

# DIVORCE RECOVERY GUIDE



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For most people, divorce is much more than a major legal process. It's also a challenging time of transition that can negatively impact virtually every area of life: emotional, psychological, domestic, parental, financial, physical health, social, vocational, and more.

This special **Divorce Recovery Guide** contains hand-picked articles, book excerpts, advice, and more to help you recover from the inevitable stresses and pressures of divorce. And just as importantly, this Guide will empower you to build the satisfying, strong, and inspired new post-divorce life you desire – and deserve.



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# 5 Tips for Starting the Divorce Recovery Process

Divorce hits like an earthquake, and divorce recovery takes time, patience, and a lot of support. Use these tips to help you start reconstructing your most basic physiological needs during divorce recovery.

By Dr. Andra Brosh, Clinical Psychologist

**D**ivorce recovery is unique. It embodies a combination of disillusionment and despair around the sudden loss of your deepest attachments. Your most basic dependency needs are at risk, and the person you were counting on for everything has disappeared. This is one of the reasons I don't teach people to "let go" too early in their recovery. It's very scary to jump into a new life with no safety net in place.

You have been severely traumatized on a psychological, spiritual, and emotional level, and this is why one of the first steps in recovering from this kind of loss is rebuilding your foundation. It's a delicate balance to untie the knots of a marriage while trying to build new connections to something stable.

Divorce recovery is a dance that takes time, patience, and a lot of support.

A foundation provides the stability and strength needed to support the structure being built on top of it. When the foundation gets shaken or shifts, the structure is threatened and can crumble to the ground. In many marriages, small fractures in the foundation develop over time, leaving it vulnerable and unstable. The cracks and fractures might be small lies, missed opportunities for connection, hurt feelings, or snide comments, all of which can pave the way for full-blown disasters, like infidelity or walking out on the marriage.

Divorce hits like an earthquake. What you thought was strong and steadfast has broken into a million pieces, leaving you feeling like you are

standing on unsteady ground. Knowing this can help you to understand why you feel lost and ungrounded.

## Lay a New Foundation

Sometimes, things need to be broken down so that they can be rebuilt in a new and better way. This is why the very first step in your divorce recovery should be to lay a new foundation – for yourself and your new life. Rebuilding your foundation is an opportunity to create an even stronger support system, both internally and externally. Your internal foundation includes your physical and emotional wellbeing, and your external foundation will include your social support system.

When I teach about divorce recovery and getting grounded I like to refer to the psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. His hierarchy is portrayed in the shape of a pyramid, with our most fundamental human needs at the bottom and the need for self-actualization at the top.

Divorce deeply affects the bottom three layers, which include (from bottom to top):

- Physiological needs.
- Safety needs.
- Love and belonging needs.

## Five Tips for Divorce Recovery

Here are some tips to help you start reconstructing your most basic physiological needs during divorce recovery:

### 1. Get Enough Sleep

Divorce is very disruptive to the rhythms of your life, but it also throws off your circadian rhythm. Your body functions on a built-in 24-hour clock, and when that clock is off so is your body. The first thing to be affected is your sleep, and when you have a good night's sleep, you put stress on your body, make poor decisions, and have trouble functioning well. To ensure that you maintain a healthy circadian rhythm you'll want to make sure that you're keeping a solid sleep routine. Go to bed at a decent hour, wake up at the same time each morning, and eat foods that support sleep.

Getting enough protein in your diet, or eating a small amount of healthy complex carbohydrates (like a sweet potato) before bed can really improve sleep. Omitting computer screens at night, doing some stretching before bed, and taking a bit of melatonin to support your sleep are all good options, too.

### 2. Drink Plenty of Water

Water is one of the most basic needs for physiologic health, but somehow it becomes a low priority. Water is the basis for human life: without it, you will become dehydrated, develop poor digestion, and feel depleted. Getting enough water requires making a commitment to drink it. Getting a water bottle you love that's easy to lug around can also improve your hydration habit. The general recommendation for water intake is 1 liter of water per 50 pounds of body weight, but drinking a glass every hour can be a starting goal. To improve water absorption, you can add a little bit of sea salt to your cup or bottle. I really like the app "Waterlogged" to manage water intake.

### 3. Develop Healthy Eating Habits

The stress and negative emotions of divorce are what cause people to lose weight. While this is often seen as one of the few benefits of divorce, this kind of weight loss isn't really that healthy. When the body is stressed (or perceiving a threat) digestion slows, cortisol rises, and many other systems become altered to ensure your survival. This is why you might not feel hungry or forget to eat.

The fight or flight system is designed for short-term use, so when it goes on too long it can create health issues. Imbalanced eating or skipping meals will wreak havoc on your physiology. Blood sugar is key to maintaining a stable mood, and not eating well throughout the day will cause it to fluctuate leading to emotional imbalance, and to insulin resistance if it continues. Eating small meals regularly throughout the day, even when you're not hungry,

will help balance blood sugar and will ensure your body is getting enough fuel to keep going.

### 4. Eat More Fat

Healthy fats like raw, grass-fed butter, ghee, olive oil, avocado oil, and coconut oil are very healing when under stress. Fats keep you full longer, and they're nourishing for your nervous system and brain. In fact, your body can't perform many of its daily functions without fat. Incorporating delicious fat-rich foods like nuts, seeds, avocado, and nut butters will provide your body with long-lasting sources of energy, and they will also help you stabilize your blood sugar. Unlike carbohydrate-rich foods, like bagels, muffins, and nutrition bars, fats slow digestion and provide an alternate source of fuel that the body prefers in times of challenging transition.

### 5. Take Deep Breaths

This is such a basic recommendation, but we all forget to breathe. Breathing is such a natural part of the body's survival system, but we can still control how deeply we breathe. Simply taking a deep breath into your diaphragm will calm your nervous system and send messages to your mind and body that you're actually doing okay. Shallow breathing sends a message of fear and that the body should be on alert. Again, setting reminders in your phone can be really helpful in remembering to breathe so try using an app like "Stop, Breathe and Think" can help you regulate your practice. ■



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# CAN'T SLEEP ?

## Here's How to Handle the 3 a.m. Divorce Demons

Some advice to help you go to sleep, stay asleep, and wake up rested rather than exhausted during divorce.

By Kat Forsythe, Therapist, Coach, and Author



It's 3 a.m. The whole world is asleep – except you and all the other thousands of individuals ripping their lives apart during divorce.

Misery loves company, but you can feel like you're alone on a deserted island when you're awake in the middle of the night.

When you are most vulnerable, when there's no one around to comfort you, when you feel the most alone, the 3 a.m. divorce demons march in. They sit at the end of the bed and begin their divorce devilishness.

Scary divorce scripts abound: *Where is he/she hiding the money? If I go back to work, how can I afford child care for both kids? How will I ever be happy again? What if she/he shows up in court? How could he/she do this?*

The middle of the night is not the time to answer these dramatic queries. That's step one to getting back to sleep. Nonetheless, when divorce uproots our world, irrational thinking and scared-to-hell fear tend to show up in the dead of night.

At night, our brains express our deepest fears in ways that we could never imagine during the day. We're tempted to find solutions to the problems presented by our anxious nighttime brains as they pop up – but that's a recipe for circular thinking and hand wringing.

Insomnia is *not* a solid foundation for rational reasoning. Find solutions in the daylight hours.

### 9 Tips to Ward off the 3 a.m. Demons

Knowing that few (if any) of our deepest nighttime fears will actually come true provides little consolation when we're alone and trembling in the wee small hours.

It feels as though the whole world has collapsed on our shoulders and we need to figure out how to fix it all *right now*.

Here are a few tips to lessen the likelihood of middle-of-the-night woes and help you sleep when going through a divorce.

#### 1. No Coffee, Nicotine, Alcohol, or Sugary Foods Within Three Hours of Bedtime.

They inhibit those warm, fuzzy sleep patterns we need and encourage the demons of dark dreams. During the night, your body repairs itself. In fact, Chinese medicine correlates gremlin timing to body parts that need nourishment. The liver seems to be the culprit around 3 a.m.

#### 2. Don't Watch or Listen to the News After 7 p.m.

And put away your smartphone an hour before bed. News about war, political havoc, disease and unrest is sure to deliver nightmares, especially

when you're stressed. Also, research shows that looking at a smartphone, laptop, computer, or any gadget with an LED screen within 60 minutes of bedtime inhibits a good night's rest. Do you watch TV shows laced with violence? Record and watch them over the weekend.

### 3. Empty out Your Worries Before You Turn out the Light.

Write in a journal. Take a few deep breaths. Ask yourself what you are thinking/feeling/reacting to in your body, then ask whether this scary thought is based in objective fact or fearful opinion. How would someone else view this worry? Add a few gratitudes if fear is gripping you ("Tonight, I am grateful for..."). Then snuggle down in bed and tell yourself you feel safe and that everything will work out.

### 4. Allow Yourself at Least Eight Hours of Sleep Every Night.

Don't cheat. If you wake up frequently during the night, make it nine hours. Sleep deprivation leads to exhaustion and anxiety. It's a direct route to nightmares, and it lessens your ability to think rationally. Your divorce navigation requires clear thinking.

### 5. If a Nightmare Wakes You up, Remind Yourself that It Was Only a Nightmare – Not Reality.

Don't read anything into it. Don't try to figure it out. Don't deliver it to a dream coach (unless it recurs). Your bad dream is your mind clearing out garbage. It's purely fiction.

