

Divorce's collateral damage

Sometimes you don't just lose your ex, you lose your extended family and friends as well. Here are 5 ways to make it through

By: Deborah Moskovitch



"I need to stand by my brother; we can't be friends any more."

This is a moment Ashley had with her friend—and soon to be ex-sister-in-law. A bond nourished for over 23 years was broken. There were tears and hugs, but the closure was hard to accept. Why does divorce lead to this kind of moment over and over?

When some people are faced with a friend or family member who is going through divorce, it just seems easier not to have to take sides. For others, the relationship is severed because it was never really all that important. And there are people that try to maintain a relationship with both, and continue the link with grace.

Of course it's not all just tears and hugs: Charlotte, who has been divorced for 5 years, told me she was relieved not to have to fake being nice to certain relatives and friends any more. But for others like Ashley, there can be a deep sadness at the loss of these relationships. Some individuals also experience an identity loss, as they are no longer welcome in certain social circles, invited to parties or know where to sit at their child's soccer game.

How to get through

Jan Schloss, a social worker, certified parenting coach and family mediator, often discusses with her clients the issues related to the loss of these relationships.

There are different ways to look at it, says Schloss. These are loyalty issues, where many privately consider, "Who am I going to side with, and how can I be friends with both?"

One of the suggestions she makes to clients when confronting the loss is to "redefine who you are and how you would like to be in this new phase of your life." And for those that think there may be a possibility of maintaining a relationship, Schloss says, "Remember, you are not divorcing your in-laws or extended family that you loved and felt clearly connected."

There might be potential to continue that connection, but prepare yourself emotionally if you can't.

Here are the top 5 things to consider when coming to terms with the loss of these relationships.

You don't have to grin and bear it alone Seek the help of a professional to help you cope with grieving the loss of these relationships.

Find strength from other relationships Divorce is a process; accept that there will be losses. Maintaining a positive outlook will help you stay strong and develop other fulfilling relationships.

Redefine who you are Ask yourself, "Who am I?" and "What do I want out of life?" Shed the notion that you need to define yourself by who you were when married.

Eliminate negativity Consistently talking about the loss of these relationships will drive people away; it means you have not moved on. Speaking negatively to your children about their extended family will make them feel that they are betraying you if they have a relationship with their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, and you don't want your children to feel like they have to keep secrets from you.

Put your children's best interest first If your children have had a positive and loving relationship with extended family and friends, it is important to keep up the connections because good relationships impact on how the children feel about themselves.

For some, divorce can feel like the beginning of a Cold War, with tension between two factions: your side and his. Divorce not only represents the uncoupling of a partnership, but can also result in the loss of other relationships, which were important to you while married. As the saying goes, time heals. Gradually, you will come to accept these losses and no longer feel the void.

Do you have coping tips for getting through divorce? Share in our forums!

Deborah Moskovitch is a divorce consultant and educator, and author of The Smart Divorce: Proven Strategies and Valuable Advice from 100 Top Divorce Lawyers, Financial Advisers, Counselors and Other Experts. Deborah has become an opinion leader in the media and has shared her insights and research on television and radio to explain that divorce can be managed in smarter ways. To learn more visit thesmartdivorce.com

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