

5 steps to post-divorce happiness

Your marriage may be over, but that doesn't mean your life is. Expert tips on how to survive and thrive after divorce

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Make no mistake; divorce is upper case Emotional. When I decided to leave my marriage, I could not imagine how I would ever say the “d” word to my children or spell out how their lives would change. While I accepted whole-heartedly that my priority was to put my children’s best interests first, I was also painfully aware of how my world was uncoupling and changing. Even though 50% of marriages end in divorce, I felt small comfort from a statistic.

At first, I felt very overwhelmed most days. I vividly recall many dreams of moving through scary-divorce-land bogged down by a big bad trunk of fear, anxiety, guilt and anger. I knew I had to unload the trunk to get anywhere but I did not want to ‘deal.’

I noticed there are two kinds of divorced people -- those who carry around trunkloads of emotional baggage and those who keep their emotions neatly tucked away in little bags, accessible, but less visible in public.

I wanted to be the kind of divorced person who had the clarity and the coping skills to downgrade my divorce from a crisis to a process and to come through the other side with hope and a good life.

Manage divorce process rather than react to crisis

I learned that surrounding yourself with helpful professionals, getting a grip on your finances and finding ways to heal your fragile emotional state is critical in the long term. Divorce is a process, not a crisis and it is important to move out of crisis mode. I also found that lawyers were not the only professionals helpful to working through divorce process effectively.

Here are the top 5 things you need to do so that you can achieve a positive outlook and keep the emotional baggage from undermining you after divorce.

- 1. Acknowledge that you are grieving and deal with the emotions.**
- 2. Put your children's best interests first.**
- 3. Learn about your finances - develop a monthly budget, understand your assets and liabilities.**
- 4. Think about how you would like your life to look like after divorce and start doing some of those things now, to help you get there.**
- 5. Prepare for the friend dynamics. It's not about you, but how friends react to divorce itself.**

Here's how I addressed each area:

It is better to manage your emotions than be managed by emotional baggage, which is why I sought the help of a therapist. Although I knew I had much work ahead, meeting with a therapist made me aware that I had choices. Gradually the emotional weight which bogged me down lifted and enabled me to gain control.

Putting my children's best interest first was a priority. I consulted with a parenting expert who guided me through this confusing time and advised me how to tell my children about my divorce. A child psychiatrist was helpful in understanding behavior -- what was a result of divorce and what was a consequence of where they were in their own development. Both professionals strongly advised that I let my children know how much I loved them, that the divorce was not their fault and give them a sense of security.

Taking control and managing my finances was empowering. It felt great to make all of the financial decisions and know what was happening with the little budget I had.

I knew that I couldn't go through life feeling like a victim or a divorcee who needed to be rescued. I wanted a rich and fulfilling life, and to be a

good role model for my children. I went out of my comfort zone, enjoyed new pursuits and began to achieve my goals.

Not only did I learn a lot about myself, but about my friends too. There are no rituals around divorce and people can say the most hurtful things. While feeling emotionally vulnerable and alone, I confided in a friend about my divorce. I expected comfort and understanding. Instead I got a very different reaction. She said “I understand why you want to leave, but you won’t be part of a couple any longer.” Aha, she would not be inviting me anywhere, let alone be my friend any more. The phantom lines were drawn. People were taking sides. But I also realized that some people feel uncomfortable with divorce- it was their problem, not mine.

It’s been over twelve years since I made that life altering decision to divorce. I’ve created a very good life for myself and one quite frankly I would never have predicted. How did I finally leave the emotional baggage behind but recognize that smaller emotional issues can and will come up that I am capable of dealing with for my children and myself? By going through a process of hard work and determination. It was certainly worth it because I live life happy and content, and suffer no regrets.

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