

# DIVORCE

## RECOVERY GUIDE



**Gwen M. Neal Attorney at Law LLC**

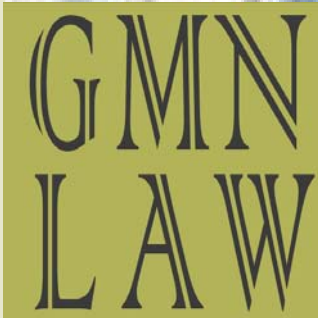
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## Delivering Resolution and Peace of Mind



**G**wen M. Neal, Attorney at Law, LLC, helps clients transition to their next phase of life with stability and direction. Gwen M. Neal, well known as “Aurora,” has represented many clients in divorce mediation and resolution conferences, resulting in successful custody and property division agreements. Ms. Neal has developed high-functioning negotiation strategies and skills by dealing with tough people in high-stakes situations.

Likewise, Aurora recognizes that not all cases get resolved. In litigation, Aurora is knowledgeable and experienced at arguing and protecting your rights.

### Truthful and Trustworthy

Having personally experienced divorce, Aurora understands and demonstrates genuine care for her clients’ well-being. The less stress clients experience, the better they can think. With Ms. Neal as a buffer, you need not be on the frontlines of your divorce. Aurora is committed to listening and working together with you. You can be confident that your case is in capable hands and that you will be vigorously represented.

### Legal Counsel, Not Just Representation

Aurora Gwen Neal will share her knowledge of the divorce process and your rights under the law with attention to detail. Prepared for the inherent emotional charge in divorce and custody cases, she will utilize her diplomacy skills, essential to mediation and litigation. Gwen offers confident and competent counsel and efficient crisis management during your divorce.

### Putting Children First

Gwen places high value on protecting children’s positive sense of self during their parents’ divorce. Issues in your divorce will first be considered through your children’s eyes. As a former teacher and mother of four, including two step-children, a son adopted from India, and a foster-daughter, Gwen acquired valuable experience that provides a back-drop for her work in custody and divorce cases, ensuring that your children’s best interests are considered every step of the way.

### More Than Just a Divorce Attorney

Much of what makes a lawyer successful wasn’t taught in law school. Ms. Neal brings over 30 years of experience in education and business to her law practice. Ms. Neal offers additional insight to her clients through accumulated wisdom and life experience. Her office is a welcoming, calm, and comfortable environment in which to confidentially discuss the dynamics of your case. Aurora Gwen Neal provides high quality representation, delivered with courtesy and respect.

Ms. Neal provides Pro Bono services through the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Ms. Neal is a member of the American Bar Association and its Family Law Section, the Alaska Bar Association and its Family Law Section and Executive Committee, the Kenai Peninsula Bar Association, and the Homer-Kachemak Bay Rotary Club and its Youth Committee.

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Offering legal representation in Homer, Anchor Point, the Kenai Peninsula, Anchorage, Western and Rural Alaska.





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, the Guide empowers you to build the satisfying, strong and inspired new "life-after-divorce" that you desire, and deserve.



## *contents*

### **4 Divorce Recovery**

Learn how to find the rewards after your divorce.

### **7 Ready to Give Up Your Baggage?**

How to forgive and move on with your life.

### **8 Victimhood**

Being a victim of your divorce is one of the most disastrous moves you can make. Here's why.

### **10 It's Your Life, Take Charge!**

Some practical suggestions on getting through divorce more easily.

### **12 Boot Camp for the Broken-Hearted**

Some tips on how to mend your heart and move on.

### **14 The Good Karma Divorce**

Create a moral compass for your divorce journey.

### **16 Reaching Renewal**

Here are some suggestions to help you along your way.

### **19 Full Esteem Ahead**

Our self-esteem can take a beating after divorce. Here are some tips to raise it back up again.

### **20 Creating a Satisfying Life**

Contrary to what you might believe, personal happiness does not depend on life dealing you a good hand. Here's how to move on with your life.

### **22 How to Quiet Your Mind**

Learn to reduce tension and stress during your divorce.

### **24 Yes, There's Life (and Even Love) After Divorce**

Yes, there is life after divorce. Here are some tips on how to make it happen.

### **30 More Helpful Information @ [www.divorcemag.com](http://www.divorcemag.com)**

### **31 FREE TeleSeminars/Your Divorce Community**

# Divorce Recovery

Recovering from divorce is like climbing a mountain, one challenging step after another. For most of us, it's a difficult journey — but the rewards at the end of the climb are worth it!

By Dr. Bruce Fisher  
and Dr. Robert Alberti

**A**re you hurting? If you have recently ended a love relationship, you are. Those who appear not to hurt when their love relationships end have either already worked through a lot of hurt, or have yet to feel the pain. So go ahead, acknowledge that you're hurt. It's natural, expected, healthy, even okay to hurt. Pain is nature's way of telling us that something in us needs to be healed, so let's get on with the healing.

There's an adjustment process after a divorce — with a beginning, an end, and specific steps of learning along the way. While you're feeling some of the pain, you're more anxious to learn how to be healed. If you're like most of us, you probably have had some destructive patterns of behavior for years — maybe since your childhood. Change is hard work. While you were in a love relationship you might have been comfortable enough that you felt no need to change. But now there is that pain. What do you do? Well, you can use the pain as motivation to learn and to grow.

The steps of the adjustment process are arranged into a pyramid of “Rebuilding Blocks” to symbolize a mountain. Rebuilding means climbing that mountain, and for most of us it's a difficult journey. Let us assure you that the climb is worth it! The rewards at the top make the tough climb worthwhile.

The rebuilding blocks are a guide and a map prepared by others who have already traveled the trail. As you climb, you'll discover that tremendous personal growth is possible, despite the emotional trauma you've experienced from the ending of your love relationship. Beginning at the bottom, we find denial and fear, two painful stumbling blocks that come early in the process of adjustment. They can be overwhelming feelings, and may make you reluctant to begin the climb.

## **Denial: “I Can't Believe This is Happening to Me”**

The good news is we humans have a wonderful mechanism that allows us to feel only as much pain as

we can handle without becoming overwhelmed. Pain that is too great is put into our “denial bag” and held until we are strong enough to experience and learn from it.

The bad news is some of us experience so much denial that we are reluctant to attempt recovery — to climb the mountain. There are many reasons for this. Some are unable to access and identify what they are feeling and will have difficulty adjusting to change of any sort. They must learn that “what we can feel, we can heal.” Others have such a low self-concept that they don't believe they're capable of climbing the mountain. And some feel so much fear that they're afraid to climb the mountain.

## **Fear: “I Have Lots of It!”**

Have you ever been in a winter blizzard? The wind is blowing so hard that it howls. The snow is so thick you can see only a few feet ahead of you. Unless you have shelter, it feels — and it can be — life threatening.

The fears you feel when you first separate are like being in a blizzard. Where do you hide? How do you find your way? You choose not to climb this mountain because even here at the bottom you feel overwhelmed. How can you find your way up when you believe the trail will become more blinding, threatening, fearful? You want to hide, find a lap to curl up in, and get away from the fearful storm.

How do you handle your fears? What do you do when you discover your fears have paralyzed you? Can you find the courage to face them so you can get ready to climb the mountain? Each fear you overcome gives you strength and courage to continue your journey through life.

## **Adaptation: “But It Worked When I was a Kid!”**

Each of us has many healthy parts: inquisitive, creative, nurturing, feelings of self-worth, appropriate anger. During our growing-up years, our healthy parts

were not always encouraged by family, school, church, or other influential experiences, such as movies, books, and magazines. The result was often stress, trauma, lack of love, and other hindrances to health.

A person who is not able to meet his or her needs for nurturing, attention, and love will find ways to adapt — and not all adaptive behaviors are healthy. Examples of adaptive responses include being over-responsible for others, becoming a perfectionist, trying to always be a people-pleaser, or developing an “urge-to-help.” Unhealthy adaptive behaviors that are too well-developed leave you out of balance, and you may try to restore your balance through a relationship with another person.

For example, if I am over-responsible, I may look for an under-responsible love partner. If the person I find is not under-responsible enough, I will train her to be under-responsible! This leads me to “polarize” responsibility: I become more and more over-responsible, the other person becomes more and more under-responsible. This polarization is often fatal to the success of a love relationship and is a special kind of co-dependency.

Adaptive behaviors you learned as a child will not always lead to healthy adult relationships. Does that help you understand why you need to climb this mountain?

### **Loneliness: “I’ve Never Felt so Alone”**

When a love relationship ends, the feeling is probably the greatest loneliness you have ever known. Many daily living habits must be altered now that your partner is gone. As a couple, you may have spent time apart before, but your partner was still in the relationship, even when not physically present. When the relationship is ending, your partner is not there at all. Suddenly you are totally alone.

The thought, “I’m going to be lonely like this forever,”

is overwhelming. It seems you’re never going to know the companionship of a love relationship again. You may have children living with you and friends and relatives close by, but the loneliness is somehow greater than all of the warm feelings from your loved ones. Will this empty feeling ever go away? Can you ever feel okay about being alone?

John had been doing the bar scene pretty often. He took a look at it and decided: “I’ve been running from and trying to drown my lonely feelings. I think I’ll try sitting home by myself, writing in my journal to see what I can learn about myself.” He was beginning to change feeling lonely into enjoying aloneness.

### **Friendship: “Where has Everybody Gone?”**

As you’ve discovered, the rebuilding blocks that occur early in the process tend to be quite painful. Because they are so painful, there is a great need for friends to help one face and overcome the emotional pain. Unfortunately many friends are usually lost as one goes through the divorce process, a problem that is especially evident for those who have already physically separated from a love partner. The problem is made worse by withdrawal from social contacts because of emotional pain and fear of rejection. Divorce is threatening to friends, causing them to feel uncomfortable around the dividing partners.

Betty says that the old gang of couples had a party this weekend, but she and her ex were not invited. “I was so hurt and angry.

What did they think — that I was going to seduce one of the husbands or something?” Social relationships may need to be rebuilt around friends who will understand your emotional pain without rejecting you. It is worthwhile to work at retaining some old friends, and finding new friends to support and listen.

### **Guilt/Rejection: “Dumpers 1, Dumpees 0”**

Have you heard the terms “dumper” and “dumpee” before? No one who has experienced the ending of a love relationship needs definitions for these words. Usually there is one person who is more responsible for deciding to end the love relationship; that person becomes the dumper. The more reluctant partner is the dumpee. Most dumpers feel guilty for hurting the former loved one. Dumpees find it tough to acknowledge being rejected.

The adjustment process is different for the dumper and the dumpee, since the dumper’s behavior is largely governed by feelings of guilt, and the dumpee’s by rejection.



## **Grief: “There’s this terrible feeling of loss”**

Grieving is an important part of the recovery process. Whenever we suffer the loss of love, the death of a relationship, the death of a loved one, or the loss of a home, we must grieve that loss. Indeed, the divorce process has been described by some as largely a grief process. Grief combines overwhelming sadness with a feeling of despair. It drains us of energy by leading us to believe we are helpless, powerless to change our lives. Grief is a crucial rebuilding block.

## **Anger: “Damn the S.O.B.!”**

It’s difficult to understand the intensity of the anger felt at this time unless one has been through divorce. Here’s a true story from the Des Moines Register that helps us find out if an audience is primarily composed of divorced or married people: While driving by the park, a female dumppee saw her male dumper lying on a blanket with a new girlfriend. She drove into the park and ran over the former spouse and his girlfriend with her car! (Fortunately the injuries were not serious; it was a small car.) Divorced people respond by exclaiming, “Right on! Did she back over them again?” Married people, not understanding the divorce anger, will gasp, “Ugh! How terrible!”

Most divorced people were not aware that they would be capable of such rage because they had never been this angry before. This special kind of rage is specifically aimed towards the ex-love partner and — handled properly — it can be really helpful to your recovery, since it helps you gain some emotional distance from your ex.

## **Letting Go: Disentangling is hard to do**

It’s tough to let go of the strong emotional ties that remain from the dissolved love union. Nevertheless, it’s important to stop investing emotionally in the dead relationship.

