



15 Tips on Surviving Your Divorce

You need practical ideas on how to survive your divorce. Whether you need to separate, file, respond to divorce papers served to you, or whether the divorce is already final, this isn't an easy time.

Your mind is spinning with this thought at the center: How will I deal with all this? There are many real issues: Who will get the kids? How will you survive financially? Who will get the house? Can you stand seeing your ex with someone else? What will people think? How will you tell the kids? How can you take care of your responsibilities? What kind of life will you have? Will you be alone forever? And, more; lots more.

There are a myriad of emotions: anger, despair, denial, hurt, sadness, disappointment, guilt, panic, fear, numbness and maybe even relief. Physical symptoms include butterflies in your stomach, tightness in your throat, shortness of breath, weakness, restless body, headaches, agitation, anxiety, sleeplessness, and adrenaline surges.

Go through the grief process.

The loss is deep. It feels like a death because it is—the death of a relationship, an ideal, a person, a chapter in your life. After all, two became one and the one is now becoming two. The loss of the “one” is a death. The loss also includes letting go of the fairy tale version of your marriage—the “Happily Ever After” dream that possibly never was and now never will be.

Grief comes in stages: numbness/shock/denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and finally acceptance. These stages cycle and recycle. You may stay in one longer than the others, and experience it again after moving forward. The **shock and denial** is a protective instinct. When we experience things that are overwhelming, our mind and body shut them out until we can handle them. You may be tempted to deny that your marriage is ending and instead believe it will work out. It makes sense to hold onto this hope for awhile. This is a necessary stage and is healthy as long as it doesn't last so long that you don't do what you need to do to take care of yourself.

Next, come **anger and blame**. How could your spouse do this to you? How could God allow it to happen? How could you have ignored the signs? How could he or she refuse to try to reconcile? How could you have not done things differently when you had the chance? And, if your spouse is involved with someone else, the anger and betrayal intensify. You need to direct your anger toward someone and something, because the anger can be intense and powerful.

Bargaining gives you the illusion that you can do something to change your situation. You pray and tell God you will do certain things, if He fixes it. You tell yourself you can make changes that will bring your spouse back. Or, you bargain with your spouse and try to convince him/her to try it again.

Finally, the **sadness** hits. You feel LOSS. This is the stage people typically think is grieving. This is where you hurt—emotionally and physically. The pain is a heavy weight in your body. You feel depressed, hopeless, unable to concentrate, unable to get out of bed, unable to go to work, and unable to complete regular routines. It feels overwhelming, unbearable, and unending. You feel like you will never recover enough to be happy and enjoy your life.

Eventually, **acceptance** comes. You stop fighting the inevitable, accept that there is nothing you can do except move on. The emotional pain ebbs. You stop trying to figure out whose fault it was and how it could have been avoided. You recognize you both had a part in the marriage failing, even if one of you was more responsible. You acknowledge God gave each of us free choice and you realize that God did not cause the divorce. You begin to feel hope. You are able to function normally. With acceptance comes the ability to begin rebuilding a new life for yourself—at first one moment at a time, then one day at a time, and eventually just living your life normally.

The following coping tools will help you in the grief process and move you toward acceptance:

Grieve the loss of the good stuff.

The marriage wasn't all bad. Your ex-spouse has some good qualities. You have some good memories. You've lost the intact family and even if it wasn't perfect, it was still a family. You may convince yourself that being rid of the problems, pain, and stress has some benefits. But, what do you do with the good stuff? You have to gain a perspective that enables you to find a place for the good stuff that doesn't negate the bad.

You can love someone and not be able to be with them. In time, the acute intensity of the feeling you have toward them will decrease and you will see her or him as your ex-spouse, your children's father or mother, and finally as the person you were married to. And, you will be able to hold onto the good, while accepting the bad.

Get your ex out of your head.

You can focus so much on your soon-to-be-ex that you forget about yourself. If the marriage is over, it is time for you to focus on yourself. What is going on with you? What are you thinking, feeling, needing, perceiving, and understanding? Every time you think about your spouse, put the focus back onto you. Try not to think about what he or she is doing, thinking, feeling, or needing.

When your mind wanders onto him/her, put it back to the present and focus on what is in front of you. Get busy. Do something—anything—wash dishes, sweep, cook, clean a drawer, run, call someone, put on music. Force yourself to notice everything around you: the sky, the furnishings, the people, the smells, the colors, the sounds, and the air. Keep your mind and hands busy with other things.

Change the environment.