### 6. Try 4-7-8 (aka "Relaxing") Breaths.

Dr. Andrew Weil (MD and integrative medicine practitioner) teaches this technique, which he calls "a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system."

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **four**.
- Hold your breath for a count of **seven**.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of **eight**. You have now completed one breath.
- Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

This technique is a powerful stress antidote that puts most people in a relaxed state almost immediately.

You can learn more about 4-7-8 breathing here: [www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath](http://www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath)

### 7. If Your Mind Races, You Can Stop Your Mind!

Author Eckhart Tolle suggests we focus on a part of our body to stop focusing on scary thoughts. For instance, think about your hands until you feel them tingle. Or create and repeat reassuring self-messages (e.g., "I'm safe and peaceful") over and over for about 20 minutes.

### 8. Try Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I).

There are several apps that offer the benefits of digital CBT-I (sometimes called dCBT-I or dCBT). For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs offers an app called "CBT-I Coach" that is appropriate for non-veterans as well as veterans. Visit [mobile.va.gov/app/cbt-i-coach](http://mobile.va.gov/app/cbt-i-coach) for more information about this app.

### 9. If You Can't Sleep, Get Up.

If you're lying awake for more than 10 minutes, get out of bed and sit in a chair until you're sleepy. Get a drink of water. Go to the bathroom. Meditate. Change the energy. Don't stress out about not falling asleep. If you have a bad night, or find yourself awake for longer than expected, don't get mad at yourself or start generating fearful thoughts about not being able to handle tomorrow if you can't sleep tonight.

### 4 Messages to Give Yourself at 3 a.m.

- Brain, I'm not going to think about that now.** I know you want to go there, but I can't let you. Instead, we're thinking about this: (fill in a pleasing subject you have decided upon before you go to bed).
- Everything seems worse at night.** (Don't try to solve your divorce dilemmas when the world seems bleak and lonely.)
- I can take a vacation from that concern because I can't do a darn thing about it right now.** So, if I were on vacation, how would I feel right now?
- Repeat a phrase that's comforting, over and over.** I've used the words "I'm safe and peaceful." If you enjoy meditating, use a mantra, such as a prayer, or the name of a deity. To learn more, read *Passage Meditation: A Complete Spiritual Practice* (Nilgiri Press, 2016). You can read the complete first chapter for free here: [www.bmcm.org/inspiration/easwaran/first-chapter-passage-meditation](http://www.bmcm.org/inspiration/easwaran/first-chapter-passage-meditation)

### Divorce and Insomnia

If all else fails, consider speaking to a medical professional about sleeping aids. Don't condemn yourself for it: occasional use may allow your brain to stop the monkey chatter and fall back to sleep. Please note: *this is occasional use only*. Relying on sleeping pills every night will create its own issues.

Unfortunately, divorce and insomnia often go together. The most important thing to help you get past those 3 a.m. demons is to know that this phase will pass. When your life settles down (and it will), so will your sleep. ■



After her own brutal divorce after 33 years of marriage, Kat Forsythe (MSW) directed her energies to helping others navigate the turbulent waters of divorce. She works with clients to rediscover, redesign, and reclaim the life they want – based on their strengths and her practical, no-nonsense plan. [www.katforsythe.com](http://www.katforsythe.com)

# Why Seek Individual Therapy During Divorce?

Seeking individual therapy can benefit you *and* your family. Most importantly, you will get the support you need to navigate the process in the healthiest way possible.

By Dr. Deanna Conklin-Danao, Clinical Psychologist





## Adding a therapist to work with you individually can help you bring your best self to the divorce process. In the end, making decisions about your future from a more solid place will set you up for the life you want after your divorce.

**D**ivorce is a stressful time. You are undergoing a tremendous life change that will require you to make many decisions that will shape your future and your children's.

At the same time, you will be dealing with a constantly swirling mix of powerful emotions such as pain, anger, sadness, and fear.

### 3 Reasons to Seek out Individual Therapy During Divorce

During this time, individual therapy can be an invaluable tool to help you navigate the divorce process as your best self. Here's what therapy can provide for you.

#### 1 The Support You Need

During a divorce, one of the healthiest things you can have is a strong support system. Being able to count on friends and family who care about you is something that will help you get through difficult times. However, while your personal network can be well-intentioned, they may not provide you with everything that you need. They may tell you what they think you want to hear ("It's all her fault!") or propose strong positions ("You should take him to the cleaners for what he did!") that lead you to make choices out of anger or fear and create conflict instead of resolution.

Individual therapy, on the other hand, provides an external source of support that allows you to process your experience in a healthier way. It will help you identify and work through issues so that you can make decisions that will deliver long-term benefits for you and your family. Therapy can also help prepare you for life after divorce by building your sense of self and your roles in relationships.

#### 2 Honest Feedback

Feedback from a neutral person is also different from the feedback you receive from friends and family. This is especially true if that neutral person is a trained mental health professional. In attempting to be supportive, some friends and family will only tell you what you want to hear. A therapist can help you see situations from multiple perspectives. This can allow you to approach decision-making with more flexibility.

A therapy relationship can also help you sort through the breakup of your marriage and understand your role in the ending of the relationship. While that type of feedback may be painful, it ultimately will allow you to have different relationships in the future instead of repeating the same pattern of your marriage.

#### 3 Tools to Help Your Family

In addition to yourself, seeking therapy during divorce will also benefit your family. You will get the support you need to navigate the process in the healthiest way possible. This will free you up to support your children. Sometimes in divorce, children pick up on their parent's distress and end up as caretakers. When they enter a caretaking role, the child's own ability to develop is put on the back burner.

The second benefit to your children is the expertise of a therapist. Therapists know how to protect kids during the divorce process (e.g. minimize conflict, maintain a positive relationship with both parents, and don't put kids in the middle) and can coach you to apply those techniques. Therapy can help you put those practices in place, even when you are feeling angry or hurt by your spouse.

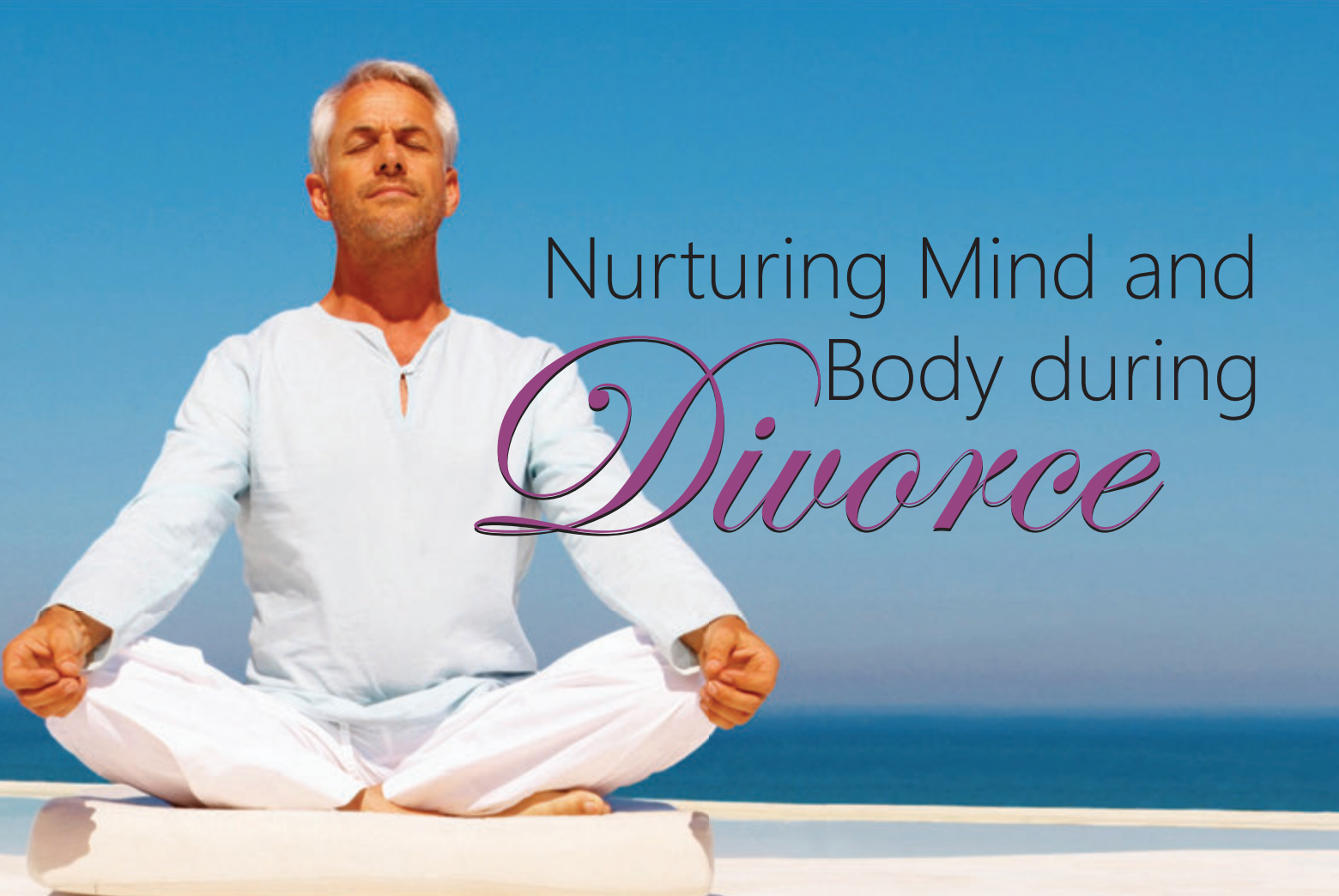
#### Involving Mental Health Professionals in Your Divorce

The importance of choosing professionals to assist you within the divorce process cannot be overstated. Involving one or more mental health professionals in your divorce – such as a child specialist, a divorce coach, or both – can create a framework for improved communication.