Stella came to take the seminar about four years after her divorce. She was

still wearing her wedding ring! To invest in a dead relationship, an emotional corpse, is to make an investment with no chance of return. The need instead is to begin investing in productive personal growth, which will help in working your way through the divorce process.

## **Self-Worth: “Maybe I’m not so bad after all!”**

Feelings of self-worth and self-esteem greatly influence behavior. Low self-esteem and a search for stronger identity are major causes of divorce. Divorce, in turn, causes lowered self-esteem and loss of identity. For many people, self-concept is lowest when they end the love relationship. They have invested so much of themselves in the love relationship that when it ends, their feelings of self-worth and self-esteem are devastated.

As you improve your feelings of self-worth, you’re able to step out of the divorce pits and start feeling better about yourself. With improved self-worth also comes the courage you’ll need to face the journey into yourself that’s coming up.

## **Transition: “I’m putting out the trash”**

You want to understand why your relationship ended. Maybe you need to perform an “autopsy” on your dead relationship. If you can figure out why it ended, you can work on changes that will allow you to create and build different relationships in the future.

At the Transition stage of the climb, you’ll begin to realize the influences from your family of origin. You’ll discover that you very likely married someone like the parent you never made peace with, and that whatever growing-up tasks you didn’t finish in childhood, you’re trying to work out in your adult relationships.

You may decide that you’re tired of doing the “shoulds” you’ve always done, and instead want to make your own choices about how you’ll live your life. That may begin a process of rebellion, breaking out of your shell.

Any stumbling block that is not resolved can result in the ending of your primary love relationship.

It’s time to take out your trash, to dump the leftovers that remain from your past and your previous love relationship and your earlier years. You thought you had left these behind, but when you begin another relationship, you find they’re still there. As Ken told Bruce, “Those damn neuroses follow me everywhere.”

Transition represents a period of transformation, as you learn new ways of relating to others. It is the beginning of becoming free to be yourself.

## **Openness: “I’ve been hiding behind a mask”**

A mask is a feeling or image that you project, trying to make others believe that is who you are. But it keeps people from knowing who you really are, and sometimes even keeps you from knowing yourself. Bruce remembered a childhood neighbor who always had a smiling face: “When I became older, I discovered the smiling face covered up a mountain of angry feelings inside the person.”

Many of us are afraid to take off our masks because we believe that others won’t like the real person underneath the mask. But when we do take off the mask, we often experience more closeness and intimacy with friends and loved ones than we believed was possible.

Jane confided to the class that she was tired of always wearing a happy face. “I would just like to let people know what I am really feeling instead of always having to appear to be happy and joyful.” Her mask was becoming heavy, which indicates she might be ready to take it off.

## **Love: “Could somebody really care for me?”**

The typical divorced person says, “I thought I knew what love was, but I guess I was wrong.” Ending a love

../CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

# Ready to Give Up Your Baggage?

By Simone Wright



I have had many conversations with people who are trying to heal their lives and hearts after a relationship and find that they are unable to move on or find a level of true happiness. So many of these people are continuing to hold on to their anger and blame their partners or their situation. When I ask them, if they have truly forgiven the circumstance often times they will shrug their shoulders at me and say, “Well, no. How could I, after what happened?” It is then I remind them, that in order for them to heal, they must truly let go of all of it, then and only then can the abundant energy that is needed to recreate a loving heart be released to do its work.

Forgiveness is ‘letting go of the rope’. Releasing your baggage is ‘letting go of the rope’. It is a simple action. A single decision made to release the attachments to what you have been committed to for so long.

How do you do it? You decide to make a choice, just like you would in a game of Tug of War on the playground. The thought occurs to you, “This isn’t fun any more and my life is not moving anywhere. I would like something different.” And so you take a deep breath — and you open your hands — and you let it go. And in that single moment, all the energy of the Universe is free once again to assist you in creating the life you want. Your life becomes lighter, your heart becomes lighter and your world reveals itself as a place of true peace and happiness. And the irony becomes, you recognize that you have had that power within you, the entire time.

## Questions to Ask Yourself

1. What baggage are you carrying with you? How has it affected your life, your health, and your relationships?
2. How have you made your partners and your relationships ‘pay’ for your baggage?
3. What benefit do you have to carrying it with you?
  - Does it keep you safe and protect you?
  - Does it let you be right about what happened to you?
  - Does it allow you to blame others for your life?
  - Does it give you permission to complain?
  - Does it allow you to continue to be angry jealous, manipulative or needy?
4. How do you suffer from carrying your baggage?
  - Do you waste energy?
  - Do your health and happiness suffer?
  - Do you alienate friends and family?
  - Do you lose out on love, peace and joy?
  - Do you feel out of control?
5. What relationships have you built around your baggage?
  - Support groups, victim groups, bitch sessions, gossip circles?
6. Are you willing to let these relationships go?
7. Is your baggage TRULY who you are? Are the issues in your baggage more powerful than you are?
8. Who would you BE? What would your life, your friendships, your health, and your relationships LOOK LIKE if you were willing to let go of your baggage?
9. What would it require from you to let it go?
  - Courage? Discipline? Acceptance? Love?
10. What would you need to tell yourself to make it alright to let it go?
  - Write it down. Give yourself permission to release the baggage in

a letter to you. Describe how it hurts you, and describe how your life will be different if you released it.

- Draw a picture of yourself and your life without the baggage — post you’re drawing of your new life on your refrigerator or wherever you will see it every day — to remind yourself of what is possible.
- Give a little ceremony, or create a small ritual to release your baggage. Maybe burn the letter you wrote to yourself, or create a prayer or meditation releasing the baggage to the Divine energy of the Universe. All ritual is helpful, as it brings conscious attention to your intention of healing. ■



*This article was excerpted with permission from the book Survive & Thrive by Simone Wright, published by Saticoy Publishing © 2007.*

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- **Forgiveness and Acceptance**, visit [www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce\\_Recovery](http://www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce_Recovery)

# Victimhood

The Curse of Divorce Recovery

By Shelley Stile

**F**eeling like or labeling yourself a victim of your divorce is one of the most disastrous moves you can make. It will prevent you from moving forward into a new life. Victimhood renders you powerless. To create a new life after your divorce, you need to be fully responsible for your past, present, and future. Being responsible means having control over one's life, and that is what it takes to both recover from the emotional wounds of a divorce as well as plan for your new life.

If you consider yourself a victim, then you believe that you had little to do with what happened to you. You take no responsibility. The responsibility is someone else's, and that leaves you with no power. Victims blame someone else. Blame absolves them of their part in the dissolution of their marriage. Blame keeps them stuck in the pain of the past and their divorce.

It is so much easier to place blame on someone else than accept personal responsibility. The fact is that two people inhabit all marriages. Those two people are co-creators of their marriage and their divorce. Even if one of the partners was unfaithful or a liar, there are always signs along the way that we either refused to see or to acknowledge. If we are in denial about all the warning signs along the way, we can only look to ourselves for lack of some responsible action.

Blame leads to resentment. Resentment consumes our mind chatter. We spend far too many hours ruminating about all the things that our ex has done or continues to do to us. We resent their new life and our lack of one. Consider

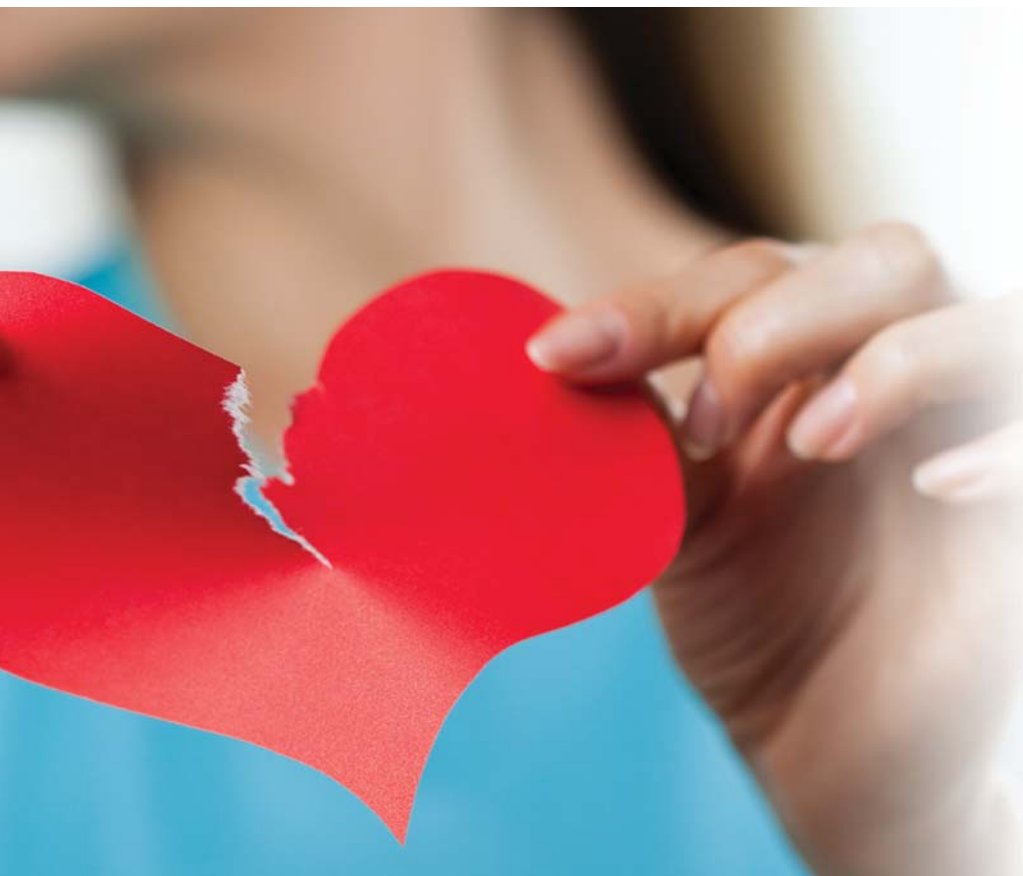
the amount of time wasted being in resentment. Exactly who suffers? The answer of course is clear: you. You are the one who is angry, sad, bitter and unhappy, not your ex. Your blame and resentment, along with your regrets, are like poison in your system. It completely immobilizes you.

## How Do We Overcome these Feelings of Victimhood? Here are some Suggestions:

1. What is the truth of your marriage? If we are completely honest and courageous, we will have begun to recognize that indeed, we played an integral part in our marriage and divorce. All too often, we interpret events and situations in our marriage and believe them to be the truth. For instance, "My husband was cheating and lied to me about it. I interpret that to mean that I am no longer desirable, that I failed as a wife. I live in my marriage as if that is a cold, hard fact." It is not. The fact is that he cheated. Period. That fact could mean a hundred different things. Stick to the facts.
2. Where are you responsible? What were the warning signs along the way that you refused to acknowledge? Where were you in denial? Where were you an enabler? For example, I know a woman who was completely surprised when her husband left her. She went on to tell me that she always gave him total freedom to do whatever he wanted: trips that lasted a month at a time and little or no responsibility in rearing their children are just a couple of items on the list. She handled it all. Translation: she was an enabler and gave him the rope that was needed to strangle the marriage. Acknowledge where you didn't do what you needed to do. Accept responsibility. Responsibility is empowerment.
3. Exactly what are you resisting? Why can't you see the truth and accept responsibility? Why do you suppose you cannot accept the reality of your life as it is now? These are questions that must be addressed. What do you gain by remaining a victim? Are you afraid of facing the truth? Are you living in what you think should be versus what is? Do you enjoy being a victim? Do you like the fact that being a victim absolves you of any responsibility and therefore any positive action?
4. If you are resisting the reality of your life, consider doing a turnaround and simply go with the flow of your life's direction. Fighting reality is a useless business. The more you resist something, the more it will persist. Consider the flow of a river. What does it feel like to swim against the current? That is what you do when you cannot accept what is.







