorrow, do not trust it. Shock produces a numbness that impersonates coping. Plan the first weekend so it is not forty-eight empty hours.

After tonight

If this is the season you are in, Separation Survival Guide is the six-month field manual for the split. First 72 hours, then housing and money, then the kids, then the long middle, then the fork. It does not promise she comes home. It does not tell you to chase. It does not replace a lawyer, a doctor, or 988.

Tonight you have one job. Do nothing permanent. Say almost nothing. Sign nothing. Sleep somewhere that does not surrender the house without counsel. Tell one man. Keep the body from wrecking the week. If the night is worse than confusion, call or text 988 before you do anything else.

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