Adding a therapist to work with you individually can help you bring your best self to the divorce process. In the end, making decisions about your future from a more solid place will set you up for the life you want after your divorce. ■



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# Nurturing Mind and Body during *Divorce*

Taking good care of yourself through the stresses of separation and divorce is absolutely vital.

By Diana Shepherd, *Divorce Magazine* Co-Founder

**Y**our teenage son has “borrowed” your car without permission again – so now you can’t drive your daughter to Brownies. Your daughter is having a meltdown on your front lawn while your neighbors watch with disapproval. There’s a message on your answering machine from your ex saying he/she can’t take the kids this weekend because he/she got a fabulous deal on airfare to Bermuda and is leaving tomorrow for 10 days of sun and sand with his/her new love interest. The house is a mess, your savings account is down to double-digits, and your son says he “just has to have” that new pair of \$150 running shoes, or he’ll be branded as a “loser” at school.

Suddenly, you don’t feel so good: your stomach is upset, your chest feels tight, and you can feel a wicked headache/backache/cold coming on. The stress in your life has risen beyond your ability to cope with it, and your body will respond with a “breakdown” wherever it’s weakest. If you tend to catch viruses easily, you’ll come down with a cold or flu; if you have a “bad back,” it will get worse; otherwise mild allergies will become moderate to severe – you get the picture.

According to the noted Social Readjustment Rating Scale (also known as the “Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale”),

except for the death of a spouse or child, divorce produces more stress than any other life event. If you ignore or deny your feelings of stress, you’ll end up sick or injured (clumsiness often goes along with stress) – and then you’ll feel even more stressed at having to cope with your disability in addition to all the other challenges you’re facing. Divorce-related stress is unavoidable, but you can learn to manage your stress so that it doesn’t seriously damage your body and spirit. The only thing that’s required of you is a genuine willingness to change – everything else will grow out of your commitment to health and happiness. Without that commitment, however, any steps you take towards better health will be severely limited in both scope and efficacy.

## **Managing Stress**

If you’re facing the challenges of divorce right now, it’s probably safe to say that stress is your constant companion. Researchers at Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, D.C., have found that emotions can cause chemical reactions in our cells. This means that negative emotions (such as fear, anger, or even fretting) can have a detrimental impact on every part

of your body – including the organs that support your immune system. If stressful thoughts and feelings can actually damage your physical health, you can see why managing stress properly – and taking better care of your body – is so vital at this stage of your life.

So how do you relax and de-stress? If you're like most people, what leaps immediately to mind are "treat" behaviors: smoking, drinking, taking drugs (prescription or "recreational"), eating a carton of chocolate ice-cream – whatever gives you feelings of pleasure and well-being, no matter how transitory. Unfortunately, all of these are band-aid solutions – they temporarily ameliorate some of the symptoms without addressing the root of the problem – and none of them contribute to health and vitality.

## Scanning for Tension

A good place to start an effective stress-reduction program is to find out where you hold stress in your body. The first time you try the following exercise, you should probably be lying down with your eyes closed. Take the phone off the hook, and tell your kids or housemates that you don't want to be disturbed for at least half an hour. In this exercise, you'll be scanning your body from the tips of your toes to the top of your head, looking for places where you hold tension then consciously letting that tension go.

Focus your attention exclusively on one part of your body at a time, starting with your feet. Wiggle your toes. Rotate your ankles, and flex your feet so your toes are pointing up towards the ceiling, then down and away from you. Is there any tension in your feet or lower legs? If so, intentionally increase the tension for a few seconds, then exhale deeply and relax that part of your body, imagining the tension flowing out of you with your breath. Move your attention upwards to your thighs, buttocks, and hips. Flex each muscle in turn, checking for tension and discomfort, then let it go with a deep exhalation. Repeat for your stomach, chest, and shoulders. Pull your shoulders up towards your ears, hold them there tightly for a few seconds, then drop them down as far as they will comfortably go while you exhale. Now focus your attention to your throat, mouth, cheeks, eyes, forehead, and scalp. Notice any tension, exaggerate then release it.

The benefits of this exercise are twofold:

1. You'll discover where you hold stress in your body.
2. You'll give your body a break by releasing tense areas.

## Yoga and You

Yoga is an excellent way to treat mind and body simultaneously. From the Sanskrit word *yuj*, which means "to yoke," yoga is designed to yoke or join the mind, body, and breath. Hatha Yoga (the most common type in North America) can help you release built-up tension and stress, strengthening the body while calming the mind.

Before trying yoga or meditation on your own, you should meet with a qualified instructor to learn how to do it properly – which poses you should practice, and which you should avoid. Your instructor will guide you through the correct positions, and teach you the basics of proper breathing, meditation, and other relaxation techniques. Once you've learned the poses, all you need to practice yoga is a quiet, comfortable place and about 20-40 minutes each day to breathe and stretch your stress away.

## Food and Mood

Here are some suggestions on using food to improve your mood:

- **Cut back on caffeine**, including coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate. Women take note: caffeine has been found to play a huge role in PMS, from breast pain to mood swings. For some people, one cup a day is too much; you'll need to experiment to determine your threshold.
- **Drink pure water**. Ideally, you should be drinking about two liters of filtered water every day. This is one of the simplest, and yet most vital, steps you can take to improve your health.
- **Increase "good" fats**. Hundreds of studies have identified a relationship between depression and the absence of foods rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids in the diet. According to Gary L. Wenk, Ph.D., author of *Your Brain on Food: How Chemicals Control your Thoughts and Feelings* (Oxford University Press, 2010), "Your brain needs a balance between Omega-3 fatty acids and a similar fatty acid called Omega-6." Both of these fatty acids influence many important brain functions, including depression. "However, it is imperative to get the proper balance of both Omega-3 and Omega-6 in order to achieve optimal brain function," warns Dr. Wenk. "My advice: include leafy green vegetables, flaxseed, canola oils, kiwi fruit, walnuts, or marine fish in your diet every day." (To watch Dr. Wenk's TED talk on why food choices are key to a long, healthy life, go to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SvkaK2AI0o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SvkaK2AI0o))
- **Take your vitamins**. "Vitamin B-12 and other B vitamins play a role in producing brain chemicals that affect mood and other brain functions," say Dr. Daniel K. Hall-Flavin, who serves as one of the Mayo Clinic's online experts. "Low levels of B-12 and other B vitamins such as vitamin B-6 and folate may be linked to depression." Ask your doctor about which vitamins or supplements might be right for you.
- **Butt out**. Aside from increasing your risk of lung cancer and heart disease, smoking triggers the release of stress hormones in the body.
- **Avoid Sugar**. In *Stress Management for Dummies* (second edition, 2013), author Allen Elkin suggests that you: "Avoid highly sugared treats. They'll give you a boost in the short run but let you down in the long run." He also suggests that

you choose snacks that have “high energy proteins and are high in complex carbohydrates. They’ll give you a longer-lasting pick-me-up.” Elkin offers loads of great stress-busting tips and advice in this highly-readable book – everything from overcoming anger to goal setting, meditation to organizational skills.

## Exercise Your Options

If you really want to minimize the negative effects of divorce-related stress on your body, you need to do more than just eat right. You need to exercise.

What’s the best form of exercise? The one you’ll do. The best exercise equipment in the world won’t do you a bit of good if you can’t bring yourself to use it.

If you’ve been sedentary for the last few years, you *must* see your physician before you start an exercise program. If you haven’t had a full physical examination in the last year, now’s a great time to have one. Please be aware that pushing your body too hard too fast is a recipe for disaster – at the very least, you’ll probably sprain or tear a muscle; at worst, you’ll have a heart attack.

Unless your doctor vetoes the idea, a good place to start is by taking daily walks, slowly increasing the speed, distance, and duration. If you can’t stand the idea of walking “aimlessly,” give yourself errands to accomplish on your walks: instead of driving, walk to the bank/post office/milk store. Arrange to go for walks in scenic areas with friends so you can enjoy their company as well as the surroundings while you walk.

If your lifestyle can accommodate it, consider getting a dog: you’re guaranteed daily exercise, and it’s nice to come home to a happy, enthusiastic welcome instead of an empty house. (Also, you’ve probably heard of the therapeutic side-effects of pet ownership: that stroking an animal lowers your blood pressure and decreases tension.) If owning a dog is out of the question, you could always “borrow” one: your neighbor would probably be thrilled if you offered to take her dog for a daily walk in the park.

Walking can also help you sleep better at night – good news for those suffering from divorce-related insomnia. In a study involving more than 700 men and women, researchers discovered that people who walked at least six blocks a day at a normal pace experienced fewer sleep-related problems such as nightmares, or trouble getting to or staying asleep; in fact, they were one-third less likely to have trouble sleeping until their wake-up time than people who didn’t walk at all. And those who walked the same distance at an aerobic pace were 50% less likely to suffer sleep problems than non-walkers.

