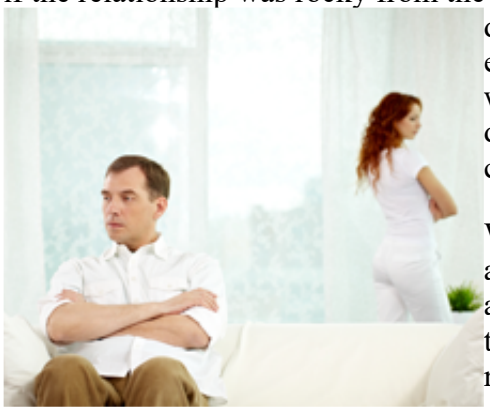
Life after divorce

Ending a marriage can be very stressful for you and your family. No matter what the cause, divorce can trigger painful and unsettling feelings. Anger, sadness and frustration are all part and parcel of divorce, even if the relationship was rocky from the start. Plus, the thought of being on your own can be tough, if not daunting. You can feel as if your life has been turned upside down, and everything from living arrangements to child care and relationships with friends and family are out of sorts. On top of this, the cost of a divorce can leave you financially strained, especially if there are children to care for.



Whether the marriage lasted two years or two decades, recovering from a divorce takes time. Although everyone is different, most people need a few years to adapt to the changes that divorce brings. However bleak the outlook may seem in the moments following the end of a relationship, remember that you can and *will* move on.

Managing your emotions

Recovering emotionally from a divorce takes work. This process can bring intense sadness, anger and frustration to the surface. Acknowledging these emotions will not only help you work through the pain, but is also an important step in the healing process. Talking with a friend or writing in a journal can also help you work through your feelings.

Some people become so consumed with the legal aspects of divorce that the emotional recovery takes a back seat. But the reality is, to move on you must accept that the marriage is over and establish an identity that isn't tied to your ex-partner's.

Let's face it: a divorce can be a major blow to your own identity, ego and self-esteem, especially if you were not the one to initiate the split. While it may be tempting to dwell on the negatives of yourself, your ex-partner and/or your newly single future—taking a "doom and gloom" attitude can help to create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Pay attention to your self-talk and when that negative voice starts to rear its ugly head, stop it in its tracks: challenge the validity of what it's saying, and start speaking more positively and optimistically about yourself and circumstances. While you can't control every part of your situation, you do have the power to deal with it constructively.

As you begin this new stage of your life, take the opportunity to learn and grow. Honestly examine your role in the relationship and recognize your part in the break-up. Learn from your mistakes and vow to make better choices in the future. If you can, try to make peace with your ex. Forgiveness can take a big load off your shoulders.

Stress relief is also important during this time of change. Meditating, listening to music, getting a massage or working on a hobby are all great ways to bring more relaxation into your life. Squeeze in some "me" time (no matter how brief) and reward yourself for your hard work.

Going it Alone—together

Ignore the desire to "tough it out" alone. Emotional support is essential for healing, and there are many people who can help you through this challenging time. Opening up to trusted friends and family members can bring comfort and relief. You may find that the greatest source of support comes from someone who has already been through a divorce.

Attending a support group in your community can be helpful or you may wish to work with a professional. These types of resources are available to help you leave the divorce in the past and move on to a brighter future.

Doing what's best for you

While it may sometimes be hard to do, especially if you're also helping children through the loss of the relationship, pay attention to what you need and take care of yourself. Spend time with people who support, value and energize you.

Minimize additional sources of stress and, if possible, reduce your workload. Don't be afraid to say no to others' requests.

Remember the old adage; take things one day at a time. Until your life becomes more settled, avoid making major life decisions if you can. Give yourself some time to recover emotionally before deciding on something like a career change, moving to another city or getting involved with someone new.

Stay healthy

When you are going through the stress of a divorce, healthy habits can fall by the wayside. You might find yourself indulging in your favourite junk food, skipping meals, or even looking to alcohol or drugs for a means of "escape." It might seem hard to find time to exercise and your sleeping patterns might be disrupted. This could lead to illness or a loss of energy at a time when you need to be "on top of things".

Try to eat balanced meals, get plenty of rest, and find an exercise routine that you can enjoy. Participating in sports and workout programs can release anger and frustration and get you into shape in the process. If you do feel your health habits are on a downward spiral and are out of your control, be sure to connect with a professional for support and resources.

Keeping your cool

If ever there were a reason to stay civil with your ex after divorce, this is it. Even if you're fuming on the inside, you need to find a way to stay calm, put it aside, and be reasonable—especially in front of the kids. Badmouthing and berating of your former partner are strictly off limits. After all, though you may have gotten a divorce from your mate, that person is still a parent to your children.

Like you, your children are coming to terms with their new family structure. Talking openly with them and devoting time to helping them through the transition is important. Maintaining a familiar routine provides a comforting sense of stability. Ensure that they understand that they did not contribute to the divorce, and that they are loved and have the support of both parents.

If your kids are having a difficult time emotionally, get them the professional support they need either individually or as a family.

Living with divorce's financial fallout

Taking control of your finances is an important part of moving on. Expensive legal fees combined with the loss of a second income can leave you cash-strapped. Take charge of your finances quickly to prevent problems from arising in the months and years ahead. Make a new financial plan to establish a sense of security for you and your family. With careful planning, you can adjust to your new situation and enjoy a stress-free independence.

Gather your utility, mortgage, rent or insurance statements, along with all other regular expenses. Use this information to create a new financial plan that allows you to cover these costs and save a little each month.

Do you really need that new outfit? After a break-up you may need to adjust to a new standard of living. Take a look at your spending habits and determine where you can cut costs. Be conscious of unnecessary expenses, especially small, spontaneous purchases. Think about how you can lower your monthly expenses. Try to pay off any loans you may already have and avoid racking up new debt. Paying your bills on time will help you avoid interest charges and keep your credit rating strong.

To help cover unexpected costs that may arise in the future, it can be a good idea to create an emergency fund.

Open a new savings account and determine how much you can afford to contribute to it each month. Even if it’s a small amount, it will accumulate over time and help protect you in the event of a job loss or sudden illness.

Put your new budget in writing and stick to it. If you need help organizing your finances or creating a budget, consider sitting down with an accountant or personal financial planner to help you get started.

Moving forward, moving on

Bit by bit, your grief will lift and you will be able to start moving forward. However, if you are having trouble moving past the sadness, or you find it is interfering with your work or daily life, you may be suffering from depression. Don’t hesitate to contact your family doctor or a professional to get the help you need.

Divorce means the end of your marriage, but it can mean the beginning of a positive new chapter in your life. With your personal finances secure and your emotional health strong, you are ready to embark on a new journey. Take this opportunity to think about what you really want. Explore new interests, cultivate new friendships and create new dreams. Eventually you may wish to find another partner, or decide to live a happy single life. Whatever you choose, you will move beyond divorce and towards a full and rewarding life.