5. Do you allow your fear of the unknown to run you? Are you afraid of your future? Are you afraid of being alone? What exactly are you afraid of? I recently heard someone say that they spend so much time worrying and little or nothing of what they worry about actually comes true! Do you see the insanity of that? As far as the future, we don't know from day to day what the future holds for us. How about if you believed that your future was going to be just fine instead of being in fear? What if everything happens for a reason?
6. Consider your perspective on life. Your attitude. What is it? Do you believe that life is hard and unjust? Do you see all that is wrong and nothing that might be right? Not only does your attitude affect how you handle life; it can actually determine your reality. If you believe that life is too hard, then that is exactly what life will be for you. Kind of like a self-fulfilling prophecy.
7. Do things differently. If your victimhood along with its blame and resentment is not working for you (and

I guarantee it isn't), then for heaven's sake, do things differently. Try on a new perspective. Examine the truth of your life versus your own personal interpretations. Take responsibility. Take actionable steps forward. Stop resisting. Get out and do new things, meet new people, and don't isolate yourself. Get back into the swing of things.

8. Learn from your experience and use that new wisdom for empowerment. Once you see the life lessons of your marriage and divorce (and believe me, they are numerous and impactful), you can use that wisdom to be a better person, to help you to become the person that you truly want to be. Everything that happens to us in life has a hidden lesson for us if we only look for it. Might there actually be a silver lining in this storm cloud?
9. Consider the costs of remaining a victim. Do you want to live your life as a bitter and angry person? Is that how you want to be seen? If you have children, is victimhood what you want to model for them? How do you want to be seen? Do you realize

that as a victim, you have no power to change your life? Remaining a victim is a very bleak picture.

10. Choose a new and better life. Think of all the decisions and choices you make during the course of a day. Are they moving you away from being a victim or keeping you stuck there? Stop and think before you make important and even not so important decisions or choices. Our choices define us and determine the course of our life.

### **In Closing, I Want to Share a Few Bits of Wisdom from the Dalai Lama:**

When you lose, don't lose the lesson.

Follow the three R's: respect for self, respect for others, and responsibility for all your actions.

Remember that not getting what you want is sometimes a stroke of luck.

Judge your success by what you had to give up in order to get it. ■

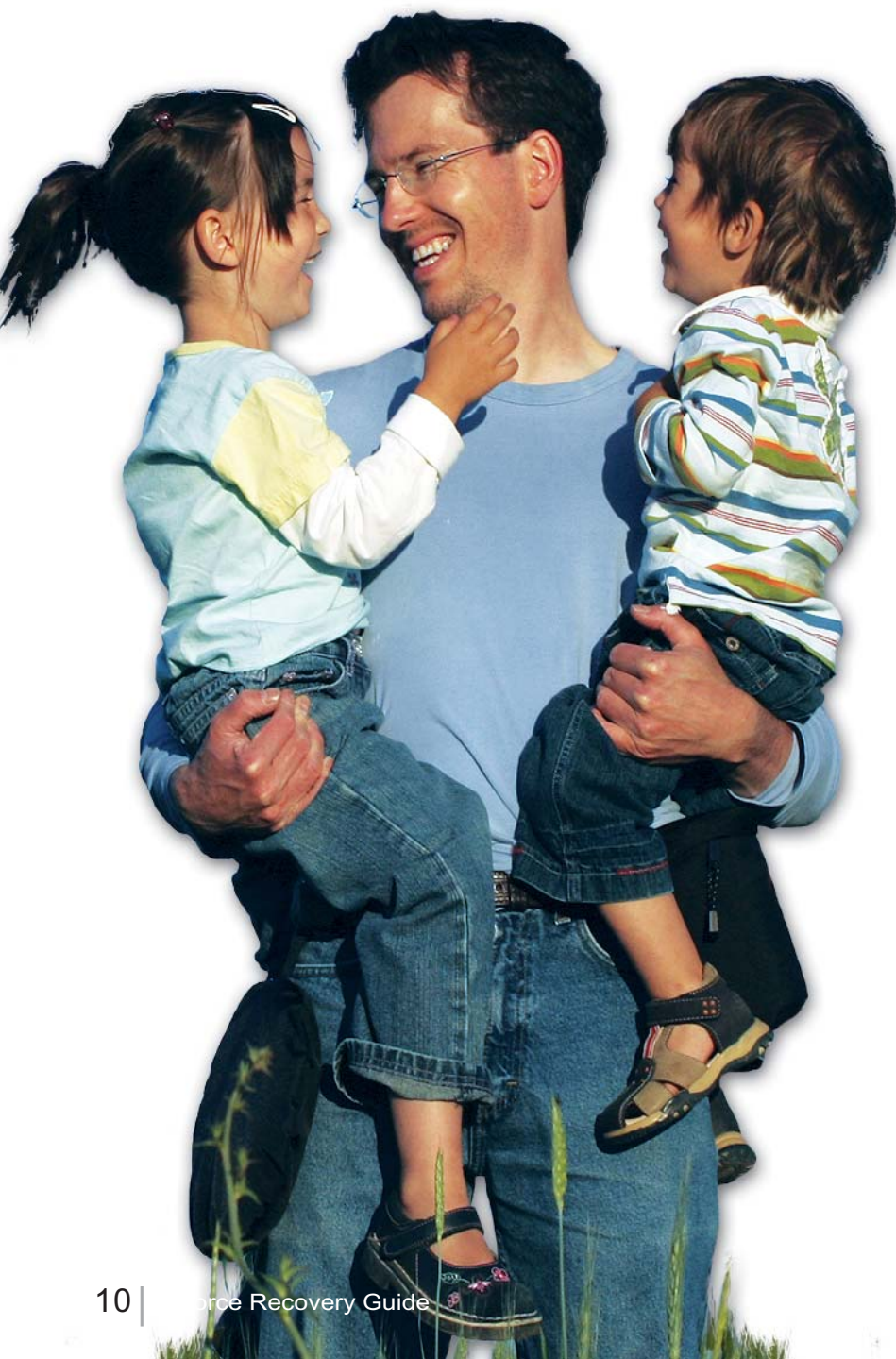
*Shelley Stile is a Divorce Recovery Life Coach who specializes in working with women looking to let go of the pain of their divorce and create new and vibrant lives. Shelley works with clients on the telephone, so you can be anywhere and get coaching. She also holds tele-seminars and publishes powerful e-books on life after divorce. She is a member of the International Coaches Federation, the governing body for Life Coaching. Shelley trained with the Coaches Training Institute and the Ford Institute for Integrative Coaching's Spiritual Divorce Recovery. Sign up today for her free e-book, The 10 Secrets to Coping with Divorce, and also to receive her monthly "Take Back Your Life After Divorce" newsletter by going to [www.changecoachshelley.com](http://www.changecoachshelley.com).*

For more articles to help with your recovery after your divorce, please visit [www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce\\_Recovery](http://www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce_Recovery).

# It's Your Life, Take Charge!

**Here are some practical suggestions on how to make your divorce easier and less adversarial — so you and your children can move on with dignity and respect.**

By Diana S. Dodson



**W**e need to learn how to have a more amenable divorce, especially when there are children involved. It is very difficult to get a divorce without feeling or doing some of the following:

- Anger.  
Getting even with our ex-spouse.
- Blaming your spouse for the problems.
- Not accepting your responsibility for the marriage breaking up.
- Denying the problems exist.  
Putting the children in the middle.  
Feeling like a failure.  
Feeling rejected.

## **Don't Try to Get Even with Your Spouse**

These are some of the things we do and feel when we are in the middle of getting. We may feel we aren't to blame and we don't know how the marriage went wrong. Because we have so many feelings, one of our first desires may be to get even with our soon to be ex-spouse. We want them to feel as badly as we do. We do things that we know will hurt them.

Getting even is only a temporary fix and can hurt the children. We really don't want to set a bad example for our children. Please remember our children are the most precious things in our lives. We want them to respect us and we need to set a good example no matter how we feel.

When one or the other spouse is feeling negative, or does not love their spouse anymore, they often set up negative situations, hoping the other one will leave the marriage. It's harder to say, "I don't love you anymore," than to create a miserable marriage. Try to at least be honest with your spouse and let them know how you're feeling.

Honesty can at least decrease some of the anger and frustrations that you helped create.

Even if you feel some anger, frustration, or rejection or are just plain devastated, there are ways to feel better about the divorce.

### Ideas and Examples to Try

- Try to remember if both of you aren't happy in the marriage, then it really isn't a good marriage.

You must tell each other the truth and stop lying. Don't distort and manipulate your feelings. If you aren't honest with your feelings, then that is a form of a lie.

### A Few Parenting Tips

If parents can accept the divorce and come to terms with themselves and each other, the divorce will be much easier on the children. The children will then have a better chance to adjust. Accept that it is over, learn, and grow from the experience and become a better parent.

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- Don't try to hurt the other person. This is very immature. You may think this will make you feel better, but you will probably feel ashamed of yourself when you start to feel better. You will probably feel that your ex-spouse wasn't worth the emotional turmoil you put yourself through.
- Don't blame the other one entirely. Accept your part in the breakup.
- Try to sit down quietly, maybe with an unbiased third party, to work out some of the logistics of the divorce.
- Talk with someone about the divorce to get a reality check. "Am I doing the right thing?" "Am I overreacting?"
- You may want to try a trial separation. Step back from the marriage to see the relationship from a different point of view.

### Might the Marriage Still Work Out?

Go to marriage counseling, even if you feel finished with the marriage. Things may still be worked out.

If you truly would like to get back with your spouse, try not to do the same kinds of things that got you into the troubled marriage. If there was an affair, by all means, get that person out of your life.

If you drink or do drugs too much, get yourself into treatment so you can show your spouse you're willing to change your behavior. You will never have a successful relationship if drugs or alcohol are a major part of the marriage. These chemicals distort reality and help to create an attitude of not caring about what happens in the relationship.

Never put the children in the middle. Don't use them to get even. Don't say bad things about the other parent to your children. This could come back to haunt you as the children get older and are able to see you for who you really are.

Set some rules that are the same at both houses. If the child is acting out at school, stealing, cutting school, getting a speeding ticket, or not getting good grades you should have certain rules that apply to them no matter if they're with their mom or their dad. ■



*Diana S. Dodson has spent many years working as a counselor and mental health consultant for children, adolescents, and adult schizophrenics. This article has been edited and excerpted from It's Your Life, Take Charge! (Authorhouse, 2008). Read more about how you can understand yourself to a greater extent and be your own guide to your happiness.*

**For more articles on relationships and excerpts from It's Your Life, Take Charge!, visit [www.divorcemag.com/articles/Relationships](http://www.divorcemag.com/articles/Relationships).**



# Boot Camp for the Broken-Hearted

By Audrey Valeriani

**Having trouble getting over your divorce or separation? Here's a look at the stages of a broken heart — and some tips on mending your heart and moving on.**

## Understanding What's Happening

*Falling in and out of love is a chemical reaction.* When we fall in love, our brains generate certain chemicals (e.g. dopamine and norepinephrine), which give us a euphoric-like feeling, temporarily *blinding* us from almost anything that may be construed as negative about our *paramour* (that's why they say, "Love is blind"). After a while, however, our bodies generate smaller amounts of those chemicals, which lead to a decline in that tingly feeling and sense of excitement. Usually, it can take anywhere from one to three years before these chemicals *naturally* lessen, but if your romance abruptly comes to an end, these levels can plummet and you feel as though your rose-colored glasses have been ripped off!

*Your heart is sick — much like your body can be.* Just like getting the flu, your heart can get *sick* and your spirit can take *ill*, so take care of them as you would your physical body. So take it easy. Don't put too much responsibility on yourself for a while. You're on an emotional roller coaster and, unfortunately, with all of that comes a process. Like mourning the death of a loved one, while grieving the loss of the relationship, you may experience any or all of these seven stages of grief:

- **Denial**  
You feel numb; may expect everything to go back to "normal"; the pain has not yet set in.
- **Anger**  
You're mad at him for leaving; at God for "making" this happen; at

yourself for saying or doing something "stupid"; at everyone for no reason.