Dr. Andrew Weil, who has seen people achieve maximum fitness through walking alone, offers the following benefits of walking in his book *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* (Ballantine Books):

- You already know how to do it
- You can do it anywhere

- It requires no equipment, just a good pair of shoes
- It carries the least risk of injury of any form of exercise
- It can provide a complete workout, equal to or better than any other activity

## Touchy Situations

Chances are, there wasn’t a lot of positive touching during the last months – or even years – of your marriage. You’ve probably heard about the therapeutic benefits of touch, which include reducing stress and blood pressure and increasing relaxation and feelings of well-being. If you are without a romantic partner right now, how can you take advantage of these benefits? The simple answer is to get a massage.

Massage is one of the oldest natural remedies around: rubbing a sore spot on your body seems to be a basic instinct, like eating when you’re hungry or the “fight or flight” response. If you’ve ever had a full Swedish massage, you know how relaxing it can be. But many experts believe that it offers other benefits as well, including:

- Reducing muscle tension, swelling, and inflammation
- Relieving “tension” headaches and chronic pain
- Soothing the nervous system
- Improving blood circulation
- Aiding digestion
- Increasing joint mobility.

Other common types of therapeutic touch include: Reiki, Shiatsu, Feldenkrais, Rolwing, and Craniosacral therapy. Some involve deep, vigorous massage; some work on acupressure points; and others involve the lightest of strokes.

## Seeing Results

If you invest the time, energy, and commitment into caring for your body properly, it will repay you generously. But as an impatient North American, you’re probably wondering when the rewards will start to show up.

“Both from observing the effects of natural therapies and from watching people try to make lasting changes in how they live, I have concluded that two months ... is the critical time for you to see effects of therapeutic regimens as well as to replace old habits with new,” says Dr. Weil. “If you can follow a program of healthy living for two months, you will have made the commitment of time and energy necessary for it to work.” ■

*NOTE: This article is provided for information-purposes only. Do not begin any diet or exercise regimen without checking with your doctor first.*



*Diana Shepherd is the co-founder and Editorial Director of Divorce Magazine. An award-winning author and editor, she has been writing about divorce, remarriage, and stepfamily issues since 1995. [www.DivorceMag.com](http://www.DivorceMag.com)*

# DUMPER OR DUMPEE

Who Would You Rather Be?



Once the dumper finally works up the nerve to say, “I want a divorce,” they’ve already checked out of the marriage. The dumpee on the other hand? That poor sap never saw it coming.

By John Prindle, Author & Musician

**I**t’s an age-old question: which is worse, to be the one who got dumped or the one who did the dumping? Sometimes I’m surprised it’s even a question at all. The answer is so obvious.

It is worse to be the one who got dumped.

I’m not talking about a six-month relationship here – I’m talking about getting epically dumped after years of marriage. When I first got divorced (and I was the dumpee), I perused many websites about the topic. Some articles written by dumpers had the audacity to say that it was worse for them – that they had it even harder than the dumpee. Yeah, right.

## Would You Rather Be the Dumper or the Dumpee?

Here are the two lines of thought on the subject, greatly simplified for the sake of brevity.

1. It is harder on the dumpee because they were blindsided, their world fell apart, they weren’t expecting it....
2. It is harder on the dumper because they have to hurt someone they care/cared about, they have to be the “bad guy”....

Now, no disrespect to all the dumpers out there. Maybe you left your marriage for a really good reason. But a lot of dumpers bail on a pretty good marriage because it’s the easy way, while working on the marriage is the hard way. Relationships go through a lot of ups and downs and, especially after many years, they require work.

Some dumpers leave for fleeting reasons; maybe they have a new love interest and think that the grass will be greener. But the bottom line is that, as the dumper, they were mulling this over for quite some time. And during that time, they were essentially lying to the future dumpee or to themselves. Once the dumper finally works up the nerve

to say, “I want a divorce,” they have already checked out of the marriage. They’ve done whatever grieving they’re going to do. For them, dumping is a huge relief (insert bathroom joke here).

The dumpee on the other hand? That poor sap never saw it coming. Maybe they thought the relationship was in a bit of a rough patch, but they had no idea that their spouse would actually divorce them. They’ve had no time to grieve. Their nightmare starts now... with all the “what ifs,” the “why did this happens,” the “how could theys,” the “why wasn’t I good enoughs,” and myriad other nagging thoughts that will constantly dance through their heads as they try to scrape up the shattered pieces of their life.

They still have to go to work every day – even when they can barely function. They might have to find a new place to live. They might have a new host of financial troubles. It’s a lovely concoction: your safe and secure world falling apart while the real world cuts you no slack and demands that you somehow get it together. It can take a few years for the dumpee to get over a divorce. It can negatively affect their health. Sometimes, they never fully recover.

Some articles state that the dumper feels horrendous guilt and goes through their own private hell. But I’m not buying it. ■



*John Prindle is a writer, photographer, and musician who lives in Portland, Oregon. He is currently editing his second novel, which he regretfully abandoned during his divorce.*

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# Reconnecting to Self Is Key to Divorce Recovery

Reconnecting with yourself is an important step in moving forward post-divorce. You're not the same as you were before – which begs the question: “Who are you now?”

By Donna McGoff, Life Transition Coach

**R**econnecting with yourself after experiencing hardship is vital on the road to recovery – something few people know.

Several years ago, I was standing in line at the airport ready to board a plane to go to D.C. It was an exciting time for me, as I was going there to await the arrival of my first grandchild.

Waiting in line behind me was a group of women who appeared to be traveling together. I overheard one of the women say to the others, “Now that my divorce is finally over, I feel like I have no life. I don't know which direction to go or where I'm headed. My purpose in life was so tied to my marriage. I love my children

and career, which is a big part of my life. There's got to be more than just going through the same old routine every day.

“As a matter of fact, most days I just drift along and go through the motions. It's so frustrating. I don't know what my next step is.” The exchange made me think about the critical importance of knowing, and loving, ourselves.

## Why Is Reconnecting with Yourself So Important?

Reconnecting with yourself is a crucial step in moving forward once on the other side of divorce. You are not the same as you were before. In addition, some of your roles are different, along

with how you identify yourself. It begs the question: “Who are you now?”

Learning the importance of self-care will help you cultivate respect and more love for yourself. It's not selfish. Furthermore, it improves self-esteem, creates positive feelings, and increases self-confidence.

Simple steps like exercising, following a healthy diet, and getting proper rest will help you heal more quickly from the inside out.

Creating more harmony physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually supports a more balanced life. In fact, it will empower you so that you can start to celebrate all the wonderful things about yourself and validate who you are now.



Above all, you will feel inspired to set goals and make plans for the future. You will make better choices and decisions for the future, all coming from your higher self.

## Jordan and Brady's Divorce

Jordan got divorced after 23 years of marriage. The emotional upheaval and shock from such a long union become more pronounced when Jordan dwells on the memories, her devotion, and her passionate commitment that she invested in the marriage.

All her hopes and dreams for the future are now clearly gone. Brady, her husband, was unhappy for a long time. He decided he didn't want to spend the rest of his life in a marriage that no longer gives him happiness and joy. Brady doesn't want to go to counseling or therapy with Jordan to try to work it out.

He feels that the marriage is at the point of no return and that he is still young enough to enjoy what life has to offer. As a result, he leaves to explore other possibilities and opportunities that could come his way.

Long after she and Brady are divorced, Jordan keeps Brady's small home office just the way he left it. She doesn't change a thing. She even keeps his phone and old headset.

Jordan gains a lot of weight and is feeling out of control. Being a small person in stature, the weight is more pronounced on her small frame. Emotional eating is her coping mechanism: it's her way of dealing with the situation. Jordan feels a lot of pain and anguish. Not only that, she doesn't allow the uncomfortable feelings and emotions to come into her experience. Instead of dealing with them, she stuffs them back down along with lots of food.

She eats those feelings and emotions away.

Under the circumstances, she does not recognize herself; emotionally, she doesn't know who she is anymore. She's lost her sense of self and her well-being. Jordan starts on the road to recovery and becomes "unstuck" when she realizes that by not taking care of herself

from the inside out, she loses the power to take control of her present life. By denying that now her life is different, she knows that she is not adapting to her present situation.

When faced with a life-altering experience, it's important to realize that it changes you. As a result, you need to get reacquainted with who you are now and embrace that person. You have to focus on reconnecting to yourself.

## How Jordan Regained Control over Her Life

For Jordan, the extra weight was an emotional crutch. Emotional eating became a habit, and put a literal barrier between herself and others. She started to isolate herself and become less social.

The good news, though, is that emotional eating is just a habit, and a habit that she can break. Jordan can replace that negative behavior with more positive, productive habits.

After clearing out Brady's home office and creating a new workout space for the exercise routine that she adopts, she starts cooking her favorite meals that are nutritious and healthy.

## Jordan's 4 Action Steps

Jordan took some simple steps so that she could once again celebrate the wonderful things about herself. Eventually, this led her to feeling empowered and able to take back control over her life. Here are the steps she took to reconnect with herself:

1. **Jordan became aware of the thoughts** that come up which are associated with emotional eating, and wrote down those that were most frequent.
2. **She made a list of different behaviors** she can readily use in place of overeating and taped it to a kitchen cabinet: a place where she can easily be reminded of them. Instead of mindlessly going into the cabinet to grab some snacks, she is able to choose a new behavior from the list and now does that instead.
3. When the uncomfortable feeling does overtake her, all Jordan wants

to do is get rid of it. Rather than eat, she now **stops where she is, right in the present moment, and feels the uncomfortable feeling**. She breathes into the uncomfortable feeling with long slow breaths. As she does that, the breathing will take away some of its power. As a result, she will stay in control and make a better choice.

