

## Living Well After a Divorce

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Going through a divorce can be a very devastating experience for a person. This is an exceptionally painful time for everyone involved. Divorce triggers a multitude of unsettling feelings of doubt, despair, depression, denial, loneliness, guilt, anger, frustration, and fear. Any time one goes through the process of dissolving a significant relationship, the person tends to feel like they are being drawn into a Bermuda Triangle of heartaches and pain. No two people experience divorce in the same manner. There are no right or wrong ways. The goal of this paper is to highlight some ways to assist people who are going through a divorce. These tips will enable the heart-wrenching experience of divorce to be a lot more manageable.

### Helpful Hints When Dealing with a Divorce:

- **Do not do this on your own** – Be willing to share your feelings with people you can trust and who have your best interest at heart. Locate a family member or friend who you know will not judge you. They will provide you the comfort you need during these fragile moments of your life. Also, be willing to join a divorce support care group where people are going through similar experiences. They will be able to provide you firsthand understanding and empathy for what you are going through.
- **Give yourself time** – Do not rush the way you are feeling. Nor should you put a time limit on when you should get over your feelings. Give yourself permission to feel whatever you are feeling. Do not be afraid to get in touch with your feelings. Feel what you are feeling and move forward one day at a time.
- **Take time for your mental health both emotionally and physically** – Often, when you are experiencing an emotional hardship in your life, the first thing you tend to let go of is your health and physical wellbeing. This, however, is really the time you want to maintain a balanced healthy eating plan along with an appropriate exercise program. Taking care of yourself will allow you to stay focused and be able to handle the emotional debris of your divorce.
- **Do not resort to using alcohol and drugs** - People have the tendency when they are in pain to want to numb the pain by using alcohol and drugs. What they fail to realize is that this only makes the situation worse. Many people end up abusing the substances and become addicted.
- **Redefine yourself** – This is a great opportunity to discover the things you enjoy doing that you perhaps put on hold during your marriage. For example, you might want to take up painting, photography, or even public speaking. Set aside some dedicated time to learn a skill you have always been interested in accomplishing.
- **Avoid power struggles and arguing with your ex-spouse** – When you find yourself in heated discussions with your former spouse, stay calm and let them know you will discuss the matter later. It is not about you winning the argument or showing them they are wrong and you are right. More importantly, it is about you maintaining your sanity. You want to remain as emotionally healthy as possible during the break up. This will enable you to move on with your life.

- **Think positively** – It is easy to get caught up in negative chatter, such as: “What did I do wrong”, “I wish I could have done this better; maybe then we would not be getting a divorce” or “I will never find anybody else to love me.” You have to be intentional about shedding the negative thinking. When you find yourself thinking negatively, shift your mindset to alternative thinking. You can do this by replacing what you are telling yourself with positive affirmations. For example, “I will never give my heart to anyone else to abuse” you might say, “the next person I chose to love will be worthy of my love”.
- **You still have a future** - When you commit your life to another individual you will share a lot - hopes, dreams, and aspirations together. Once the relationship is terminated, you feel like your future has been ripped from you. You become paralyzed in thinking there is no hope for tomorrow. You grieve the loss of the future you once had with your spouse. Be encouraged because you can dream and live again. You will be able to find hope and aspiration in things you desire that will be separate from your ex-spouse. Mourn the loss of the old dreams and replace them with new ones.
- **Know that moving on is the end goal** – Being able to express how you are feeling will liberate you and set you free to establish a new life separate from your ex-spouse. Dwelling on and overanalyzing what could or should have been will leave you stuck in the past. It is okay to discuss how you are feeling but then you must give yourself a drop-dead date. This will be the date you stop reliving what could or would have been or else you will rob yourself of a joyous future. Of course, it will not be as simple as it sounds. To get started on a 1000-mile journey, you have to be willing to take the first step.
- **Make new friends** – You might discover the old friends you had are not willing to weather the storm with you. They might not agree with the divorce, take the side of your spouse, or find it difficult to be friends with you and not your ex-spouse. Many couples only feel comfortable spending time with other couples. Be okay with releasing them and respecting their space so you can heal properly. Locate new friends who will accept you and your being single. Whatever you do, don't force yourself to be in toxic relationships that are not beneficial to you. You want people around you who will lift you up and not bring you down.
- **Nurture yourself** - Do things that make you happy and nurture your soul. Go for walks, take vacations, see a funny movie, read your favorite book, or volunteer for community organizations you always wanted to give your time to, i.e. homeless shelter, battered women, or rape crisis center.
- **Avoid making major decisions** – Try not to make any major decisions immediately following your divorce. You are still pretty emotional so it will be best to delay any major decision making. You do not want to make decisions that you will later regret. When you are hurt and wounded, this is not the time to make major life decision(s).
- **Establish and maintain a routine** – Going through a divorce disrupts your life routine causing stress, uncertainty, and frustration in your life. Having a routine can provide some degree of normalcy, structure, and certainty in your life. It will reduce stress and confusion.
- **Let go and celebrate your future** – Going through a divorce can sometimes leave a person reminiscing about the past and desiring to relive their past life; however, there comes a time when you will have to release, relax, and let go and begin to celebrate your new future. You are now entering a new chapter of your life and you will need to bring closure to the last chapter. The end of one chapter of your life does not mean the end of your life story. You are simply putting an end to that phase of your life so you can embrace the next phase.
- **Keep a journal** – Many people find being able to write out what they are feeling is helpful with their healing process. You might discover journaling your feelings is an excellent way to cope with your pain.
- **Seek professional help** – If you find yourself not feeling like things are getting better for you and you are unable to cope with daily life activities, make an appointment with a therapist; preferably one who has expertise in the area of divorce.