- **Guilt**  
You regret things that were said or not said, done or not done, which you are *sure* would have changed the outcome.
- **Depression**  
You're sad; there is weight loss or gain; anxiety; unable to cope with routine tasks; crying bouts; tiredness.
- **Forgiveness**  
You begin to come to terms with what happened and slowly let things go; you begin to forgive the other person *and* yourself.
- **Acceptance**  
You get used to your new situation; you are not upset all the time anymore; you begin to move on.
- **Recovery**  
You don't think of him so much anymore, and when you do, there is little discomfort; you are ready to move on!

You may also experience physical and psychological symptoms as well. Your body can feel tired, almost stiff, and may be resistant to any activity. Also, studies show that depression can lower your immune system, which can make you susceptible to colds and even disease. Mentally, you may feel confused, forgetful, and scattered. You may be unable to concentrate, and following simple directions can feel overwhelming.

*Change is not easy.* Use this time for self-reflection and goal-setting. When



we experience something that is potentially devastating, our minds tend to protect us from memories which can be too overwhelming or upsetting. For this reason, we may not always be able to accurately remember the facts about certain events. We may forget how irritating or cruel or controlling the person was, or imagine them to be more loving, desirable, or kinder than they were in reality.

## Mental Conditioning

*Let the Healing Begin.* Now that you've gotten a better understanding of what's going on within you, let's examine ways to help you to begin feeling better. Instead of spending all of your time thinking about your ex, going over and over everything that happened in your mind, and just plain wallowing in your misery, it's time to take control over your thoughts and start focusing on you! On this page you will find a chart describing things to rely on in order to get yourself moving in the right direction. Practice these suggestions as often as you can, and if you slip up, it's okay. Chock it up to a bad day, let it all out, and start fresh the next day.

## Heart Mending

- What to **focus on** to help you get over a broken heart. See table 1.
- What to **do** to help you get over a broken heart. See table 2.

If you are having trouble falling asleep during this time, try this visualization.

*Lie in bed and close your eyes. Think of all of the people and issues that are worrying you. One by one, picture each of them and then shrink them until they are really tiny and can fit in the palm of your hand. Then pick one up at a time and place them on your night table — pick up your ex, your boss, your mother, the bills — whatever — and place them on the nightstand next to you. Picture this little group standing together now, waiting patiently for you to address them again in the morning.*

Worrying about things and rehashing events over and over does you no good

— it just keeps you from getting a much needed good night's sleep. By (literally) taking them off your mind, you allow yourself to get much needed relaxation without the fear that your problems will go unaddressed.

Besides getting enough sleep, it's also important to make yourself feel comfortable during this time. Wear your favorite clothes, snuggle with your softest blanket, eat your favorite foods, then

take a bath and put on your pajamas! Think of yourself during this time as being *under the weather*, and treat yourself kindly.

## Planning Future Missions

*Think about what you want and set some goals:* Fear, procrastination, and/or laziness are the only things stopping

.../CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

**TABLE 1: What to focus on to help you get over a broken heart.**

<b>Yourself</b>	Don't think about what your ex is doing; keep your mind on <i>you</i> .
<b>The Present</b>	Concentrate on what you're doing <i>in the moment</i> .
<b>Friends and Family</b>	Let people who love you listen to you and help you.
<b>Structure</b>	Keep to your normal schedule as much as possible.
<b>Your Spirit</b>	Say prayers, affirmations; think positive.
<b>Goals</b>	Decide what you want, make a plan, and go for it.

**TABLE 2: What to do to help you get over a broken heart.**

<b>Have Faith</b>	Believe in yourself and that you will be okay. Relinquish control over everything.
<b>Keep a Journal</b>	Write down everything — both good and bad thoughts. It will help you get rid of all the anger, confusion, and heartache you have.
<b>Practice Self-Control</b>	Keep focused on your responsibilities as much as you can by allowing yourself to get upset or dwell on your ex <i>only at certain and limited amounts of time</i> .
<b>Exercise/Move Around</b>	When you're feeling overwhelmed, get up and move your body. It has been proven that changing the location and position of your body can break your train of thought.
<b>Eat Right</b>	This is <i>not</i> the time for a strict diet, nor is it a time to indulge. Some foods containing sugar, caffeine, or alcohol can make you anxious, so be aware.
<b>Keep to a Schedule</b>	When you're feeling bad, there is a tremendous temptation to just stay in bed and lay around the house — but don't do it. Right now, your only tasks are to get yourself up and go to work.
<b>Seek Positive Reinforcement</b>	Review old books that inspired you. Seek out stories or articles that are uplifting, funny, and insightful.
<b>Smile/Laugh</b>	Studies have shown that when we smile, our faces send messages telling our brains that we are all right, and soon we feel better.
<b>Volunteer/Do Things for Others</b>	You'd be surprised how much helping someone else actually helps you! It takes your mind off of your problems for a while.

# The Good Karma Divorce

By Judge Michele F. Lowrance

Craft a “Personal Manifesto” that serves as a moral compass for your divorce journey. Let good karma, or good action, be your guiding principle.

## From the Soul to the Page

The advent of a life crisis — breakup and divorce being among the most difficult — forces a person to choose a path. One direction can be destructive and therefore weakening, while another can build strength, wisdom and awareness. To help reduce pain and turmoil for the litigants in my courtroom, I asked them to write down their worst fears, concerns and ideal goals for their divorce. I began to notice the sheer act of writing these down created a major shift in the litigants’ emotional responsiveness and malleability in settling cases.

I find that when you dump your emotions, concerns, and goals on the page, you free up much of the emotional energy you use to manage your feelings. Too often, this emotional content feels like something you chew and chew, but can never quite seem to swallow. With these circular thoughts on paper, you are free to focus on goal-setting and aspirational thinking. Writing will create what you will and is your most formidable ally in the divorce process — what I refer to as your Personal Manifesto. This document will be the tool you use to impose order on the disordered and chaotic experiences and emotions that lie ahead. You may think that goals and life purposes don’t feel relevant to the pain you are in. But not to take command of your life plan is to allow the result to be guided by chance, which is no guide at all.

## Your Personal Manifesto

A Personal Manifesto, or mission statement, is an organizing principle you will use to develop new perceptions and actions based on the core understanding that your old perceptions and actions may have created the problems you are now experiencing. Your Manifesto will become a sanctuary, a refuge, where you will be protected from the onslaughts of polluted thoughts about your divorce. On those days when you are feeling disconnected from your true self, distanced from your aspirational self (the person you would like to become), and almost completely stripped of optimism and hope, you will have in your drawer your self-made antidote pulling you away from the dark side. You will have created a psychological home that will always be available to you during times of vulnerability. Often the reading of one sentence can trigger a shift in your perspective and bring you back from the brink.

The process of developing your Manifesto creates your first shift in attitude. You will not only be sculpting your aspirational self; you will also be emphasizing positive emotions and qualities you can use to counter negative thought streams. Ultimately you will be able to assign meaning to the pain in your life, and you can start to envision the possibility that pain is not always destructive, but can be transformative. When you see pain in a new light, it changes your relationship to adversity. In time, the Manifesto will become your personal doctrine containing your own investigated truth, so that when you refer to it, it will give you moments of inspiration and transcendence.





## What Does a Personal Manifesto Look Like?

Your Personal Manifesto can be half a page long or a dozen, although I think once you get started you'll probably find you have a lot to say. You may find yourself writing things you've never articulated to anyone — not even your former spouse or your closest friend. Keep this work in a safe place so you can be brutally honest and completely self-conscious.

As you begin, expect to create a series of lists, punctuated by the occasional revelatory moments. Don't stop writing until you get it all out. Grammar doesn't matter. Neither does spelling or penmanship. No one should ever see these early drafts but you. That being said, this is probably an appropriate place for us to talk about what is discoverable in a divorce action. Many people do not realize that unless it is part of a document you send to or work on with your lawyer, anything you write could be subpoenaed if relevant. This includes your diary, a letter to your sister, even your emails.

Obviously, early rambling drafts of your Manifesto in which you rant, rage, and vent are included. I would destroy the early drafts once you're finished with them, particularly if they contain thoughts, self evaluation, or destructive fantasies you would not want spoken allowed in a courtroom.

## Getting Started on Your Personal Manifesto

As you begin the process, allow your writing to recognize both the good and the bad in your experiences with your former mate. Understand that we don't have to corrupt good memories in order to detach. Allow yourself to take into account your own multi-dimensionality as well as that of your spouse. Good thinking can become clogged with sabotaging thoughts and fears. You want to make sure you have not been tampering with the evidence.

Write out the following questions and answers and make notes on how you feel, including any insights that emerge:

1. Recall five things about your mate that you once treasured.
2. Write down at least five offenses your mate has inflicted upon you.
3. List at least five offenses inflicted upon you by your mate that you have not mirrored to either your spouse or others.
4. Picture and describe the kind of person you want to be now. How do you want to remember yourself five years from now, when you look back at what you were like during your divorce?
5. Have someone take a picture of you when you are angry, then look at that photo and ask yourself how many times you want to relive that moment.
6. Make a list of five heroes, real or fictitious. Next to each name write three things you like about each one. What things do you have in common with them?
7. If you are a parent, list all the positive qualities you think a good parent should have. For the qualities you do not think you possess, write down why you think you do not possess them and are these issues you can work on.
8. Describe the ideal way you would like to handle your disappointment and resentment.
9. What are the three greatest benefits you've reaped from your relationship?
10. Make a list of things you are waiting for in your life before you can believe your life is "good". Then note whether your spouse is keeping you from that goal and note how much power you may be giving to your spouse.
11. Try reframing your negative thought patterns by shifting some attitudes.

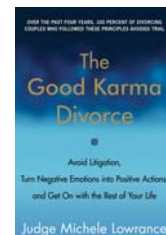
## Writing Your Personal Manifesto

Now, you can take each fear or negative and reframe it in a way that puts you back in control. Don't be surprised if the development of your Manifesto occurs in several states. Your Personal Manifesto may include any or all of the following:

- How you feel in the present
- Habitual and reactive behaviors you want to change

- How those changes will benefit your life
- The kind of person you would like to be
- Acknowledgment of your progress
- A statement about self-forgiveness for your setbacks
- Your intentions for your future
- A statement motivating yourself to keep going on this path.

Trying to live up to the aspirational portions of these sentiments should be the heart of your mission. Some days you will do better than others, but on those days that are challenging — between the life that was and the life that will be — remember that you have created a team of thoughts to protect you against your own negative impulses. Use your Manifesto as your mantra to get back on your chosen path and perhaps find an even better path. ■