4. **Jordan adopted a regular workout routine and consciously chooses healthy, nutritious foods** that will empower her to cultivate self-care from the inside out.

## What Does She Learn from These Actions?

Jordan learns to be present. She's not distracted by thoughts of the past or the future. The past is gone and the future is not here yet. All we ever have is the present moment.

By becoming aware of her thoughts, Jordan has learned that her thoughts create the uncomfortable feelings that trigger emotional eating. When she begins to become aware of them, she can push them aside. By pushing them aside, she is making space to replace the negative thoughts with positive ones.

When she does that, Jordan feels less apprehension, worry, and stress about things that she no longer has control over. What she does start to cultivate is control over herself. By doing this work and reconnecting to herself, she begins to know, respect, and love who she is now. ■



*Donna McGoff coaches divorced women 50+ as they face challenges not experienced by their younger counterparts. Her online course, "Recover, Reconnect, Reinvent – The Ultimate Result-Driven Process to Rebuilding Your New Life After Divorce," and her e-book, Recover and Heal From the Inside Out After Divorce, are available on Donna's website.*

[www.livingabovetheordinary.com](http://www.livingabovetheordinary.com)

# 6

## Tips for Bouncing Back After Infidelity

When someone has cheated on you, the anger and resentment you feel towards them is understandable. But these emotions can paralyze you, affecting your ability to move on from infidelity.

By Chris Armstrong, Certified Relationship Coach



**O**ne of my four rules of relationship coaching is that I will not try and salvage a relationship or marriage if there has been infidelity. I will not waiver from this. But dammit if I will not help a client who has been cheated on and has decided to end their marriage. Bouncing back after such deceit is not easy but it is achievable.



Here are six things you can do to move on after your spouse has cheated.

### 1. Let Yourself Grieve

You will cry. You will have anger. You will want to be alone. This is you. This is us. This is human. One of the worst things that one can do is to put on a false sense of bravado or hide their emotions. When we suppress our feelings instead of allowing ourselves to grieve, the internal pain manifests itself in ways and at times that are unhealthy. This can yield long-term, negative consequences.

### 2. Do Not Overthink the “Why”

Your marriage has ended because they cheated on you. To this day, you are still not sure why. So there you sit, thinking about every possible rationale.

- You’ve gained weight and they were no longer attracted to you?
- They went on a lot of trips and grew lonely in the hotels?
- There was so much time with the children and working on the online business that you were always too tired to stay connected in the bedroom?

It could be these reasons and it could be many other reasons. I need to share something with you that you may not want to hear. In the scheme of things, the “why” does not matter. Again, your marriage has already ended and no rationale you can think of will justify the infidelity. And the more you think about the why, the more you are second-guessing yourself and unwittingly sabotaging the life you are trying to rebuild.

### 3. Resist Posting It All Over Social Media

Posting your tale of woe on Facebook may give you an opportunity to release in the moment, but it will also create weeks of constant reminders through the countless “likes,” comments, and emojis. It will also create opportunities for friends and family to weigh in, throwing unintended fuel on the fire. This will not help you bounce back.

### 4. Find Meaningful Outlets

“Meaningful” is a very deliberate word, because we are good at doing things, anything, to occupy our minds, but if those things are not who we really are and do not truly resonate with us, they will prove to be temporary buffers from the negative feelings of the infidelity and divorce. On the other hand, if there are hobbies and activities that have always brought you joy, find a couple of hours a week to get back into them. You will smile, and it will be natural. You will remember the good things in life, and those memories will be pleasant.

This brings me to the most important reasons for finding meaningful outlets. The more you can invest in them, the more they will help.

### 5. Remind Yourself of Who You Were When You Were Happy

Divorce can be an embarrassing experience; being cheated on can be even worse. We feel unattractive and unworthy of a faithful relationship with someone who supposedly loved us. What’s more, it is almost always the case that some of our friends and family knew about the infidelity. But, your spouse’s cheating is just a moment in a life that was full of moments that made us happy.

- We remember being asked to the prom by three guys we liked.
- We remember having game night and martinis with our friends.
- We remember being flirted with by the bartender at that place on Sycamore.

Keep these memories in your frontal lobe so that the pain of divorce and infidelity can be replaced by the confidence of who you are and the faith that there is a happy life to be had.

### 6. Be the Bigger Person

When someone has cheated on you, the anger and resentment that you are prone to feel towards them is understandable. But when these emotions are turned outwards towards the cheater, they can paralyze you, affecting your ability to move on. You must resist this.

**Be the bigger person: it will show your cheating partner that you are not a wounded bird, and in the long term, the effect that they had on you was nil.**

- When you see them every other weekend to drop the kids off, converse with them.
- When they come to the soccer game with their new squeeze, introduce yourself – don’t wait for the awkward moment where you bump into each other.

Taking this approach will help you find your pride and self-regard that almost certainly lapsed when you found out about the infidelity. Say to yourself, “I am not hiding because I am bigger and stronger than that.”

It will also put things into perspective for the one who cheated on you. You are not a wounded bird, and in the long term, the effect that they had on you was nil. This puts the rest of your interactions with them on a level playing field.

This is *not* to suggest that you should forgive cheating – I think the complete opposite. *But*, one needs to forgive an offense in order to truly move on. ■



*Chris Armstrong is a Certified Relationship Coach and Emotional Intelligence facilitator who cuts to the chase and speaks from the heart. A regular blogger at DivorcedMoms.com, he is also an experienced advocate for women’s equality and empowerment, having taught more than 350 sessions on these matters. [www.mazeoflove.com](http://www.mazeoflove.com)*

# Get Your Head Straight After Divorce

Looking after your mental, emotional, and physical health after divorce can help make the process a little easier – and help you move towards your goal of healing.

By Paisley Hansen, Divorced Mom and Author

**G**etting your mind in the right place after divorce can seem impossible. This is because divorce is one of the most difficult things a person goes through in life and can take a lot out of you emotionally, mentally, and physically. However, that doesn't mean that it is impossible to cope with or move past. If you are looking for ways to help yourself heal and move on after a difficult divorce, here are some things to try out.

## Give Yourself a Break

One of the most important things you can do when dealing with a divorce is learning to give yourself a break. Many people have a tendency to be hard on themselves, even while they are going through a tough life situation. When you are already trying to deal with a lot of heavy emotions, it can be a good idea to learn to be easy on yourself or not blame yourself too much for the situation. You should also try to find more ways to be compassionate with yourself and accept that going through a divorce does not reflect negatively on you as a person.

## Start Journaling

Another thing you can do to help make things a little easier on you emotionally is to try things that will help you process your feelings, like journaling. Journaling is not only a good hobby in general, but it can also have a lot of great healing benefits. By taking time to write down your experiences and how they have affected you emotionally, you can better process some of the things that you have gone through and ease your mind.



Not only does this help you make sense of things in a deeper way, but it can also help reduce stress and promote feelings of well-being too.

### Practice Mindfulness

If journaling isn't something that you can see yourself doing, mindfulness, or meditation, can be another great way to help manage your emotions and reduce stress during this time. Meditation has many great benefits, besides just allowing you some time to relax and clear your mind. Not only can it help to reduce stress and calm your nervous system, but over time it can help with mood regulation and even change the wiring of your brain so that it is more resilient to stress in general. To get the most out of meditation, it is ideal to practice for at least 15 to 20 minutes a day. However, some may find it difficult to do this, so starting out in intervals of 5 to 10 minutes and building up can be a good place to start.

### Look After Your Physical Health

Something that has a huge impact on how people feel overall, yet that many forget, is their physical health. During a difficult time like divorce, some may let their routines slide and stop exercising (or exercise past the point of exhaustion), stop sleeping (or sleep too much), or let personal hygiene take a backseat to watching too much TV. You may begin eating far too many unhealthy "comfort" foods, or start smoking, drinking to excess, or using recreational drugs to numb your pain.

However, your physical health has a huge impact on how you feel emotionally, and in many ways, how well you will be able to cope with the many challenges facing you as well.

Because your physical health is so important to healing and moving on in general, doing some things to ensure

that you are taking good care of yourself can be ideal. First, you should make sure that you are eating a quality diet full of fresh fruits and vegetables. In addition to that, you should begin a workout routine, if possible.

Getting plenty of physical exercise during this time is especially helpful because working out – no matter what kind of workout you do, whether it is walking, weight lifting, or aerobics – can help boost happiness chemicals in your brain. In addition to getting enough exercise, it is also essential that you try to stick to a regular sleeping schedule and that you get as much sleep as possible so that you can feel your best.

### Trust the Process

Along with learning to be easier on yourself while you are going through a hard time, it can be beneficial to learn to trust the process as much as possible. This may not feel easy at first, and you may have trouble starting out, but in the long run it can make the process much easier on you overall. No matter what your specific circumstances are, having faith that you will come out of the process with the best possible outcome for you can take a lot of stress and strife out of the situation.

Getting your head straight after divorce is crucial in order to heal in a healthy way. By taking the time to look after your mental, emotional, and physical health, you can help make the process a little easier on yourself and move closer towards your goal of healing. ■



*Paisley Hansen is the loving mother of two beautiful daughters. She has seen and lived through the effects divorce can have on a family, and she is passionate in helping others through that process.*

**No matter what your specific circumstances are, having faith that you will come out of the process with the best possible outcome can take a lot of stress and strife out of the situation.**



# DIVORCE STRESS

Divorce stress is not uncommon when faced with the end of a marriage. Learn how to identify and manage it in both yourself and your children.

