



Traversing the Dark Night of the Soul from Midlife Crisis to Rebirth and Renewal  
www.creationcoach.com ♦ dkiley@creationcoach.com ♦ (540) 239-5612

## What Is a Midlife Crisis?

*“An often dreaded period of time that conjures up images of a Harley-mounted, silver-haired, 50-something man (or woman) riding off into the sunset.” ~ Anonymous*

The term “midlife crisis” was first introduced by Elliot Jaques in 1965, and used extensively by Freudian psychologists like Carl Jung. It marks the transitioning from youthful enthusiasm and vitality into older adulthood (men and women); sometimes called our second adulthood. Somewhere between the ages of 40 and 65 we will be caught off guard. For some it may only last a couple of years. For many it can take up a very grueling 12 years of our life. During this time adults re-evaluate their lives; their achievements, goals, dreams and for some, even their spouse. It can be an intensely confusing, even fearful time of life when we suddenly realize our candle is burning low and our time is not as limitless as we felt it always was. We question and regret all the opportunities we missed or goals we couldn't achieve. Our glass is indeed looking more empty than full. Suddenly we may experience cycles of regret, fear, anger and blame. We may be tempted to throw it all to the wind and risk everything for a chance to regain meaning and a sense of infused purpose; an affair, cosmetic surgery, quit our job to move to Italy and study wine-making, finally buy that big Harley and ride with the guys across country. The transition can range from mild to dangerous but for all it is definitely destabilizing.

## Signs & Symptoms of a Midlife Crisis

### Feeling Tied Down, with No Chance for Change, Listless and Bored

Feeling hopeless and stuck in a rut without purpose or any real meaning. We might find ourselves feeling listless and bored with life. A beloved hobby becomes dull, a once-fun job seems tedious, and a lifetime dedication to spirituality becomes a sham. We look at our devoted partner as though this just can't be all there is to life.

### Obsession with Physical Appearances

Our mirror is not our friend anymore as we see our bodies aging; hair loss, grey, liver spots, wrinkles, weight gain and on and on. We feel intense anxiety about the need to compensate with different styles of clothing, makeup, cosmetic surgery and exercise routines. The fear of becoming increasingly unattractive can feel painfully oppressive even more so for women in this western culture, which weighs so heavily on a woman's physical and sexual desirability.

### Divorce or Having an Affair

Infidelity and divorce are very common at midlife. As self doubts and insecurities mount, we adults crave ever increasing respect, attention, and affection to compensate for the feelings of loss that are piling up in us. If our current partner can't give us what we feel is lacking in ourselves (a daunting task) then we may look for it elsewhere rather than face our own inevitable demise.

### Assigning Blame

A common symptom of a midlife crisis includes assigning blame to others. Confused about the changes happening, we very often accuse our spouses, family members, co-workers and friends for our feelings of failure or “not enough”.

### Panicking About Health Issues

At some point we start worrying if that pain in our knee will ever go away. Will I need a joint replacement? Is that lump in my breast cancerous? Maybe this migraine is a brain tumor. I keep falling asleep after lunch. I must have diabetes. I go pee 3 times a night so I must have prostate cancer.

### More Questions Than Answers

Such as: “Is this all there is?”... “Why am I doing this?”... “What about what I need?”... “Who am I anymore?”... “What is the real point of me?”... “Why put my life off any longer?”

### Buying a Fancy Car, Motorcycle, Boat...

Adults looking to recapture their youth may purchase expensive “toys”. The car, motorcycle, yacht etc., symbolize youth and vitality. Both youth and vitality are the qualities we are fearful of losing in ourselves.

### Big and Drastic Changes

In an effort to “re-design” our lives to give us more confidence and meaning, we may suddenly try to create new habits and schedules. We look to find new ways to make the most out of the time we have left. This is often accompanied by irritability, impatience and anger. We feel haunted by negative self-talk and try to whip ourselves back into shape.

### Insomnia and Changes in Sleep Patterns

Some scientific studies point to a reduction of Melatonin production in the brain as a cause for insomnia in midlife. But mounting worries and concerns about our slow loss of identity and looming mortality weigh heavily in the balance here since supplementing with Melatonin may have little effect on the aging brain.

### Bouts of Depression

Symptoms of a midlife crisis usually include feeling “sad, blue, unhappy, miserable, or down in the dumps.” Signs of depression might include difficulty with accomplishing and focusing on simple tasks.

### Preoccupation with Death and Dying

It has been said that all uncomfortable feelings and emotions can be traced back to our fear of death. Midlife often magnifies this exponentially and can toss us into a pit of morbid thought processing that leaves us in despair and deeply depressed. This has been called the “Dark Night of the Soul” and is experienced as a spiritual crisis, which drives us to question life, God, spirituality and all purpose and meaning. Without proper support this can be a dismal experience. But, with a bit of grace, this can also be the doorway to insight and meaning we've been looking for.

### Disconnecting from Our Usual Circle of Friends to Hang with Younger (or Older) Friends

Replacing our usual circle of friends with younger friends falls more often into a man's midlife experience. Men often want to infuse themselves with the dynamic energy of a younger crowd with an eye on beauty and enthusiasm for life. Women in their midlife crisis may find it difficult to surround themselves with youthful, more beautiful women so, women may find themselves enjoying the company of an older circle of friends, who make them feel more youthful and desirable by comparison.

### Changing Careers

Switching careers in midlife is very common. If someone doesn't actually change careers than they probably spend an agonizing amount of time thinking about it. If a complete career change isn't on the plate then something else is; such as developing plans to build your weekend gardening hobby into a commerce opportunity at the local Farmer's Markets. Or expanding your old watch collection into an antiques gallery.

### Increased Addictive Behavior

In midlife we may give way to drugs, alcohol, sex or work to mask feelings of regret and depression. Without sufficient support from friends, family, community, therapist or coach, we may feel the need to self “nurture” ourselves (albeit dysfunctionally) by taking to bed with depression, drinking, drugging, pornography, overwork etc.