Everything can be a reminder of the fact that your marriage is ending. To counter this, make the environment yours. Replace the things that he or she took. Get painful things out of your house: pictures of the two of you, gifts, and things with special memories. Make your surroundings nurturing, inviting, and different. Change the bedding in the bedroom; buy new sheets, blankets,

and a bedspread to make it feminine or masculine. Put clothing in the closet on the side your spouse had clothing and take his or her clothing out if it is still there. Rearrange furniture. Buy new sofa pillows, new dishes, new towels, and new pictures. Whatever is a painful reminder about that person, change it if at all possible.

Change yourself.

You are going to become a new person. You will rediscover parts of yourself that you lost in the marriage. You will discover new likes and dislikes, a new lifestyle, new friends, and new interests. Change something about your physical looks to signify that you are going to be different: a new hairdo, new outfit, or a new look. Don't go to all the old places you went with your spouse.

Find activities you really enjoy. Think back to what you wanted to do in the marriage, but didn't, because your spouse didn't like it or there wasn't enough time. Go do it. This will help you to see positive in the negative and it will give you hope by helping you to see that there are things you like and enjoy. Do things even if you don't feel like it and try not to take your spouse with you in your head.

Focus on single people instead of couples.

When you are in pain over a particular problem, the tendency is to notice other people who don't have that problem. Infertile women see babies and pregnant women all around them. Single people and newly divorced people see happily married couples. But truthfully, many people are single and half of all marriages end in divorce, so many of the couples that you see were in your shoes at one time and have moved on, others will be, and many are unhappy. Let that give you hope rather than discouragement. Instead, notice the single people around you that are happy and enjoying their lives.

Enjoy your alone time.

Many things are enjoyable and satisfying, but you can rob yourself of the enjoyment if you focus on feeling sorry for yourself and on the fact that you are newly alone. You enjoyed your alone time when you were married and probably wanted more of it.

You need alone time. It helps you to regroup, meditate, capture your soul, rejuvenate, and process your life. Think of it as necessary, but use it carefully. Do something in your alone time to fill it: read a book, watch a movie, pray, read the Bible, walk, mediate, take care of business, pamper yourself, learn something new, go somewhere fun, or rest. Do whatever is enjoyable and satisfying and takes your mind off your spouse; then do it again—and again.

Reach out to supportive people.

I am a strong person and able to handle alone time well. But when my marriage got bad and it looked like I would be going through a divorce, I desperately needed support. We all need hugs, affirmation, support, and attention from other people. Risk stepping out of your pain and isolation to get those needs met. Call your friends and family members, join a support group, find a good counselor, or talk to someone at church. But remember, it is important to only reach

out to safe people who understand and affirm you. You don't need more condemnation and rejection at this time of your life.

Let go of other people's opinions.

Not everyone will agree with you about the marriage and divorce. Accept that some will side with your spouse—his or her family and best friends will most likely fall into this category. You will lose couples because you won't necessarily fit in with them or feel comfortable like before.

You may be bothered by people knowing your spouse's side of the story but not yours. You may desperately want to "correct" the story, but you can't. You have to let go of what people think of you and not worry about what they know. You also don't have to give an explanation of why your marriage is ending to every one. You can disclose as little or as much as you like, but try not to play the blame game or deliberately hurt your spouse. Simply state the truth in as much unbiased honesty as is necessary for the situation and person. And, accept the fact that you can't change everyone's ideas about you.

Let go of your spouse's opinion.

One of the hardest things to let go of is the fact that you can't make your spouse see your view of the marriage and why it failed. While in the marriage, you worked at getting your spouse to understand your feelings, motives, and needs. You didn't like it when your spouse felt upset with you. You tried to resolve misunderstanding.

In most divorces, the spouse will hold their own set of biases, perceptions, blame, and resentments. You are powerless over all those things. You have to accept that you can't set the record straight—not about the past, why the marriage failed, who you are as a person, or the divorce agreements. If you could do that, you probably wouldn't be divorcing!

Find legal support.

In rare instances, people can settle divorces between themselves or with one attorney acting as a mediator with both parties to help them work out an agreement. You can only do this if you and your spouse are honest and willing to disclose assets. It saves a lot of time, stress, and money, if you can do it, but it isn't possible if both of you aren't willing to cooperate, compromise, and act in good faith.

Most of the time, you need your own attorney. If your spouse gets one and you don't, you will suffer. Respond to the divorce filing within the allotted amount of time so you don't sacrifice your rights. Be willing to fight for what you deserve and are legally entitled to. Be willing to stand up so you will be taken care of. You don't have to give up your rights as a Christian in your divorce. If you have children, do what it takes to protect them and your custody rights.