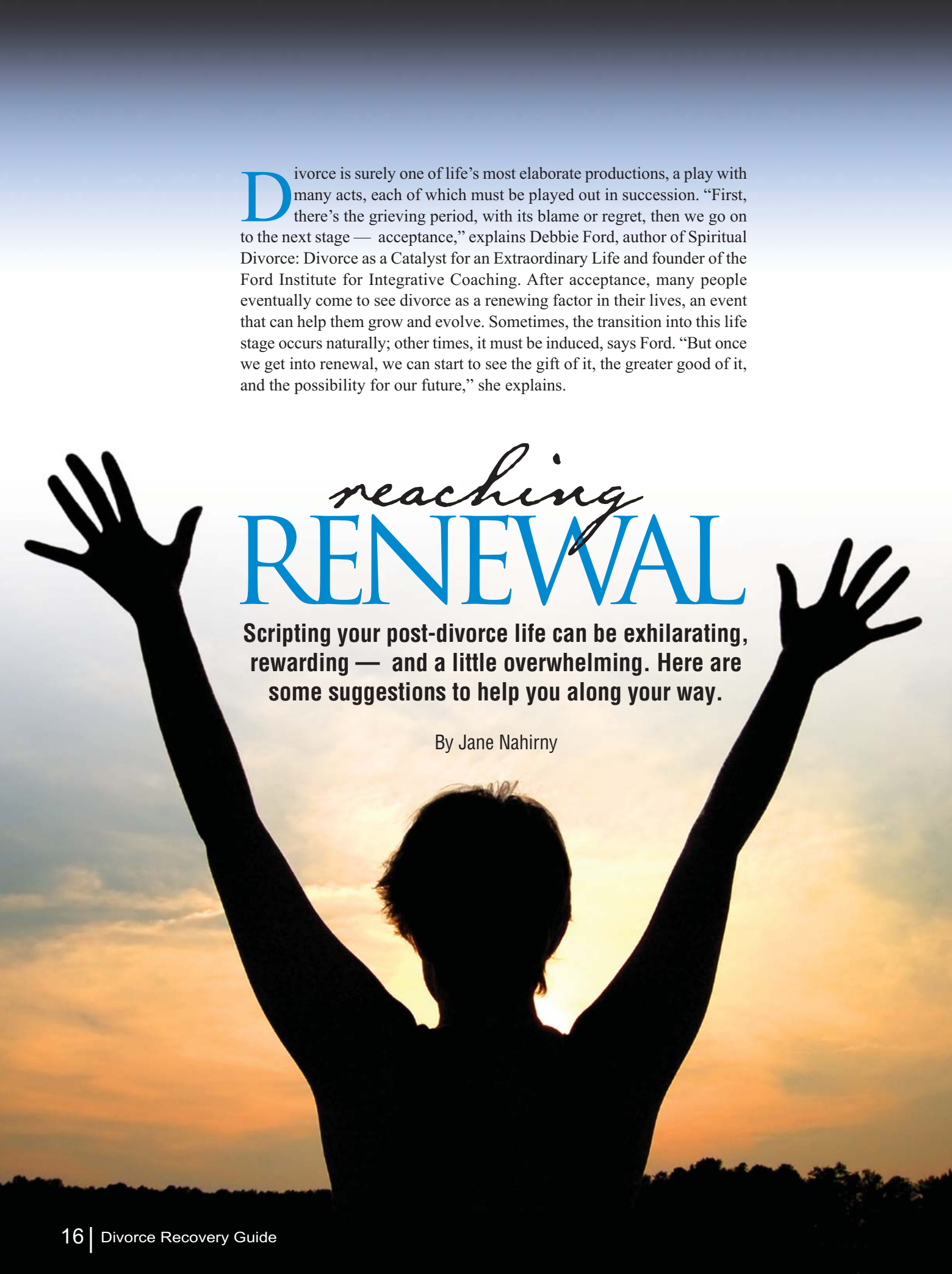


*This article was excerpted with permission from the book The Good Karma Divorce by Judge Michele F. Lowrance, published by HarperCollins Publishers*

©2010. Michele F. Lowrance has been a domestic-relations judge in Illinois since 1995. A child of divorce who was raised by her grandparents, Judge Lowrance has been divorced and has devoted her professional life to helping those similarly situated. For more information visit [www.thegoodkarma-divorce.com](http://www.thegoodkarma-divorce.com).

### More excerpts from *The Good Karma Divorce*:

- For articles on the Getting Started Checklist; examples of Personal Manifestos; How to Fortify Yourself and Your Manifesto and Forgiveness: Weapon of Mass Construction, visit [www.divorcemag.com/articles/Health\\_Well\\_Being](http://www.divorcemag.com/articles/Health_Well_Being).
- To read how Divorce Isn't Easy, But it's Doable, visit [www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce\\_Recovery/divorce\\_not\\_easy.html](http://www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce_Recovery/divorce_not_easy.html)

A silhouette of a person with their arms raised in a gesture of triumph or joy, set against a vibrant sunset sky with orange and yellow hues. The person's head is tilted back, and their arms are spread wide, reaching towards the top corners of the frame. The background is a gradient of colors from deep blue at the top to bright orange near the horizon, with some wispy clouds visible.

Divorce is surely one of life's most elaborate productions, a play with many acts, each of which must be played out in succession. "First, there's the grieving period, with its blame or regret, then we go on to the next stage — acceptance," explains Debbie Ford, author of *Spiritual Divorce: Divorce as a Catalyst for an Extraordinary Life* and founder of the Ford Institute for Integrative Coaching. After acceptance, many people eventually come to see divorce as a renewing factor in their lives, an event that can help them grow and evolve. Sometimes, the transition into this life stage occurs naturally; other times, it must be induced, says Ford. "But once we get into renewal, we can start to see the gift of it, the greater good of it, and the possibility for our future," she explains.

## *reaching* RENEWAL

**Scripting your post-divorce life can be exhilarating, rewarding — and a little overwhelming. Here are some suggestions to help you along your way.**

By Jane Nahirny

It's a great opportunity for people to recreate themselves, agrees David Simon, M.D., author and medical director/co-founder of The Chopra Center. "It's not uncommon for people to get married at a stage in their lives when they're still in formulation," he says. "When that relationship undergoes a transformation that leads to divorce, it gives people an opportunity to consciously start to create a future that will bring them more well-being, passion, enthusiasm, power, or whatever they felt was lacking in their marriage." In other words, divorce can offer a chance for you to ask yourself, all over again, "What do I want to be when I grow up?" It's a second chance at life, and it's yours for the taking. Here are some suggestions to consider before you journey into your own personal renewal.

### Be Sure You're Ready for Renewal

If you're going through a divorce, you're probably looking forward to experiencing a more positive stage in the process: you know, when it stops hurting. But experts warn that it's important to be ready for renewal before you move on with your life. Taking time to indulge in the powerful emotions associated with divorce is critical, says Dr. Simon. "If you short-circuit that emotional healing by pretending everything is okay too quickly, it will definitely show up in the next relationship."

Most people who experience divorce regard it as a failure, a loss of a dream, explains Harville Hendrix, Ph.D., author of *Keeping the Love you Find* and co-founder of Imago Relationships International. "It's very important that people grieve that loss," he says. "A past that has not been grieved will interfere with the planning of a future, and it can be a true impediment to moving on." It's also important to realize that divorce is co-created, he says. "You need to forgive yourself — and your partner."

You'll know you're ready to move towards renewal when less of your mind and body are consumed with digesting the experience of divorce, says Dr. Simon. "Like any wound or trauma, it can take a brief moment for the wound

**Be careful not  
to burn out friends.  
Most of them  
will get tired  
of hearing  
about your divorce  
long before you  
are tired of  
talking about it.**

to be created, but it may take weeks or months or even years for it to be healed." Give yourself the time you need to grieve and heal this primal wound.

### There's Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself

During the recovery process, you may find yourself feeling afraid and anxious. Recognize that these are perfectly healthy and normal emotions in a time of change or transition. Divorce challenges our self-image, and the uncertainty it causes creates fear and anxiety about our future. "Anxiety, though, is really an impulse to consciously make choices that will help redefine who we want to be in the world," insists Dr. Simon. "If you're not feeling some anxiety, you're not really embracing the opportunity to learn what's available in divorce." The growing pains of transition from divorce are not unlike those we feel when we're exercising, he adds. "It may not feel good at the time, but you know that the end result is that you're going to be healthier and more fit."

Courage is always there, says Ford, but sometimes we choose to be fearful and afraid instead of being courageous and strong. "Ask yourself, 'Is this choice an act of faith or an act of fear?'" Choose to acknowledge fear and stand in faith. Faith is having trust in the universe, trust in something bigger than yourself. Faith gives you courage," she says.

### Share Your Journey with a Supporting Cast

Perhaps the most difficult part of renewal is getting over the sense of inertia and lack of control you felt during your divorce process.

Now is the time to enlist the help of a therapist, life coach, personal trainer, weight loss or other support group, friends, family members, your minister, priest, or rabbi — whomever you can count on to support you at this critical juncture in your life. "Knowing that your vital energy is really important right now, back away from negative people," stresses Ford. "Make sure you have people around you who are for you, who are cheerleaders for you." Identify which friends you can talk to about which issues, urges Jeffrey Rossman, Ph.D., director, Behavioral Health at Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires, Lenox, MA. "It really does help to have at least one person you can share this with, and sometimes through the sharing of it, you gain some greater understanding of your process."

Be careful though not to burn out friends, however, most of whom will get tired of hearing about your divorce long before you tire of talking about it. Don't be surprised if you lose some friends during the process: some people will feel threatened by your divorce (almost as though splitting up were a contagious disease they could "catch" from you), and some will feel compelled to side with you or your ex. If you are sharing with a close friend, try to choose someone who won't merely "merge" with your pain, adds Hendrix. "You'll want someone who can be your mirror and your wall."

### Imagine a New Vision for Your Life

The process of renewal truly begins when we close the door on the past and open new doors to our future, says Ford. Start by creating a vision that is inspiring: "Vision is the antidote for pain and suffering," she says. "Being in action on a vision moves people into new realms of consciousness." One exercise Ford recommends: Visit a local newsstand and



choose any magazine that is attractive to you; then let that subject matter guide you in creating a new vision. “You could even cut out magazine pictures and words that affect you in a positive way and make yourself a little vision map,” she says. Another way to develop a vision is to take a close look at someone who inspires you, says Ford. “For instance, you may be inspired by Oprah — but what about her inspires you? This is using the outer world to learn about the inner world.”

Another way to get in touch with your true self is to identify your core values, says Rossman. “Then you can begin to craft a life that is based on those values, on what is really most

of confidence. When you reach small goals, whether it’s weight loss or exercise, you start to feel as though you are accomplishing things. Exercise is great for people going through divorce because it strengthens you while providing you with a healthy outlet for anger. It also relieves stress while increasing fitness, says Dr. Simon. “You feel better about yourself, and you generate natural anti-anxiety and natural anti-depressant chemicals,” he says. “We also recommend that people learn and practice a meditation technique. This enables you to begin to access that quiet inner voice of your soul. That inner voice only wants four things for us: it wants us to be happy, healthy, to have love and be loving, and to find meaning and purpose

**Rome wasn’t built in a day; your new life plan will also take time and patience to develop. In the meantime, invest in your success by taking care of your mind, body, and spirit.**

important to you,” he says. The key is to start small with a short-term goal. “It’s got to be about you, and it’s got to be something you have control over,” says Ford. See this time as an opportunity to get back into shape, take up painting, learn a foreign language, join a club, plant a garden, or even just re-organize your closet. “If you’re feeling overwhelmed, small projects can really give you a wonderful feeling of empowerment,” adds Dr. Rossman. “Once you string together a number of small successes, your confidence can really build.”

## Take Care of Yourself

Rome wasn’t built in a day; your new life plan will also take time and patience to develop. In the meantime, invest in your success by taking care of your mind, body, and spirit. If one of your goals is weight loss, for instance, the key is nourishment. When you’ve gone through a difficult situation like divorce, you need to be very kind to you. Keep in mind that you’re nourishing yourself, and that it’s not just about the food. The combination of healthy eating and living gives people going through divorce back that extra little bit

in our lives.” Of course, you should consult your doctor before starting a new exercise regimen — particularly if you have been a couch potato for some time.

## Make Your Home a Sanctuary

Our homes reflect our spirit in so many ways. Now is the time to clear clutter from your path and make your home equally receptive to renewal. When life is good and a long-term relationship is going well, one’s home can be the only place you want to be. But if the relationship ends, home needs to be redefined. Tune into the colors and textures that give you pleasure — check out decor magazines, films, nature, fashion — and introduce them into your new home. If you’re moving to a new address, try to paint before you move in so that the space welcomes you and your new life. If you’re staying put, the act of changing wall colors and furnishings that you never really liked can be rather satisfying.

When Ford was going through her own divorce, she changed out framed photos in her house of her and her former husband with photos of spiritual leaders she admired; she also found

great comfort in music. “Is there anything in your environment that is bringing up feelings of loss or sadness or loneliness?” she asks. “If there is — can you — just for now, let them go?” It can also help to create a sacred place in your home, says Dr. Rossman. “For some people, that would be the place where they meditate; for others, it’s the place they read.

## Let the Outside In Again

When we are going through divorce, it’s as if the outside world almost ceases to exist. We become thoroughly and utterly self-absorbed, necessarily, as we transition through the healing process. “When you’re self-absorbed, your life energy circles ‘round and ‘round inside you,” says Hendrix. “To get over self-absorption, you need to move your energy out, and one of the best ways to do that is to find something to do that means you give something of yourself away — whether it’s doing something philanthropic, teaching a class, working in a soup kitchen, or planting a garden.”

