

# Am I having a mid-life crisis?



## BETWEEN US

Louisa Niehaus

**D**O you want to escape your life? Are you bored? Do you feel like you are stagnating? Are the responsibilities and humdrum of your life making you feel flat and uninspired?

Mid-life is a time of flux. This period is often characterised by people changing or disrupting their lives radically.

The most common and familiar signs are extramarital affairs, divorces, changes in career and a desire to change or leave one's current lifestyle. It can also be experienced as having a great sense of boredom or disillusionment with one's life. A feeling of "is this all there is?"

### Characteristics of a mid-life crisis

Mid-life is characterised by a desire for change and wanting to change the current status quo.

It is precipitated by feelings of stagnation, boredom, suburbia, a search for adventure. Wanting to recapture youth and youthful adventures, freedom.

- Brought upon by caring for ageing parents
- Seeing teenage children reach sexual maturity/adulthood
- Facing one's own impending

ageing and mortality

- Fuelled by wanting to leave a legacy/mark
- Facing the demise of one's own youthfulness, desirability
- Dead ended in one's career
- A feeling of being passed over for younger talent

Is there a difference between a male and female mid-life crisis?

Male mid-life is often seemingly more visible. We are all familiar with the classic archetype of an ageing playboy. Men seem more evident in the acting out of their impending loss of virility. They act this out by validating themselves through engaging with youth.

Almost as if this an elixir that will re-energise and re-potentiate them.

However, mid-life for both genders encompasses a far greater spectre than the obvious which is an extra-marital affair. The extra-marital affair can be symptomatic of a greater issue, which could be a yearning for adventure, disillusionment, boredom or rebellion against the current status quo.

Female mid-life is slightly more nuanced. Traditionally it has been characterised by menopause, and therefore a female mid-life



experience is deemed to be more a physiological experience than a phenomenological one. However, this research is changing, given women's equanimity.

Women too are susceptible to the loss of their youth and virility.

There is a rise in the number of older women (known as cougars) seeking younger partners.

There is a great emphasis on parts of our culture on youthfulness and physical desirability, and this can also fuel dissatisfaction and unease with ageing. Western culture also places less value on the wisdom of the older generation.

How to recognise that you are in the throes of a mid-life crisis?

This is where I want to differentiate between a crisis and an awakening.

A crisis is when the symptoms are full-blown, you have quit your job to be a DJ in Ibiza, and there are school fees to be paid and a mortgage to service.

An awakening is when you feel the rumblings of a malaise. You are bored, but you haven't yet acted on it. You are bored in your relationship/marriage and seeking excitement.

You have a yearning to pack it all in and escape. We all have these temptations occasionally and life isn't always as exciting as you want it to be.

However, if these feelings are persistent and ever-present, if you feel depressed and locked in, you are possibly experiencing the transition which, if left unchecked, could lead to a crisis.

Don't be rash. Examine truly whether what you presently have in your life is worth salvaging. It could be that you have outgrown parts of your life, your marriage, your job.

The last time you probably

made important decisions or assessments regarding your life was when you chose to get married, start a career, pursue your education, have children.

One does not stop to reassess where you are in mid-life and whether your goals and aspirations are still relevant. You just kind of slide sluggishly into it. Then feel unhappy, thinking, I am in mid-life, is this all there is?

What to do if you believe you are having a mid-life crisis?

Assess. Take stock of what you currently have in your life. What works for you? What doesn't, are your current dreams and aspirations from 5/ 10/ 20 years ago or are they in line with who you are now? Will you really be reinvigorated by those skinny jeans and that affair? Can you follow a life passion such as a hobby, that gives you more excitement and satisfaction?

Mid-life is a time when you have garnered a fair amount of wisdom, choose to use your wisdom sagely, to make decisions that suit your rich, adult self. Incorporate new things that excite you and maintain those that nourish you.

● Niehaus is a psychotherapist with a specialisation in trauma therapy. She consults internationally and in South Africa, to a broad base of clients, on relationships, personal growth, trauma, conflict management and self-actualisation. She has a particular interest in the psychology of love, mid-life transition and awakening.

Unconscious motivators for behaviour, drives and relationships motivated her to establish an academy for adult actualisation, specialising in relationship insight and intrinsic growth using the principles of depth psychology and the symbology of myth and story-telling. She is a frequent contributor to Radio 702 and DStv's *Real Health*.

● Explore mid-life in more detail by joining Louisa Niehaus's course on *Mid-life Mastery*: <https://www.louisaniehaus.com/midlife-mastery/>

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