- **Children and divorce** – Not everyone has children but when there are children involved here are some helpful hints to take into consideration:
- **Let them know it is not their fault** – It is important to have open and honest conversation with your children so they understand up front that the divorce has nothing to do with them. Otherwise, children will think they are the reason for their parents separating and/or divorcing. Be available to listen to how the divorce has impacted them. Do not assume they are okay. Get them help if they need assistance in coping with the divorce.
  - **Maintain consistency** – Ensure children are able to keep their daily routines. Children are able to function better both at home and school when there is consistency in their life.
  - **Ensure stability in discipline** – Now that the children will be co-parented, it will be very beneficial to establish the same set of rules and regulations. You want to agree upon such things as designated bed times, curfews, what they can eat, social media accessibility, etc.
  - **Avoid putting your children in the middle of your conflict** – By all means do not speak negatively about the other parent in the presence of the children. Avoid having the children to “spy” on their other parent, seeking information from the children about the other parent’s personal life or having the children to take sides. “Triangulation” is a therapeutic term where you pass a message through a child to the other parent. Instead of the parents speaking directly to each other, they use their children as pawns. You want to stay away from this at all costs.

**Forgive your ex-spouse** - Being able to forgive someone who has hurt you will liberate you and set you free to move on to the next stage of your life. Sometimes the hurt you are experiencing makes you want to hold on to the pain and seek revenge. What you will soon discover by trying to hold the other person hostage for your pain is that you become a prisoner of that pain. Many times, the other person has moved on with their life and you are still in bondage. Forgiveness is a process. It does not mean you have to be in the company of that person; you can love them from a distance. Practice the art of forgiveness because you have been forgiven.

Divorce is a very sensitive and painful topic; however, it is very common in our society for couples to get divorced. Knowing some valuable tips as to how to cope with divorce is indeed relevant. This is not an exhaustive list but I do hope it provides the necessary insight to provide some relief and assistance to people who are going through a divorce.

*“Surrendering does not involve preparing for a soft landing, it means just landing on hard, ordinary ground, on rocky wild country side, once we open ourselves, then we land on what is.”*

Chogyam Trungpa, Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism

Life can be filled with many disappointments but know that even after a divorce you can live again.

### Conflict of Interest

It does not constitute a conflict of interest for the authors.

### Suggested Readings

1. How to Sleep Alone in a King-Size Bed: A Memoir of Starting Over by Theo Pauline Nestor
2. Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself by Melody Beattie
3. No One is to Blame by Bob Hoffman
4. Loving What is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life by Byron Katie
5. Too Good to Leave, Too Bad to Stay by Mira Kirschenbaum
6. Falling Apart in One Piece: One Optimist’s Journey Through the Hell of Divorce by Stacy Morrison
7. Transformational Divorce: Discover Yourself, Reclaim Your Dreams, and Embrace Life’s Unlimited Possibilities by Karen Kahn Wilson

8. Co-Parenting Works! Helping Your Children Thrive After Divorce by Tammy Daughtry
9. When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times by Pema Chodron
10. The Good Divorce: Keeping Your Family Together When Your Marriage Comes Apart by Constance Ahrons
11. Getting Past Your Breakup: How to Turn a Devastating Loss into the Best Thing That Ever Happened to You by Susan J. Elliott.
12. It's Called a Break Up Because It's Broken by Greg Behrendt
13. Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation by Rachel Cusk

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