With self-renewal comes an interest once again in people, activities, and issues that fall outside our own inner world. Push yourself to seize these opportunities when they arise. “Reach out also to your closest friends,” advises Dr. Rossman. “Sometimes, when people have gone through divorce, they might be feeling needy. One way to really reach out in a friendship is to give back to your friends.”

Regardless of how you choose to extend yourself to the outer world, make a commitment to include more f-u-n in your life. “Most of us think we’re too busy to have fun,” says Ford. “But fun lightens our heart, and that is so renewing.” ■

*Jane Nahirny is the former Editor of Divorce Magazine.*

**For more articles to help with your recovery after your divorce, please visit [www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce\\_Recovery](http://www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce_Recovery).**

# Full ESTEEM Ahead

**Our self-esteem can take a beating after divorce. Here are some tips to raise it back up again.**

that the grieving can take place right alongside full engagement with life, he says. “And try to ‘live well’: That’s a wonderful way to boost your self-esteem.”

## **Calm, subdue, and wrestle those self-punishing thoughts to the ground.**

In their book, *Conquer Your Critical Inner Voice* (New Harbinger Publications), Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D., Lisa Firestone, Ph.D., and Joyce Catlett, M.A. note that: “The critical inner voice is the language of the defended, negative side of your personality; the side that is opposed to your ongoing personal development.”

## **Work to replace the inner critic with a healthier voice.**

Pick up a copy of *Self-Esteem*, by Matthew McKay, Ph.D. and Patrick Fanning (New Harbinger Publications). Chapter Four deals with “Accurate Self-Assessment.” These important pages will help you create a realistic inventory of your strengths and weaknesses, which the authors claim will lead to a “self-description that is accurate, fair, and supportive.”

## **Avoid assigning blame, either to your ex or to yourself.**

When you feel yourself blaming either yourself or your spouse, shift to learning, suggests Dr. Rossman. “Ask yourself, ‘What can I learn from this?’” Avoiding the blame game is particularly important if you have children. Bad-mouthing your former spouse in front of the children may provide you with a sense of release in the short-term, but it’s very damaging for the children in the long-term, stresses Dr. Rossman.

## **Take responsibility for your own happiness.**

In his book, *A Woman’s Self-Esteem: Struggles and Triumphs in the Search for Identity* (Jossey-Bass), Nathaniel Branden (who also authored *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*) explores the origins of personal happiness and suggests that intrinsically happy individuals consciously commit themselves to their state of eternal bliss.

## **Develop a more positive body image.**

While physical appearance alone cannot determine an individual’s self-esteem, learning to accept and appreciate how you look is important. In his book, *The Body Image Workbook: An 8-Step Program for Learning to Like Your Looks* (New Harbinger Publications), author Thomas F. Cash, Ph.D., discusses body-image distortions and offers guidance through sensitively written text and useful “Helpsheets for Change.”

## **Start dating again — if you’re ready.**

“Look at it as an opportunity to learn more about yourself. Each date is a chance to cultivate your skills; it’s also an opportunity to get to know another person.” But resist the temptation to look at dating as a “spouse hunt,” advises Dr. Rossman. “If you’re on a date, and you decide that this is not the person of your dreams, you can feel like you’ve wasted your time. Even if that person is not going to be your life partner, there can still be something very worthwhile in getting to know him/her.”

## **Learn to enjoy your own company.**

“How you think about it makes all the difference,” says Dr. Rossman. “Instead of saying, ‘Oh, I’m divorced and I’m home alone, what a loser I am,’ why not say, ‘What a nice opportunity to do whatever I want?’”

## **Feel the pain, experience the gain.**

“I think when people want advice about self-esteem, sometimes what they’re really saying is, ‘What can I do to feel better?’ My advice is almost the opposite,” concludes Dr. Mirman. “It’s a really difficult and painful process, and if you allow yourself to feel bad, you’re going to get through it better. There’s going to be more happiness at the other side — but you need to actually give yourself permission to feel badly for a while in order to feel good later on.” ■

*Diana Shepherd is the former Editor of Divorce Magazine.*

## **Recognize that what you’re going through is normal.**

“It’s an emotional process,” says M. Chet Mirman, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and co-founder of The Center for Divorce Recovery, a Chicago-area psychotherapy center specializing in divorce-related issues. “It helps when someone’s going through a divorce if they remind themselves that this is a normal part of the process — that this too will pass.”

## **Go on living your life as fully as possible while grieving the loss of your marriage.**

advises Jeffrey Rossman, Ph.D., a psychologist and the director of the Behavioral Health Department at Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires. Know

# CREATING A Satisfying Life



Contrary to what you might believe, personal happiness does not depend on life dealing you a good hand. How you respond to what comes your way will largely determine whether your life is fulfilling or not; here's how to move from dissatisfaction to real satisfaction.

The breakdown of a marriage is one of the most traumatic things that can happen in your life. Divorce can cause profound feelings of loss, failure, regret, abandonment, emptiness, fear of the future, and/or powerlessness — especially if you didn't initiate the split.

There's no quick fix to your anger and grief, but there is a journey toward a more satisfying and fulfilling life that you can start right now. The transition from despair to satisfaction starts with your determination not to be a victim of your circumstances; happiness doesn't depend so much on what happens to you, but on how you deal with what happens to you. Change your way of thinking: decide that you're not going to let divorce take control of your life, and you'll be taking the first step towards recovery. If you are determined to wallow in defeat and sorrow, then the divorce has already won.

## Feel the Pain, Then Let it Go

Divorce is a loss, so allow yourself to grieve. "You have to allow the hurt to run its course," says relationship expert,

workshop leader, and best-selling author Bill Ferguson. "The more you allow yourself to feel the pain, the more it comes and the more it goes."

Divorce recovery is a process, and it takes time. How long you will take to heal depends on many factors, including the length of your marriage, whether you were abused, and the support you receive from family and friends. "You must take the process of recovery seriously," urges Micki McWade, who has developed a 12-step divorce-recovery program in her book *Getting Up, Getting Over, Getting On*. "People have high expectations of themselves; they think they should be getting over it quickly and immediately. But for every five years married, it takes about one year to get over it. Don't suppress your feelings or act as if it never happened, but give the process respect. If you bypass the process, it sets you up for a fall."

## Erase Revenge, Blame, and Guilt

Even when the divorce is over, anger, blame, and/or guilt may dominate your

thoughts. If you want to feel better, you'll have to work through and release these feelings. It's unlikely that either you or your spouse is 100% responsible for the end of your marriage; perhaps both of you should have put more effort into it, or perhaps you were simply not a compatible couple. Whatever your situation, you have nothing to gain — and a lot to lose — by lashing out at yourself or your ex-spouse.

Most definitely do not resort to revenge. It's a dish best not served at all, even if your ex has hurt you without shame. Vengeance doesn't make the hurt go away; it sets a horrible example of social behavior for your children, and it stalls you from moving on. Revenge never fulfills its intended purpose: it doesn't "teach a lesson" to the person who hurt you, but rather provokes that person to get back at you in turn, starting a cycle of tit-for-tat vengeance that causes unnecessary anguish on both sides. Revenge is extremely harmful at its worst and a waste of time at its best.

After all you've gone through, it may be tempting to see yourself as the eternal



victim of your former spouse. But adopting this role prevents you from embracing responsibility for your own actions, whether or not you really have been a victim. On the other hand, it's no more constructive to blame yourself for everything. Immersing yourself in guilt, or playing the "if only" game, will keep you stuck in the past and afraid to make a decision in case it's the wrong one. "You need to let go of the non-empowering emotions," advises Mike Lipkin, a Toronto-based motivational speaker and the author of *Your Personal Best*. "Anytime you stay angry at someone, you are letting them live rent-free inside your head."

## Look for the Hidden Gift

"Problems are just opportunities in their work clothes," said the late Henry J. Kaiser. If you change your way of thinking to consciously look for the positive effects in any negative event, you may experience a radical change in your emotions and your outlook on life.

The "gift" that comes out of suffering isn't always immediately apparent. This is where you need to develop the ability to "turn lemons into lemonade," as the old saying goes. It takes courage, character, imagination, and perspective to accept the inevitable, and even use it as the basis to create something positive. Sometimes, the most beneficial thing to come out of bad times is what you've learned from them, and you should acknowledge that to yourself. You need to look at the situation and say, "What's the lesson here? What have I learned from this experience?" The benefits of doing this include a sense of empowerment from having used your experience to grow wiser, and using your new-found wisdom to avoid the same pitfall if it comes up again. Experience is a hard way to learn how to get through life, but it's a very effective teacher.

## The Power of Choice

Now that you've grieved, let go of your hurt, and looked for positive aspects of your situation, it's time to start exploring your options as to where life

can take you next, or, rather, where you will take it. If fulfillment is your aim, you have to proactively make choices about where to go instead of waiting for things to happen to you." In divorce, it's important to heal your hurt, and it's also important to get on with your life," Ferguson points out. "The main thing is to be active. Life is like being in water: as long as you're swimming, you stay above water, but if you stop moving, you sink. During divorce, some people get caught in upset and then withdraw from life, eventually sinking into depression. You need to move forward and start creating dreams. Find things that you love to do."

Weigh the pros and cons, then take action. If you're dissatisfied with your job or your financial situation, take the initiative to update your resume and look for something more fulfilling, or at least to work toward promotion to a higher position or ask for a raise. If you're feeling courageous, you might even switch career paths completely and start over, although you have to balance this desire with the need to put food on the table and maintain a roof over your head. If you want to improve your education or technical skills, or if you just have an unsatisfied hunger for learning, go back to school in the evenings.

"Between anything happening to us and our response is the power to choose our response," says Stephen R. Covey, renowned motivational expert and author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Through the power of choice, Covey has helped numerous people overcome setbacks in their lives and go on to make valuable contributions to their communities. "Use the power of choice to bring yourself new meaning and new relationships. It will transcend a difficult past and help you learn from it. The only real failure is a mistake not learned from," he says.

The power to learn from your past and choose where to go next is the opposite of seeing yourself as a victim with no control over your life. Covey points out the four "basic human endowments" that go into the power of choice:

1. **Self-awareness.** We can observe our own past and see how it has developed our own strengths and weaknesses;
2. **Imagination.** We can picture ourselves in a new way and reinvent ourselves. "Our memory is limited and self-limiting," says Covey, "but our imagination is unlimited and expansive, and it feeds on optimism and hope."
3. **Conscience.** Our inner sense tells us what is right and wrong; and
4. **Willpower.** The power of navigating your own life can awaken powers within you that you may have forgotten you had or of which you were unaware. It will at least revitalize your confidence and control, and this has to come from within. If your partner defined much of your self-image, you need to take a fresh look at yourself and decide who you are now, as well as who you want to be in the future.

## Improve Your Outlook

Although it may take a while to completely recover from your divorce, there are many little things you could do to boost your spirits in the meantime. For example:

- Have a guys'/girls' night out with your friends.
- Do a good deed without expecting a reward.
- Join a club, sports team, arts group, support group, or any other special-interest organization.
- Play with a puppy or kitten.
- Take a night class in some subject you've always wanted to learn about.
- Surprise an old friend you haven't spoken to in months or years with a phone call or e-mail.
- Volunteer at a charity or cause.
- Buy yourself a treat. Stay within your budget, however, or this one will rebound on you. ■

*Jeffrey Cottrill is the former Managing Editor of Divorce Magazine.*

For more articles to help with your recovery after your divorce, please visit [divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce\\_Recovery](http://divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce_Recovery).

Taming tension during your divorce will reduce your stress level and help you get through the process.

# How to Quiet Your Mind

By Claire Michaels Wheeler, MD, PH.D

A quiet mind is a blessing you can grant yourself with practice. Can you remember a time when all you were doing was sitting and maybe looking? Hearing sounds, sensing your body, feeling your breath, but not creating a narrative about what was happening? Can you remember times when you were simply being not doing anything — not even meditating or “relaxing”? When you are still but highly observant, not bothered by assessments (good or bad, okay or not okay) but simply allowing everything around you to be what it is, you are in a meditative state.

