



Divorce: Surviving and Thriving

With nearly half of marriages in America ending in divorce, it's a reality many of us will face at some point in our lives. Divorce can be an emotionally difficult experience. It may take months or years to get over the related losses. During this grieving process, it can be helpful to focus on practical matters and begin creating your new life.

There are 3 areas to think about when starting your new journey:

- Getting organized
- Coping with loss
- Creating a new identity

Get organized

Getting divorced doesn't mean your family has gone away (especially if you have children). However, your day-to-day life will be different. Each family member will most likely need to change the way they've organized their lives in order to cope with the changes. This restructuring can be very stressful. Here are some areas to consider:

Paperwork

Get your critical papers in order. Copy them and keep them in a secure place. Important papers include:

- tax returns
- insurance policies
- bank statements
- investment accounts
- property records
- marriage certificates
- legal records

What can I do today to better organize my important paperwork?

Household Chores

You may find that you have less help with cooking, cleaning, shopping and errands. This may feel overwhelming. During the first few months following a separation or divorce, it may be helpful to take things slow and to lower your expectations of yourself.

Which chores can I let go of right now?

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What are some creative ways to delegate or share in the responsibilities (i.e., fixing and freezing meals ahead of time, encouraging older children to take on more responsibilities etc.)?

Parenting Roles

All parties involved in a divorce experience stress. The challenges may be different depending upon if you live full-time with your children (custodial) or are the non-resident parent (non-custodial). Both parents can share in the following responsibilities:

- Create a plan on how you will parent together
- Do not talk badly about your former partner in your child's presence.
- Remain calm, no matter what your former partner says or does
- Keep the best interests of the child in mind

Custodial parents

If you are the parent who lives at home with the children, you may find that you have less time for yourself. Added responsibilities and pressures leave little time for your needs. Be sure to find the time to take care of yourself.

Little things I can do for myself each day:

Non-custodial parents

If you are a parent who does not live at home with the children, you may feel frustrated by the lack of parenting time you have. You may find it difficult to maintain a strong relationship with your children when you see them on a part-time basis. Try to build routines and maintain a consistent schedule with them. Celebrate the time you do have together.

Things I can do to bond with my kids when we're together:

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Cope with loss

There are many losses that accompany a divorce. Different people grieve in their own way, at their own pace.

Relationships

Marriage - The marriage relationship is an important relationship in your life and you find yourself grieving this loss.

Friendships - Friendships often change as a result of divorce. Friends sometimes don't want to appear to be choosing sides by spending time with one former partner over the other. Couples may tend to spend time with other couples and don't have as much in common with you now that you're single. Tending to your friendships that remain and finding new ones by joining clubs, participating in hobbies or attending support groups may be helpful.

Family – Extended family may not know how to support you. They've experienced a loss too. Be patient and ask for the support you need.

Possessions

Most people make adjustments to their lifestyle after a divorce. You may find yourself in a completely different financial situation than when you were married. You may be on a tight budget and making many more financial sacrifices. It is possible that you've lost your home and other possessions. Allow yourself to mourn the loss of your previous life, but also try to keep perspective about what's truly important in your life.

Emotions

Emotions are one of the most difficult things to manage in the divorce process. Feelings of anger, sadness and loneliness are normal. Talk with loved ones and seek professional help if you find yourself unable to cope with your feelings.

Create a new identity (as a single person)

One day you're married, the next day you're not. You may suddenly be a single parent. You look around and nothing in your life looks the same. Going through a divorce can affect your identity as a person.

One way to cope with the stress is to take charge of your new life. Here are some ways to move forward:

- Establish new goals/dreams

I'd like to accomplish:

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Date I'll have it done: _____

- Learn a new hobby

I've always wanted to:

- Keep a journal
- (Re)Connect with friends/make new friends
- Attend events you enjoy that your former spouse didn't appreciate

I've always wanted to go to/see:

Coping with the stress and emotions of divorce is not easy. Healing takes time. Allow yourself to grieve naturally while taking the steps necessary to move forward.

References:

1. Equality in Marriage. (2004). *What to do first*. Retrieved June 11, 2008 from: <http://www.equalityinmarriage.org/wdhow.html>
2. Iowa State University Extension. (1996). *Divorce Matters: Coping with Stress and Change*. Retrieved June 11, 2008 from: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1637.pdf>

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