



ALL THINGS  
SEPARATION &  
DIVORCE

Getting  
through it

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# How to Care for Yourself During & After a Divorce

Getting Separated or Divorced? You may feel as if you have taken up residence on the local rollercoaster, true story. You haven't. Divorce is a significant grief process (second only to the loss of a loved one, incidentally) and you are going to feel a range of emotions, daily.

It is our goal to **help you move forward to a positive and fulfilling life**. That may seem an unlikely outcome for some at the moment. But it will come. And we will guide you through it and to it.

We want you to Get the Happy Back (if you've lost it). We want you to be kind to yourself and to others, to read, read & read some more. About self-care, about grief, about starting over and happy things. We want you to teach yourself how to grieve (if you need to). And to remember this:

**It will get better. It has to.**





Here are some thoughts about self-care during separation and divorce from John Howard  
Couples Therapist, Educator & Founder, ReadySetLove.com

### **1. Break-up gracefully**

Okay, graceful is easier said than done, but it's still one of the most important ways to minimize stress in a divorce and feel better long-term. After all, why are you divorcing if not to feel better afterward? You may need help breaking up in a way that feels fair and mutual. Ideally, both partners should understand why it is in their best interest to end the relationship. Sometimes one partner wants to divorce more than the other. It is important for the partners who are more reluctant to realize that staying with someone who is unhappy with them will cause them suffering as well. Divorce can be a bitter pill to swallow, but by getting everything out in the open, partners can often mutually recognize and agree on the best decision for them. This common ground in the decision helps prevent resentment and feelings of being a victim going forward.

## 2. Take joint responsibility

Again, a difficult thing to do. But to the extent that one or both partners can admit co-responsibility, the divorce process and the years after typically go more smoothly. There are situations where one partner is more at fault than another, but most of the time, partners contribute more or less equally to issues in a relationship. It may be challenging to recognize our part, but if we try, we can feel more in control, more empowered, and heal faster from an ended relationship.

## 3. Talk, talk, talk (but don't gossip!)

It is well known that talking about our feelings can help our brains process those feelings, which allows us to move on more quickly and gracefully. Share even the crazy, negative feelings you have; the wild, irrational feelings. Talking about those innermost thoughts we have when we are in distress can lighten some of the pain and hurt we feel. Just choose who you share with wisely. There is a difference between sharing feelings in a productive manner and gossiping in a spiteful manner, which can make things worse. You don't want to be known as the ex that always bad-mouths his/her partner, and you probably have friends in common with your ex. Bickering adults are not very attractive to others. Children, in particular, should be spared hearing negative comments about another parent. Share your most powerful, negative feelings and impulses with close friends, extended family members and trusted therapists to get relief from the inner crazies divorce can bring up.





#### **4. Focus on the basics**

Going through a divorce can feel extremely chaotic. Change takes over both our inner and outer lives. During times this stressful it can be helpful to simplify our focus on the basics. Prioritize your sleep and healthful, regular eating. These two things will help your emotional system cope with the stress and help your mind integrate the changes.

#### **5. Ask friends for support**

Because we live in a self-reliant culture that values independence and strength, we often don't ask for the support we need. Your friends can be invaluable to you when times get rough. Contrary to popular belief that 'friends don't want to deal with our suffering,' bringing your close friends in and giving them specific tasks can make them feel important and deepen your friendship in meaningful ways. Ask your best friend to take you to lunch once a week. If you or your partner has moved out, ask a friend to stay overnight with you on occasion, or to have you to their place for dinner. Fill your friends in on your plan to stay sane and healthy and ask them to hold you accountable to it!





## 6. Exercise!

Another staple of self-care, exercise can help lower stress and anxiety by stimulating the production of positive hormones and neurochemicals. Exercise is known to ward off depression and helps us channel our emotions through physical activity. Daily exercise of 20-30 minutes, or three times a week for 50 minutes, seems to be enough to derive the benefits. Be careful of over-exercising as a way to channel stress as that can place additional burdens on your system at a time when it needs resources to handle your feelings. Adding extra B vitamins to your diet has also been shown to have positive effects on your **mental** well-being.

## 7. Practice self-compassion

We have a tendency to blame ourselves when relationships don't work out. A divorce calls for a healthy dose of self-compassion. To stimulate your sense of self-love, try reading Dr. Kristin Neff's *Self-Compassion, the Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*, which recounts her journey back to self-appreciation. Dr. Chris Germer, another expert in the field, has great meditations that are soothing, help restore self-confidence, and can be streamed free from his website [www.mindfulselfcompassion.org](http://www.mindfulselfcompassion.org).

## 8. Join a group

The power of social interaction during and after a divorce is well established. Isolating can amplify negative feelings and make recovery more difficult. Consider joining a church group, men's/women's group, or topic-focused group in your area. If you are new to an area and lack friends, find in-person social gatherings centered around a hobby you enjoy (hiking, kayaking, reading, etc). Joining a therapy group where you bond with others who also help you stay on track with your self-care goals can feel very supportive.

## 9. Move on

An ended relationship is not necessarily a reason to go it alone for a while. We are social creatures, and tend to do better when we have others with whom to share our lives. Beware of the rebound (one sign is seeking a partner with the exact opposite qualities of your ex!), but keep yourself open to new relationships that match your goals for a better life. There's nothing like the feeling of love to help ease the pain of a lost connection. The old idea that we should 'focus on ourselves' for a year or more is no longer helpful according to modern neuroscience, which understands the importance of relationships to the healing process. Our minds and emotions heal more efficiently through meaningful connection with others.



## 10. Remember the big picture

It is difficult to keep in mind during a separation or divorce that such an event can lead to a more enjoyable life. We are often so consumed by pain, fear and stress that we can't see past our momentary experience. Try to keep the big picture in mind. After some time you will be free from both a hard relationship and the pain of ending it, and have the freedom to express yourself however you wish and with whom you wish that better meets your goals for a happy, fulfilling life.



*Self-care is one of the most important activities to engage in during and after a divorce. Part of self-care is enlisting the help of friends and others to support you in specific ways through such a sensitive time. Follow these tips to keep yourself sane and healthy and emerge stronger and ready to move forward into the next chapter of your life.*

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end in HAPPINESS**