By Marina Edelman, Marriage and Family Therapist

**D**uring the Olympics, one of the female gymnasts was asked how she handles pressure and stress. She said that she doesn't view pressure to perform as a negative; instead, she labels the feeling as "excitement" instead of "stress" or "pressure." This is not a big stretch since stress can be good as well as bad. Without some stress, we would not have the adrenaline to win races, solve problems, take exams, and make changes in the world.

Stress can be defined as mental, physical, or emotional disturbance that alters homeostasis of the body and can be experienced both physically and psychologically. It is a form of pressure experienced by a person due to external impact from a job, school, death of a loved one, marriage, and divorce. Change has been identified as the dominant cause of stress in most cases.

Stress is also accompanied by a feeling of threat where the affected person assumes an endangered state of mind. Stress is an undesirable and unpleasant state usually manifested through actions, the way of thinking, and feelings.

Chronic stress cannot be ignored and must be dealt with to avoid decreased immune function, which leads to worsening of ill-health and causes debilitating symptoms.

The easiest way to start dealing with divorce-related stress is through adopting the following actions and practices:

- Avoid rushing.
- Exercise.
- Take deep breaths.
- Talk about it: putting an adjective to a feeling releases the negative energy stored in the body.

You can also engage your mind to help manage your stress:

- Use positive mental imagery.
- Focus on the task at hand rather than imagining the outcome.
- Avoid negative thoughts.
- Reflect on thoughts and actions that led to a particularly good performance.

## Stress: Signs and Symptoms

Stress is an individual experience and symptoms vary. The signs and symptoms listed below may also be signs of disease, so you shouldn't ignore them just because you believe they are stress-related. You must get more serious symptoms checked out by your doctor.

### Physical signs and symptoms of stress include:

- ✓ Chest pain.
- ✓ Pounding heart.
- ✓ High blood pressure.
- ✓ Shortness of breath.
- ✓ Fatigue.
- ✓ Diminished or increased sex drive.
- ✓ Muscle aches, such as back and neck pain.
- ✓ Headaches.
- ✓ Dizziness.
- ✓ Clenched jaws and grinding teeth.
- ✓ Tight, dry, or a feeling of a lump in your throat.
- ✓ Indigestion.
- ✓ Constipation or diarrhea.
- ✓ Increased perspiration.
- ✓ Stomach cramps.
- ✓ Weight gain or loss.
- ✓ Skin problems.

### The psychological signs and symptoms of stress include:

- ✓ Sadness.
- ✓ Depression.
- ✓ Crying.
- ✓ Withdrawal or isolation.
- ✓ Insomnia.

- ✓ Mood swings.
- ✓ Worry.
- ✓ Restless anxiety.
- ✓ Irritability, anger, decreased anger control.
- ✓ Overeating or loss of appetite.
- ✓ Feelings of insecurity.
- ✓ Decreased productivity.
- ✓ Job dissatisfaction.
- ✓ Changes in close relationships.
- ✓ Increased smoking.
- ✓ Increased use of alcohol and drugs.

Everyone experiences divorce stress differently – including children and especially teenagers. Teen girls and boys tend to manifest stress differently from each other; signs of stress in teenaged girls include:

- ✓ Procrastination in doing her homework.
- ✓ Overreaction to a situation with a friend.
- ✓ Frozen while taking a test.
- ✓ Loses temper easily and is unusually moody.
- ✓ Excessively tired.
- ✓ Uses aches or pains as an excuse to stay home from school.
- ✓ Takes out aggression on a younger sibling.

In teenaged boys, a certain amount of moodiness is normal. Here are some signs to help you differentiate between “normal” and “stressed-out” in teenaged boys:

- ✓ Arguing is normal; constant anger is not.
- ✓ Withdrawal from parents is normal; pulling away from family and friends is not.
- ✓ Anxiety is normal; feeling constantly overwhelmed is not.
- ✓ Being upset for days after a bad experience is normal; more than two weeks is not.

## Get Help

Pay attention to your body and it will serve you well. If you aren't able to cope with divorce stress on your own, please consult a mental-health professional who can help you identify triggers and implement new coping strategies to minimize the effect of life's rollercoasters on your health and well-being. ■



Marina Edelman is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who offers solution-focused and evidence-based psychotherapy and counseling, including assessment and treatment for a range of emotional, behavioral, and psychological difficulties. [www.marinaedelman.com](http://www.marinaedelman.com)



# To Help You **Move** **Past Your** **Divorce**

If you're trying to move past your divorce but are having a hard time doing it, you're not alone. Here are some tips to help you move on – and maybe even find love again.

By Gray Robinson, Divorce Coach and Lawyer



“  
Being a good person  
in a bad situation  
speaks volumes  
about your character  
and integrity.”

**D**ivorce is challenging for both parties involved. If you are trying to move past your divorce but are having a hard time doing it, you are not alone.

I was a divorce lawyer for many years and have been divorced twice myself. There are some tips, though, that can help you survive divorce, move on, and find love with someone else.

### 1 Don't Be a Victim

Many people look at divorce as a tragedy and experience anger, despair, fear, and loathing – especially if they did not want the divorce. Instead, people should look for the positives in the situation and imagine they are a caterpillar undergoing a metamorphosis into a better person. My experience with divorce convinced me that if I looked for the positives, the emotional pain was reduced. Try making a list of the positives of divorce and focus on that rather than the pain.

### 5 Take Responsibility

Even if you don't want a divorce, you have to take responsibility for the termination of the relationship and learn any lessons there are to be learned. Whether it is changing your expectations of the relationship, what you are looking for in a partner, or identifying your part in the demise of the relationship, you have to see where you can change. People who claim to be blameless are bound to repeat their mistakes in future relationships.

### 2 Accept that Everything Changes

Very few relationships last forever. We get older, our desires and expectations change, and so do our physical, emotional, and mental bodies. Relationships – especially marriages – are like a dance. If one or both spouses stop dancing at the same dance, the dance will end. No one is to blame; this is life.

### 6 Take the High Road

The biggest challenge in divorce is to keep your head when everyone else is losing theirs. Always speak kindly and set an example for your ex-spouse to follow. Harsh words and anger will leave a lasting scar. Remember: you married your ex for a reason. Do not let fear of the future make a bad situation worse. It is also critical that you do not gossip about your ex-spouse. It is human nature to seek sympathy and guidance from friends, but you don't have to "trash talk" your ex all of the time.

### 3 Focus on Why You Fell in Love

Many people view their ex-spouse as a monster and blame themselves for marrying such a terrible person. They forget that at one time they were very much in love with this person. If we can remember the reasons that we fell in love in the first place it can help make the ex more human. Hate is an expensive emotion and can cause great suffering. If you can remember that your ex-spouse is a human being, what follows does not have to be a horrible experience.

It is also critical that you not do not trash-talk your ex-spouse to your children. They are not emotionally equipped to handle the emotions you are going through, so let them be kids and let them love their other parent. Finally, it is important not to trash talk your ex-spouse when entering into a relationship with someone new. They will be more impressed with your kindness and compassion than your tales of woe.

### 4 Happiness Is the Best Revenge

When clients came to me to help them with their divorce, I always asked them two questions. The first was, "Do you want to be happy or right?" The second was, "Why did you marry this person?" Being right is always the more expensive route. People who want revenge and to prove their ex-spouse is a bad person don't understand the emotional pain they will have to suffer to achieve their goal. People who can be compassionate and want the best for their ex-spouse will be happier and richer in the long run. Put aside your petty grudges and understand that you will be alright – no matter what happens.

Being a good person in a bad situation speaks volumes about your character and integrity. It will also benefit you when starting new relationships. People are attracted more to character, integrity, and kindness than any other traits. Remember all of this as you begin to learn how to move past your divorce – you won't regret it. ■



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# Why Being Friends with Your Ex Doesn't Usually Work

It's a good idea to be civil and cooperative with your ex; however, being friends with them probably won't allow you to move on with your life after divorce.

By Terry Gaspard, Therapist and Author

**W**hile it's normal to want to undo the past, being friends with your ex usually doesn't work out. It's a noble endeavor to want to be a friend to a former spouse, but it can fuel your child's reconciliation fantasies and prevent both adults from healing and moving on with their lives.

It's especially problematic for the person who was left – or the dumpee – because having regular contact with the person who rejected them can make a person feel confused or give them a sense of false hope. On the other hand, the dumper would probably admit to feeling guilty upon seeing their ex regularly or worry that they are sending the wrong message.

When my marriage ended, I had the misconception that two good people (myself and my ex) should be able to stay friends after our divorce. In my case, I was looking for closure – but soon realized that letting go of the reasons why our marriage dissolved was a healthier decision. I also came to terms with the fact that I didn't need to have all of the answers to why my marriage failed in order to move on.





There are many reasons why people strive to be friends with their ex after a breakup or divorce. Certainly one of the main reasons is that they have unfinished business that they hope to resolve. Or they may want to keep the non-intimate part of the relationship going because they have caring feelings towards their former spouse.

Erin, a 40-something teacher, confides, “I couldn’t understand why two civilized adults couldn’t visit with our kids and hang out like friends. But Jason told me it hurt him too badly because I broke it off and he was reminded of his pain every time we got together.” This experience is a common one for the dumpee who might feel especially hurt if their ex has a new partner and they don’t. It can add salt to an open wound that has not had sufficient time to heal.

