

Coping with Divorce



Unraveling the fabric of a shared life is rarely simple or easy. Even the most amicable divorces involve tremendous emotional and financial upheaval. And the reason that it can be so difficult to endure is that the most immediate and profound effect of divorce is loss:

- Loss of a shared future
- Loss of financial and emotional security
- Loss of shared experiences
- Loss of familiar routines
- Loss of possessions
- Loss of friendships
- Loss of children
- Loss of identity

Recognizing and accepting loss is a giant step toward recovery. In many ways, a divorce is the death and rebirth of your own life. It's a journey that can take years to complete. During this process you can expect to feel a mix of difficult emotions, the most common of which are:

- Anger
- Grief
- Anxiety
- Feelings of insecurity
- Fear
- Hopelessness
- Regret

While coping with these emotions can be painful, they are normal. The key to getting back on your feet is to deal with your situation in the most positive and constructive manner possible. Here are some tips to set you up for success:

Deal with legalities quickly

Once the decision to divorce has been made, finalize it as quickly as possible. Drawn out battles delay closure, add to expenses, and drain emotional energy.

Avoid unnecessary conflict

Do everything you can to keep the line of communication open with your spouse. Never threaten or take legal action when you are angry or upset.

Be open to mediation and negotiation. Keeping disputes out of the court system usually results in cleaner and more amicable resolutions. Hiring adversarial lawyers often escalates conflict, and the resulting ill will can carry negative consequences far into the future.

Seek support

Don't be afraid to lean on friends and family for support. It is not uncommon for mutual friends to pick sides. They may not make obvious statements about it, but don't chase friends. Instead, rely upon those who care about you. Use other resources as well – your local church or synagogue, support groups like Parents without Partners, even professional therapy. All can play a positive role in helping you get back on track.

Take care of yourself

Use routine to counteract the destabilizing forces set in motion by divorce. Get plenty of rest—exhaustion can magnify emotional responses—and go to bed at the same time each night.

Avoid using drugs and alcohol as coping or avoidance mechanisms. Be sure to eat right and exercise for a short time each day in order to stay fresh and keep your head clear.

Refocus your energy

Explore new interests and hobbies—activities that broaden your social circle are best. Read a book you've been meaning to get around to. Make a change around the house by painting a room, changing your landscaping, or rearranging the furniture. Now is a good time to make a few changes to your life in order to fill the void of loss.

Cut yourself a break

While it's important to admit to and learn from the mistakes you've made, beating yourself up over them is never helpful. Forgive yourself and forgive your spouse if you can. Things may look hopeless today, but you can—and will—move on to brighter days with intention and commitment to making it happen.