I have found, in my years of leading mind — body groups, that this is a good place for beginners to start exploring the mindful state. I’ve had wonderful experiences of this in airports, riding in cars (not while I was driving!), while lying in the snow after falling down skiing, and at family gatherings, among other places. Time seems to stand still. I’m quiet on the inside, but acutely observant in a curious, gentle way of everything within and around me. Moments like those convinced me that I could use meditation to calm my sometimes manic mind.

## How to Relax Your Mind

Here is a good way to begin practicing mindfulness. Find a time when you can take ten minutes to yourself. You do not have to be in a darkened room with candles and incense in order to do this. You can be outside, in the

lobby of a large office building or a hotel, on your front porch — even in your car, if it’s not moving. All you need is to sit and be fairly confident that you won’t be interrupted for a few minutes. Now, get comfortable in your seat. Adjust your clothing or glasses so you aren’t distracted by anything tugging or compressing parts of your body. Uncross your legs, if you’re comfortable with that. With both feet on the ground and your hands in your lap, check your whole body once more to make sure you can relax.

Now, start thinking about the fact that you’re breathing. Don’t make a big deal out of it. Just notice that *Hey, guess what, there’s air flowing in and out of me every few seconds. And the air is a bit cool as it flows into my nose and into my throat. I can feel my chest expanding as the air fills it. As I become more relaxed, I’ll feel my belly expanding too. And just at the moment my lungs are full, everything stops for a second, and then I’m exhaling. The air, now warm, is flowing out of me, and my chest is falling.* Just notice this for a minute or so. If your mind wanders away from the miracle that is your breath, just let go of whatever your mind has got its teeth into, and return your attention to the air flowing in and out, in and out. This is a good thing, this breath. It brings life in, and it carries used-up old stuff out. It keeps you fresh from moment to moment. Just keep going back to it, and your mind will gradually stop jumping around.





Now, start to pay attention to what is going on around you. This is a shift you need to make carefully, because you might find your mind flooded with words about what things look like and whether things are okay and what's she wearing? And who did her hair? If this happens, gently return your narrative mind to your breath. Say to yourself, "air in, air out" with the movement of your breath until you can be curiously attentive to the world around you without the running commentary. The goal is to appreciate, perceive, and allow all you see, hear, feel, smell, and sense with a quiet, nonjudgmental mind.

## A Better Way of Being in the World

Simple awareness is something humans are born with — babies and toddlers, use it all the time. They're just observing. As you practice this, you'll slowly develop the ability to shift into simple awareness a few times each day. It's a very different way of being in the world, one that short-circuits stress because there's no need for self-consciousness, for comparing yourself to other people, for complaining or ruminating over past or future problems.

Eventually, you'll want to make the connection between occasionally practicing simple awareness in the world and practicing it continually with respect to your own thoughts and perceptions. Think about this: You can observe your thoughts and actions the way you observe the world, without constant judgment, and simply allow yourself to be as you are. If you notice things you'd like to change, that's fine, but begin by simply allowing yourself to be, and by cultivating an attitude of friendly curiosity about what's going on in your mind and spirit. This type of self-acceptance is something you have to relearn, because

it gets drummed out of you by the culture of materialism and competitiveness, but you can do it.

## Meditation for Maniacs

Are you a person who always has something to do? Life is demanding, pulling you in all different directions. There is always something to buy, to do, to see, to figure out, or to fix. The demands on your attention are never ending, starting with the alarm clock in the morning and ending with the late — night news and its dire warnings of the latest health threat or severe storm somewhere across the planet. You, like most people, probably feel like a maniac at least some of the time, rushing about in your head, your car, and your home to maintain some control over what seems like relentless chaos.

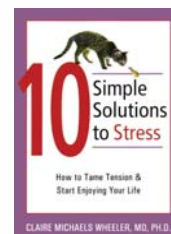
It's vital to your physical, emotional, and psychological health to break the spiral of intensity. You can learn to stop the madness for a few minutes and then dive right back in, refreshed and better able to cope.

One excellent way to do this is to use the three — breath technique. You can do this anytime, anywhere. All you have to do is recognize the signs of stress. As soon as you start to feel overwhelmed, stop for a minute. Say to yourself, I need a Break. Then take it. Take three breaths with your full attention on each one. Start by fully exhaling, and then calmly, carefully observe the next breath coming in. Feel it expanding inside you, and think to yourself, *Thank You*. Hold the breath for an instant, and then let it out slowly, thinking to yourself, *Let go*. Repeat this twice more. Don't cheat yourself. You have time to do this carefully, slowly, and mindfully. Just give yourself one minute to reconnect with the miracle of your breathing, and then get back

to work. If you practice this everyday, you'll notice a shift in the way you perceive stress, from something that just keeps happening to you to something you can observe with detachment.

## Mindful Walking

I can't write about meditation, mindfulness, and flow without mentioning my favorite type of meditation: mindful walking. This is simply the act of taking a very slow walk during which you pay close attention to everything that happens. This is a nice thing to do in your neighborhood, in your yard, or in a natural area near where you work. Start by coordinating your breath with your steps. Take a step as you inhale, take a step as you exhale. Continue this for a while, noticing how each foot touches the ground, how your chest expands, whether or not it feels awkward to be walking so slowly. Gradually, turn your attention to your surroundings. It's amazing to discover how many details you've been missing. ■



*This article was excerpted with permission from the book 10 Simple Solutions to Stress: How to Tame Tension and Start Enjoying Your Life by Claire Michaels Wheeler, MD, PH.D., published by New Harbinger Publications, Inc. c2007. Dr. Wheeler is on the faculty of the Center for Mind-Body Medicine of Portland, OR; and an instructor at Portland State University's School of Community Health.*

For more articles on health and well-being during and after divorce, visit [www.divorcemag.com/articles/Health\\_Well\\_Being](http://www.divorcemag.com/articles/Health_Well_Being).





# Yes, there's life (and even love) after divorce

**How to Make It Happen**

**By Mark Goulston, M.D.**

**T**il death do you part.” — Didn’t quite last that long, did it? Add to that the unrelenting incomprehension of how the person who made you feel the best about yourself and your life and now they’ve become the one who makes you feel the worst. It’s no wonder that divorce causes such upheaval. From affairs to bankruptcy to abuse to irresponsibility to mid-life crises to drug or alcohol addiction — isn’t it mind-boggling how nearly everyone going through it feels so unprepared?

## Just as there are negative coping behaviors, there are positive coping behaviors that can actually help improve your situation.

Maybe it's the shock of how adoration turned to repulsion, mutual respect to disdain and love to hate. It's difficult to accept that what you thought was the right thing to do, has turned out to be wrong.

Or perhaps the thought of how a divorce adversely affects young children can be an enormous source of worry, stress and guilt. The maternal bond is the strongest attachment there is and when you are a part of something that causes your children so much hurt, it can be of the most upsetting experiences in your life.

Finally, the effect of losing all of your passion for the person you once loved can make you feel inadequate. Nothing kills off passion as much as feeling hurt, scared, disappointed, angered, or betrayed — all of which are not merely possible in a divorce, but are typical.

It is the combination of these factors that can have such a profound negative effect on your career, relationships, spirit and soul. You may think to yourself: "If I was wrong about my marriage, how many other things am I wrong about?" or "If I'm screwing up my children's life, what kind of mother am I?" Then as if all of this weren't enough, you start having sleep and concentration problems and become depressed and/or anxious. All told, it becomes extremely difficult to function on the job, in relationships, and to feel hope or optimism about your future.

Despite the nearly universal traumatic effects of divorce, some women do survive, move on, fall in love again, and live happily after. What distinguishes those who do well from those who don't? Those who have positive coping behaviors do better than those with negative ones. Those that "heal"

end up better off than those that remain wounded. And those who move on rather than stay bitter, depressed and feeling like a victim have a much better chance for a satisfying life.

### Negative and Positive Coping — the choice is up to you

Women who leave their marriage are more likely to have an easier time coping, healing and eventually moving on. As a woman who was divorced by her husband told me: "It's better to have loved and leave, than to have loved and be left."

Next to the sense of failure in a divorce the worst feeling is powerlessness. Women who leave feel as if they have more power than those who are left. This can even out, however, if the man who is left feels angry and becomes vindictive and makes the divorce as horrendous as possible. Alternatively, the man who does the leaving may feel some guilt and responsibility for taking care of his rejected wife to ensure that he ends up divorced and not a widower (if he thinks she might do something self-destructive).

Regardless of whether you left or were left, there are negative coping behaviors that you will want to avoid because they make matters worse. Negative coping behaviors include:

- Isolating. Pulling away from other people like a deer on the side of the road to lick your wounds. Isolating leaves you prey to your imagination. It makes it difficult to keep perspective.
- Obsessing. Often accompanies isolating. The more you obsess the less you are able to function, care for your children, and the longer it will take for you to get through the divorce.
- Compulsive activities. Frustration, anger with no one to take it out on

and fear often trigger increased eating, drinking, and spending to try to relieve upset. However, what makes you feel better for the moment often causes you to lose self-respect and experience shame later on, two things you don't need to feel any more of.

- Getting even. You will be very tempted to get even with your ex and you'll find more than enough reasons to justify it. But when you focus on retaliating it makes the divorce more costly and more painful. The children are also hurt more by this reaction, as they feel thrust into the middle of this mess.
- Wearing out your friends and family. This is the opposite extreme from isolating. This is when you lean on and on top of your friends instead of leaning into them for support. Even good friends can become exhausted when you keep saying and doing the same things and "Yes, butting" all their suggestions. When you come off as too needy you will burn people out and they'll start to avoid you.
- Feeling sorry for yourself. When you think of yourself as a victim and wait for the world to fix your problems and life, you're in for a very long wait.

Just as there are negative coping behaviors, there are positive coping behaviors that can actually help improve your situation. These include: Be around people. Pain is pain; suffering is being alone with pain. If you push yourself to be with people in your misery, suffering that you can't live with becomes pain that you can.

- Do things that give you back some sense of power and control over your life. These include keeping your divorce papers in order (with the originals in a safety deposit box and copies in a file at home), changing your assets that are listed in both you and your ex's names to yours, letting creditors know of your divorce and having them notify you as soon as your ex stops making payments to protect your credit rating, keeping good records of your ex's payments so you don't let it build up to a larger amount, keeping records



## On the subject of choosing the right people to tell your feelings to, seek out different people at different stages of your divorce.

of children's expenses, and sitting down with financial advisors to review your investments.

- Try what your close friends suggest. If you get to share your pain with your most caring friends, they get to have you try their helpful suggestions if you can't think of any alternative solutions. Hope for the best, plan for the worst.
- Have a realistic attitude and approach to your ex. Don't count on him to make it easy for you. If he does, consider it gravy. A helpful tool to aid you in being realistic is called the Him/You Inventory.

For example with regard to children, you might write: I can rely on him to be caring when he's with the children; I can't rely on him to be on time and be consistent with his visitation; He can rely on me to be civil to him and not bad-mouth him to the kids; He can't rely on me to be friendly when he tries to joke his way out of being unpredictable about picking up and dropping off the kids. After you fill out the chart

send it to your ex with a blank one. Tell him you'd like him (if he's willing) to make corrections on yours from his point of view and then to fill out the blank chart with regard to you. Then consider using this as vehicle to work toward having more constructive conversations with him (again if he's willing).

### Healing — why settle for being scarred or scared?

Dealing with your upset rationally is okay, but don't intellectualize and try to convince yourself that you're okay when you're not. Like an abscess that can't heal until it's drained, awful feelings can't be healed until you feel them.

1. The three steps to doing this are:  
Admit all your feelings to yourself (including anger, hurt, depression, fear, disappointment, etc).
2. Feel your feelings by filling in:  
"When and why I felt most depressed was \_\_\_\_\_."

Then do the same with all your other feelings. Keep in mind that just because you think you won't be able to endure them, doesn't mean you can't.