Another reason why people want to stay in close contact with a former partner after a breakup is guilt. Sometimes the person who is the dumper feels guilty about leaving the

**While it’s normal to want to undo the past, being friends with your ex usually doesn’t work out.**

relationship, especially if they were unfaithful, and they want to remain friendly with the dumpee to help to ease their guilt. In this case, counseling with a qualified therapist is a more effective way to deal with these leftover emotions.

Further, some individuals keep their relationship alive because they hope for reconciliation but they don’t necessarily acknowledge it. According to Susan J. Elliott, author of *Getting Past Your Breakup*, “Examining your quest for contact and being honest about your real intentions will help you stop making excuses to make contact.”

Conner, 48, reflects, “I did all I could to keep in touch with Karen with the hope that we could fix things and one day get back together – even though I knew she was in love with someone else.”

### Why Being Friends with Your Ex Doesn’t Work

- 1. Most of the time, a post-breakup friendship is a setup for further heartbreak**, especially for the person who was left and probably feels rejected.
- 2. It does not give you or your ex time to grieve the loss of the relationship or marriage.** Like all losses, the breakup of a long-term relationship or marriage causes people to go through various stages of grief. In order to heal and move through anger and denial, it’s essential that individuals have the emotional and physical space to do this. Trying to maintain a friendship may extend the healing process.
- 3. You need to forge a new identity:** After a breakup, it’s essential to lose your identity as a couple and to return to who you were as an individual, rather than half of a couple.
- 4. It can cause confusion for your children.** It’s normal for

most children to experience reconciliation fantasies and seeing their parents spend time together (social events, holidays, etc.) can cause them to long for their intact family. Children benefit from parents who are collaborative but not necessarily friends post-breakup.

- 5. You might not have been true friends and it’s problematic to start now.** Sometimes, especially when there are children involved, a person may feel pressured to preserve a friendship that never existed or that disappeared during your marriage. So just say “no” and remain cordial to each other.
- 6. You need energy to “take care of yourself”** and to form new relationships. Maintaining a close friendship with an ex (especially if it’s emotionally or physically intimate) can delay this process.
- 7. Acceptance is the final stage of grieving the loss of a loved one**, according to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, and a post-breakup friendship doesn’t facilitate this process.

At some point, it’s important to accept the breakup of your marriage and come to a place of “it is what it is.” These anecdotes from bloggers help to explain how acceptance and setting boundaries with your ex can facilitate creating a new chapter in your life.

Katie, a 30-something high school counselor, reflects, “When I broke it off with husband Kyle, he took it very hard. I thought that if we stayed in touch and hung out sometimes it would help him adjust, but it only made things worse. I let my guilt and his feelings of rejection be the driving force rather than common sense. It took him years to get over our breakup and I was left feeling even more guilty because of the pain I caused him.”

Justin, a 40-year old accountant, shares: “It just didn’t work for Heather and me to remain friends. It got complicated without three kids and they felt more confused when we tried to get together. Then when I started dating Susie, they didn’t like her and kept talking about wanting their mom and me to get back together. It wasn’t fair to them and I didn’t want to give them false hope.”

Truth be told, it’s a great idea to be civil and cooperative with your former spouse – especially when you have children. Being allies with your ex can help children adjust and thrive post-divorce. That said, maintaining a friendship with your former spouse probably won’t allow you both to move on with your life after a divorce. Giving yourself time and space to regain independence and a sense of identity will serve you and your children well in the long run. ■



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# How to Let Go of the Past After Divorce

Moving on after divorce can be difficult, but there are actions you can take to make the process smoother. Try the following suggestions and start looking forward to a happy future!

By Wendi Schuller, Therapist and Author

It can be hard to let go of the past after divorce. Focusing on what was instead of what is can hinder you from moving on post-divorce. Divorce may come as a shock, and fixating on what used to be gets in the way of taking action now.

Some people interviewed for this article said they kept dreaming about the past – likely through the lenses of rose-colored glasses – as the present was too painful to think about. Others felt that if they denied what was happening (i.e., that their spouse was leaving them), things would go back to the way they were.



One sign that a person is hanging on to an ex-spouse and not letting go is talking endlessly about them. An acquaintance went on and on about her former husband until somebody else changed the subject. She did not date but instead wallowed in that relationship which she failed to leave behind post-divorce. There were no children and it was a clean break. I occasionally run into her former husband; he has never brought up his ex in conversation with me, and he was able to move on with his life. He is happily remarried and is a proud step-father.

You must realize that you can and must choose whether to stay mentally and emotionally attached to a former partner or face the cold truth of reality that they are not coming back.

## How to Let Go and Move On

Part of getting beyond reliving the past is filling the void left by your divorce. When an old life and marital relationship

**Instead of focusing on what you're missing, look for the silver lining in your divorce cloud.**

ends, something has to fill this gaping hole. This was the problem with my acquaintance. She did not try to meet people, take a class, or pursue new endeavors. The void remained.

One of the first steps to moving on is replacing the loss of friends (those who departed from your life with your ex) with new friends, pursuits, hobbies, and adventures. Expand your social circle by joining a special interest group or renewing friendships that may have fallen by the wayside when you got married. I joined travel and book clubs. Other divorced pals are in film and hiking clubs.

If you haven't already done so, go find your "tribe!" There are many studies globally that show the health benefits of being connected to others, so you must leave the (depressing) safety of your sofa by enjoying pleasurable outings with like-minded people.

## Stay (or Get) Mentally and Physically Active

A new job during the early phase of my divorce proceedings was mentally stimulating, and it gave me less time to think about my losses. Others have taken courses or changed career paths after a divorce. Take up a sport for a physical

challenge (start slow if the only "sport" you've engaged in for years is channel surfing). The goal is to keep mentally and physically active to fill the void and find life more satisfying. When your agenda is crammed full of entertaining events and pleasurable pursuits, looking ahead instead of behind becomes much easier.

Some divorced individuals told me that they became more active in their churches, synagogues, or mosques. The support received helped them realize that they were not alone and that other people care about them. Divorced people in the congregations offered advice and shared their own stories. One divorced friend even met her next husband in her church's singles group.

## Start New Traditions

Rituals and routines can keep one rooted in the past. If you always went out for Sunday brunch with your spouse, make it a Saturday brunch with friends. Discover different dining or coffee venues. Doing the same activities at the same places that you did when married triggers memories.

My boys and I dropped some routines that we did with their father. Instead, it was exciting to dream up fresh ways to have family fun and create new experiences after divorce. My sons and I shook up Christmas rituals by leaving town over the holidays several times. Think about what no longer serves you or keeps you tethered to your former spouse, and drop those traditions, habits, and routines like a hot coal.

## Focus on the Positive

Being in the company of positive people can help you leave the past behind and notice what good things lie ahead. They tend to look at the bright side of life and not dwell on the negatives. Emotions are contagious, and being around these people is uplifting.

Instead of focusing on what you're missing, look for the silver lining in your divorce cloud. I gave up being on the party circuit and entertaining, which we did to further my husband's career. After divorce, I realized how draining the constant parties were and am so glad to have given them up. I have more time for my sons, which resulted in a closer relationship with them.

Think about what aspects are better in your life now, and keep looking forward to your next adventure. ■



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# Reinventing Yourself After Divorce



Reinventing yourself is about more than putting on new clothes or taking up a new hobby. It starts from the inside out and involves understanding who you are – and who you want to be.

By Frankie Wallace, Writer

**W**hen the papers are finally signed and you have a judgment of divorce in your hand, it doesn't really matter how you got there. Maybe things ended amicably. Or maybe you knew this was coming for years because your marriage was in turmoil.

Whatever the case, going through a divorce can leave you feeling lonely and empty. In reality, you did lose a part of yourself and a part of your past.

But you can rebuild, reinvent, and revive yourself for a brighter future. Now that you're single, you can focus your attention on self-care and creating a "new you."

That doesn't mean you need to change *who* you are. But if you're willing to take the best elements of yourself from your past and embrace them, along with the idea of becoming your best future self, you can truly be the person you've always wanted

to be without anyone holding you back.

It's okay to fully accept and process what happened. It's even more okay (and healthy!) to grieve over the loss of your marriage. But once you've accepted the reality of it, you can let go and move on to live your best life.

Let's look at a few positive changes you can make to debut the new you.

## Changing Your Look

One of the easiest and quickest ways to start feeling different is to start looking different. Maybe you've wanted to change your hair for years but your partner liked it the way it was. Or maybe you never even considered changing your look until now. But making subtle changes can boost your self-confidence (something that often suffers during a divorce) and can motivate you to make a fresh start.

You don't have to go through any drastic changes. Small differences can actually end up meaning a lot to you. For example, if you wear glasses, you can get yourself a new pair of frames. Try frames that are thicker/thinner, or have a different shape or color. Glasses can change the look of your face, so don't be afraid to try something different, even if it takes a while to get used to them.

You could also consider brightening up (and practicing!) your smile. There are plenty of inexpensive off-the-shelf ways to safely brighten and whiten your teeth. If your budget allows, you could also go to your dentist for professional whitening.

If you've never been happy with the way your teeth look, you could also consider braces. Some insurance companies will cover the cost, and there are other financial assistance programs to help you pay for braces when they're needed.

Changing your wardrobe is another easy way to update your look. Treat yourself to a bit of retail therapy, or just

buy a few new outfits that capture your personality and how you feel.

## Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone

If you really want to reinvent yourself, try to do some new things. That includes things that the "old" you may not have considered. Find your purpose and start living it.