Mostly, don't be afraid that your spouse won't reconcile because you get an attorney. Some people think that there is a chance their spouses will come back and don't want to risk losing that chance by getting their spouses mad. Reconciliation does happen sometimes, but if it does, the person will overlook the fact that you needed to protect yourself financially and legally, especially if they were protecting themselves and /or initiated the divorce.

Figure out why the marriage failed.

It is natural and healthy to want to put closure on your marriage by figuring out what went wrong. You can gain a pretty good perspective, but at some point you have to let it go and accept that you might not understand everything. Try not to assign blame; instead, accept that you each did the best you could. Even if your spouse is clearly the majority of the problem (as is the case with addictions, affairs, mental illness, and other obvious problems), you still have a part in how you reacted. And in addition to your spouse's major problems, you both are imperfect human beings with faults of your own.

If you are replaying the last argument or the "last straw" that caused your marriage to end, you need to accept that no one thing caused it. The marriage was on rocky ground anyway if that one thing was the last straw. If it hadn't happened, it would have been something else. Let it go.

Practice detachment.

There are times you have to see your spouse: court, switching kids, taking care of business associated with the divorce, family events, and around town. Some people have to work in a family business together and others continue to live in the same house through the divorce. Seeing your spouse is painful, but to the best of your ability (even though you don't want to), maintain your composure, act dignified, control your emotions, and be respectful. Do this even if your spouse is with another partner. It will make the process easier for you and set the tone of the relationship that you will have to have with your ex-spouse in the future.

And, if you are feeling compelled to take care of your spouse's emotions and needs, let it go. It isn't your responsibility or role any longer and will delay the process of separating yourself from you spouse that you must go through to let go of the marriage.

You will also need to practice detachment when you have to send your children to your spouse's place. You are used to being with your children all the time and being away from them regularly is hard. It is also harder, if you are uncomfortable with things that your spouse does while with your children are there, but unless you can make a case legally or it is truly dangerous, you will have to learn to live with letting go and not controlling the situation.

Detachment is complete when you get to the place where you wish your former partner well and view your marriage as a closed chapter in your life.

Keep the kids out of the divorce.

Don't put the kids between you and your ex. Only tell them enough age-appropriate information to understand what is going to happen to their lives. Tell them that when two people get married and either stop loving each other or have too many problems, they sometimes break up. Don't tell them things to purposefully turn them against the other parent, only enough for them to make sense of the situation. The best possible outcome for the kids is that you can be around your ex for necessary things like family events without being visibly uncomfortable or upset.

Let the kids grieve, react, and deal with it in their own way, but don't put them in the middle of you and your spouse. Don't pry information from the kids about what your ex is doing. Don't put them in a position of siding with one parent over the other or having to hate one parent in order

to love the other. Encourage them to have a healthy relationship with the other parent and try not to make them choose between their parents or decide where to live. If they are not physically or emotionally safe with your spouse, you will need to work with your attorney to protect the, because you are required to follow custody orders, unless your child is old enough to make his/her own decisions, or is too big (literally) to make him/her do what you want. Always check with your attorney to understand your state's laws.

Know when it's time to date.

When can you date? The answer: It depends. Dating is dangerous during and right after a divorce, unless the marriage was completely dead for years and you've already worked through the loss, because you are so emotionally vulnerable that you might not make a healthy choice. People typically gravitate toward the same type of spouse, until they process the divorce and work through their old stuff. When you are emotionally vulnerable, you may be so needy that anyone will do, as long as it is a warm body and someone who seems interested in you. The last thing you need is a series of rejections from people that weren't necessarily right for you anyway.

Instead, it is safer to seek out both men and women to be friends with. Get comfortable knowing yourself again in many new relationships. See what types of people bring out the best in you and the ones you enjoy being around the most. Friendship has lots of advantages over dating. You can rediscover yourself, worry less about rejection and impressing the other person, maintain healthy boundaries, heal from your divorce, and prevent unnecessary hurt.

You can get affirmation from all kinds of people: family, friends, co-workers, and even the opposite sex as friends—you don't have to date to get positive attention. When are you really ready to date? When you're not in a tremendous amount of pain, when your thoughts aren't always about the divorce, when you have processed the end of the marriage, and you have become healthy emotionally.

In conclusion, divorce is never easy, but there are things you can do to make it easier. Using these coping skills will make a difficult and lengthy process survivable. Eventually, you will be able to close the chapter of your marriage and begin the new chapter of the rest of your life.