2. Express your feelings to someone who is receptive to your pain. Start your conversation by imagining they have just said to you: "What is the worst part of this whole situation for you?" Then be specific vs. general. The more specific you are the easier to feel your feelings.

On the subject of choosing the right people to tell your feelings to, seek out different people at different stages of your divorce. Early on seek out sympathetic people who will let you vent and blame things on your ex. Then move on to empathic friends (or a therapist) who will offer you more understanding than sympathy and finally move on to wise friends whose opinion you respect and who will not enable you to remain stuck in self-pity.

Dealing with your feelings with the proper people will assist you if you are ever going to meet the greatest challenge to healing, namely forgiving and forgetting. You will never heal if you do not accomplish this. Instead the thread of bitterness toward your ex will contaminate the rest of your life.

You'll forgive when you no longer need to blame. Initially you need to blame your ex for several reasons. Blaming him prevents you from realizing your own contribution to the failure of your marriage that can trigger guilt, shame and feelings of inadequacy resulting in intense depression. Accepting your share of the responsibility for causing the divorce will lessen your need to blame. Why do this? Because blaming will eventually make you bitter.

And bitterness is its own punishment. You'll forget when you no longer need to remember. This occurs once you have learned all the right lessons from this relationship and made them a part of who





you are and how you act. For instance one lesson you might take from your divorce is that you really don't know someone until you have an argument and can totally resolve it, rather than sweeping it under the carpet unresolved only to build up and become worse.

## Moving On — the fine art of building new memories

After you have healed to the best of your ability, it's time to move on. This means stepping out into life. After you've learned what you would do differently if you could do your marriage over, including knowing how and why you chose to marry him, it's time to begin thinking about starting another relationship.

As I wrote in my book, *GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior*, (published by Perigee Books), the best way to leave a loss such as divorce behind is to build new memories. You need to build new memories to dilute the hold that the terrible memories about your marriage and divorce have on you. You build new memories by actions taken not by thoughts thought or by good intentions.

Compare your life to the cross section cut trees that have hundreds of rings, each signifying a year. Some rings indicate when the tree flourished, some rings reveal years when it endured fire or drought. Taken together all the rings demonstrate the history and character of that tree. If you borrow from the tree analogy and build new memories, then the year of your divorce just becomes a

single rotten year. But two years from now could be the year you started met and began dating a person you respected and who loved you, and four years from now, the year you re-married and started to live happily after.

If you don't take action and don't build new memories to dilute the effect of the bad ones, the bad memories build and become overpowering and can also ooze into and spoil other parts of your life.

It will not be easy to do this and maintain it, but keep in mind it takes 30 days for a change in behavior to become a habit and a minimum of 6 months for a habit to become part of your personality.

Even if you have coped and healed you may feel you'll be better off if you don't try again. Maybe so, but maybe not if the old adage "Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all" or its newer version, "The only thing worse than being married is being single" holds true. ■

*Mark Goulston, M.D. is a Los Angeles based psychiatrist, author of The 6 Secrets of a Lasting Relationship: How to Fall in Love Again...and Stay There (Perigee) and co-founder of [www.couplescompany.com](http://www.couplescompany.com).*

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you from having what you want. Basically, there are three steps to achieving your goal.

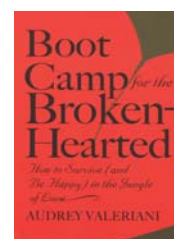
1. Figure out what you want,
2. Take steps toward your goal every day, and
3. Focus on it and don't give up.

Now ask yourself these questions: What do you want for your future? What have you denied yourself? What have you put off? What's important to you? What do you dream of being and/or doing? List your replies and write down the actual steps you can take to make it happen. For example, see table 3.

## Tips

- Understand what's happening to you, both emotionally and physically.
- Allow (and help) yourself go through the whole "process" of ups and downs.
- Be gentle with and forgiving of yourself.
- Keep up with your normal routine as much as possible.
- Take time to examine your choices, and do what's best for you.
- Review what you've learned from your experience.
- Set some goals, and make your first move!

Hopefully, you're now feeling a little more optimistic and believe that life will go on after tissues, tantrums, and talk shows. ■



*This article has been edited and excerpted from Boot Camp for the Broken-Hearted (New Horizon Press) by Audrey Valeriani. Based in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, Valeriani is the creator of TheAccidentalExpert.com, which provides relationship coaching. You can order her book at [www.bootcampforthebrokenhearted.com](http://www.bootcampforthebrokenhearted.com).*

To read more excerpts from *Boot Camp for the Broken-Hearted*, visit [www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce\\_Recovery](http://www.divorcemag.com/articles/Divorce_Recovery).

## BOOT CAMP / CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

**TABLE 3: Set your goal.**

GOAL	TODAY	THIS WEEK	THIS MONTH	IN 6 MONTHS	BY YEAR END
Become a paralegal	Research schools or training	Get brochures; choose school	Get financing; work out details	Go to class and study	Graduate!
Go to Paris	Get brochures	Save money	Book with travel agent	Pack and go!	Enjoy pictures!
Buy a Condo	Save some money	Talk to an agent	Get qualified by the bank	Look at properties	Move!

relationship should encourage one to re-examine what love is. A feeling of being unlovable may be present at this stage. Here's how Leonard put it: "Not only do I feel unlovable now, but I'm afraid I never will be lovable!" This fear can be overwhelming.

Christians are taught to "Love thy neighbor as thyself." But what happens if you don't love yourself? Many of us place the center of our love in another person rather than in ourselves. When divorce comes, the center of our love is removed, adding to the trauma of loss. An important element in the rebuilding process is to learn to love yourself. If you don't love yourself — accepting yourself for who you are, warts and all — how can you expect anybody else to love you?

### Trust: "My Love Wound is Beginning to Heal"

Located in the center of the pyramid, the Trust rebuilding block symbolizes the fact that the basic level of trust is the center of the whole adjustment process. Divorced people frequently point their fingers and say they cannot trust anyone of the opposite sex. There's an old cliché that fits here: when you point a finger at something, there are three fingers pointing back to you. When divorced people say they don't trust the opposite sex, they're saying more about themselves than about the opposite sex.

The typical divorced person has a painful love wound resulting from the ending of the love relationship, a love wound that prevents him/her from loving

another. It takes a good deal of time to be able to risk being hurt and to become emotionally close again.

### Relatedness: "Growing Relationships Help Me Rebuild"

Often after a love relationship has ended, you find another relationship: one that appears to have everything the previous union lacked. You think: "I've found the one and only with whom I will live forever. This new relationship appears to solve all of my problems, so I'll hold onto it very tightly. And I believe the new partner is the one who is making me happy."

You need to realize that what feels so good is that you are becoming who you would like to be. You need to take back your own power and take responsibility for the good things you're feeling.

The new relationship after a breakup is often called a "rebound" relationship, a label that is partly true. When this relationship ends, it is often more painful than when the primary love relationship ended. For instance, about 20% of the people who have signed up for the divorce class didn't enrol after their marriages ended: they enrolled after their rebound relationships ended.

### Sexuality: "I'm Interested, but I'm Scared"

What do you think of when the word sex is mentioned? Most of us tend to react emotionally and irrationally. Our society over-emphasizes and glamorizes sex. Married couples often imagine divorced people as oversexed and free to "romp and play in the meadows of sexuality." In

reality, single people often find the hassles of sexuality among the most trying issues in the divorce process.

A sexual partner was available in the love relationship. Even though the partner is gone, sexual needs go on. In fact, at some points in the divorce process, the sex drive is even greater than before. Yet most people are more or less terrified by the thought of dating — feeling like teenagers again — especially when they sense that somebody has changed the rules since they dated earlier. Many feel old, unattractive, unsure of themselves, and fearful of awkwardness. And for many, moral values overrule their sexual desires. Some have both parents telling them what they should do, and their own teenagers who delight in parenting them! ("Be sure to get home early, Mom.") Thus, for many, dating is confusing and uncertain. No wonder sexual hang-ups are so common!

### Singleness: "You Mean It's Okay?"

People who went directly from their parental homes into "marriage homes," without experiencing singleness, often missed this important growth period entirely. For some, even the college years may have been supervised by "parental" figures and rules.

Regardless of your previous experience, however, a period of singleness — growth as an independent person — will be valuable now. Such an adjustment to the ending of a love relationship will allow you to really let go of the past, to learn to be whole and complete within yourself and to invest in yourself. Singleness is not only okay, it is necessary!



## Purpose: "I Have Goals for the Future Now"

Do you have a sense of how long you are going to live? Bruce was very surprised during his divorce when he realized that at age 40 he might be only half-way through his life. If you have many years yet to live, what are your goals? What do you plan to do with yourself after you have adjusted to the ending of your love relationship? It's helpful to make a "lifeline" and take a look at the patterns in your life, and at the potential things you might accomplish for the rest of your time. Planning helps bring the future into the present.

## Freedom: From Chrysalis to Butterfly

At last, the top of the mountain!

The final stage has two dimensions. The first is freedom of choice. When you've worked through all of the rebuilding blocks that have been stumbling blocks in the past, you're free and ready to enter into another relationship. You can make it more productive and meaningful than your past love relationships. You're free to choose happiness as a single person or in another love relationship.

There's another dimension of freedom: the freedom to be yourself. Many of us carry around a burden of unmet needs, needs that may control us and not allow us freedom to be the people we want to be. As we unload this burden and learn to satisfy these needs, we become free to be ourselves. This may be the most important freedom.

## Looking Backward

While climbing the mountain, one occasionally slips back to a rebuilding block which may have been dealt with before. The blocks are listed here from one to nineteen, but you won't necessarily encounter and deal with them in that order. In fact, you're likely to be working on all of them together. And a big setback, such as court litigation or the ending of another love relationship, may result in a backward slide some distance down the mountain.

## Rebuilding Your Faith

Some people ask how religion relates to the rebuilding blocks. Many people working through divorce find it difficult to continue their affiliation with the church they attended while married, for several reasons. Some churches still look upon divorce as a sin or, at best, a "falling from grace." Many people feel guilty within themselves, even if the church doesn't condemn them. Many churches are very family-oriented, and single parents and children of divorced people may be made to feel as if they don't belong. Many people become distant from the church since they are unable to find comfort and understanding as they are going through the divorce process. This distance leaves them with more loneliness and rejection.

There are, happily, many churches that are actively concerned for the needs of people in the divorce process. If your church doesn't have such a program, we urge you to express your needs. Organize a singles group, talk to an adult class, let your minister know if you feel rejected and lonely. Ask your church leaders to help you educate others about the needs of people who are ending their love relationships.

The way each of us lives reflects our faith, and our faith is a very strong influence on our well-being. Bruce likes to put it this way: "God wants us to develop and grow to our fullest potential." And that's what the rebuilding blocks are all about — growing to our fullest potential. Learning to adjust to a crisis is a spiritual process. The quality of our relationships with the people around us, and the amount of love, concern, and caring we're able to show others are good indications of our relationship with God.

## Children Must Rebuild Too

Many people ask about how the rebuilding blocks relate to children. The process of adjustment for kids is very similar to that for adults. The rebuilding blocks apply to the children (as they may to other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and close friends). Many parents get so involved in trying to help their kids work through

the adjustment process that they neglect to meet their own needs.

If you're a parent who is embarking on the Rebuilding journey, we recommend that you learn to take care of yourself and work through the adjustment process. You will find that your children will tend to adjust more easily as a result. Kids tend to get hung up in the same rebuilding blocks as their parents, so by making progress yourself, you will be helping your children, too.

## Homework: Learning by Doing

Millions of people read self-help books looking for answers to problems in living and relationships. They learn the vocabulary and gain awareness, but don't really learn at a deep emotional level from the experience. What we learn emotionally affects our behavior a great deal, and much of the learning we have to do to adjust to a crisis is emotional relearning.

Some things you believed all of your life may not be true and you'll have to relearn. But intellectual learning — thoughts, facts, and ideas — is of value only when you also learn the emotional lessons that let it all make sense in your life.

Be aware that not all support groups are supportive. Choose carefully the others with whom you work through this process. They should be as committed as you are to a positive growth experience, and willing to maintain confidentiality of personal information. ■

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