For some people, that might mean new daily routines and habits. Working out, for example, might be something new for you, but it can completely change your life. Exercising every day can lower stress, change the way you look, and boost your energy. There are

**When you get to know yourself again, you can be more self-reliant and self-confident. You can also let go of the pain and anger that you may be still holding on to.**

so many ways to get moving; whether you go to the gym, become an avid outdoor runner, or try a new sport that you've always been interested in, don't be afraid to push yourself out of your comfort zone.

Think about something you have always been curious about but have never tried. Maybe it's skydiving. Maybe it's taking a dance class. Maybe it's art or pottery. Taking that first step toward a new hobby can give you a sense of purpose and it can also make you feel stronger and more confident than you have in years. Plus, when you

start getting involved with different things, you're bound to meet new and interesting people.

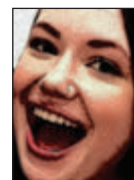
## Don't Settle for the Same Old, Same Old

Perhaps the most important aspect of reinventing yourself is not going back to who you used to be. That doesn't mean letting go of the parts of yourself that you have always loved: it means not settling for the "same old" – especially when you step back into the dating world.

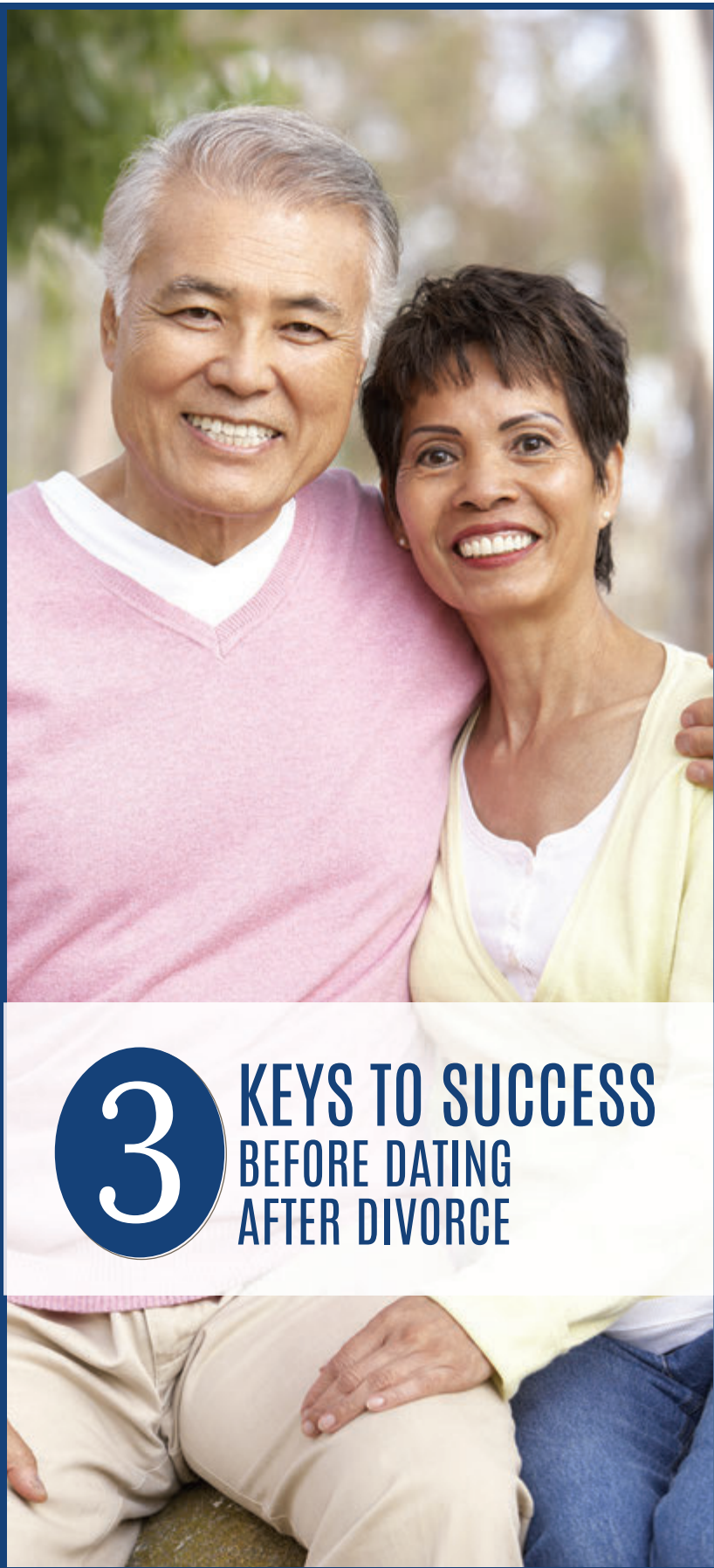
It can be hard to learn to love yourself again after a divorce. But it's crucial to practice self-love on a daily basis. If you don't, not only will you be unable to move on from the pain of your divorce, but it's also unlikely that you'll ever be able to give a new partner the love they deserve.

Take time to get to know yourself. Who are you, really? What's the best thing about you, and what's the worst? It might seem silly to ask yourself those questions, but we don't often sit down and really think about who we are. That's especially true after a painful event like divorce. When you get to know yourself again, you can be more self-reliant and self-confident. You can also let go of the pain and anger that you may still be holding on to.

Don't settle for less in the future, whether you choose to remain single or start dating. And remember: reinventing yourself is about more than putting on new clothes or taking up a new hobby. It starts from the inside out, and understanding who you are and who you want to be. ■



*Frankie Wallace contributes to a variety of blogs online and writes about many different topics, from divorce to parenting to education.*



# 3

## KEYS TO SUCCESS BEFORE DATING AFTER DIVORCE

It can be hard to imagine going on a date, especially after a long-term marriage; these three tips will help you step into the dating pool with confidence.

By Carla Hugo, Certified Divorce Coach

**E**ach divorce is unique. You may have precipitated your divorce, or you may have clung onto your marriage. Many times, it's a bit of both. In either case, you ended up single. The reality of being single can be difficult to accept and adjust to. As with any loss, the loss of your marriage needs to be mourned. While your memories stay intact, your future plans with your spouse have now disintegrated. That makes it a great time to re-imagine and re-build your future.

If you're considering dating after divorce, here are three keys to keep in mind.

### 1 Take Time to Identify Your Unrealized Dreams

When you look back at your marriage and the plans that will not come to fruition with your spouse, how can you re-envision them? What are the dreams that you wanted to experience when married? What are the dreams that you want to experience now that you are single? The nature of divorce is that it offers you freedom.

Take some notes in a journal or on a device. Do you have a travel destination in mind? Have you wanted to really learn how to cook? Whatever dream you once had, you can still achieve.

Know what you want *before* you begin dating. Having clarity about your vision and values will help to keep you from falling for

someone who is not supportive of or in alignment with your dreams.

## 2 Clean Up Your Act

It's a great time to detoxify from habits that do not make you feel your best. Before you can find your best match, you need to be your best. Look at what you eat, what you drink, how well you sleep, and your exercise routine. These physical acts contribute greatly to your emotional well-being as well as your physical energy and wellness. Consider other habits that may cause you to be sedentary or drain you of positive energy. These can include television, video games, and social media. What steps, if any, do you currently take to clear your mind?

Use your journal or device and identify toxic, addictive food and drinks that you want to eliminate from your diet. Keep a sleep log and take note of what circumstances create your best sleep. Notice the habits that cause you to ruminate on thoughts that make you feel sad or fearful. Eliminate these habits. This process of detoxifying your life will make you feel vibrant and love yourself more. Your physical and emotional health will improve and you will have enhanced energy. When you start to date, you want to be with people who support your best self.

## 3 Be Authentically Yourself

When you set out on a date it is best to be your authentic self. Rather than put on a façade of whom you could be or whom you think the date wants you to be, be true to yourself. In that truth, you will attract a more likely match. Once you have implemented keys one and two you have made huge progress toward being your individual and unique self. You are clear on your dreams and have cleared out activities, food, and substances that are detrimental to your health. It is a re-birthing of sorts.

Now it is time to allow yourself to shine. Express yourself in a way that is true to your core values. Resist the urge to fall in line with what those around you are thinking or promoting. Be true to your dreams, not drama. Stay focused on detoxifying on a continual basis and steer clear of toxic indulgences and situations.

When you are true to yourself, you are authentic. Contrary to popular belief, being true to yourself does not make you insensitive to others or selfish. In fact, when you operate from your authentic self, you have more to offer others! When you are no longer hiding behind what others expect of you, your own uniqueness will shine. People will be drawn to you for what you have to offer them.

## One Chapter Ends and a New One Begins

Divorce is devastating and marks the end of an era in your life. Take time to be present with what is going on currently and unhook from past drama. Get clear on your dreams. Let go of foods and habits that make you feel sick and sad. Reveal your true self and share your vibrancy with those in your world.

Dating after divorce can be hard, but with these three keys under your belt, you'll be ready to step into the dating pool with confidence. When you meet a date, you know you can rely on your instincts and ability to be your best! ■



*Carla Hugo is a holistic life coach and the author of *Keyed In: 7 Keys to Transform Your Life*. After her own divorce, she became a Certified Divorce Coach to help clients avoid pitfalls, make better decisions, and move from fear and emotional turmoil to self-confidence and mental clarity. [www.getcoached.com](http://www.getcoached.com)*

“**Know what you want before you begin dating. Having clarity about your vision and values will keep you from falling for someone who is not in alignment with your dreams.**”