

Divorce Recovery Strategies

As a licensed mental health professional, I work with many individuals, couples, and families who are affected by divorce. I have developed this list of survival strategies for people who are experiencing divorce. If you or someone you love is in this situation, I hope these ideas will help you.

1. Take your time as you adjust to your changed life circumstances. Recognize that you are going through a major life transition that cannot be rushed.
2. Set up temporary arrangements to help you get through the changes involved in your divorce process.
3. You will often feel frustrated. Avoid the temptation of acting for the sake of acting just because it gives you a temporary feeling of being in control.
4. When you feel uncomfortable, slow down and identify what you are feeling and why.
5. Don't force any more changes on yourself than are necessary.
6. Explore both the benefits and costs of your new life.
7. Think about the future. In your journal, explore the question, "What is waiting to happen in my life now?"
8. Remember to ask yourself, "What am I supposed to learn from this?"
9. Protect yourself against the inevitable forgetfulness and absent-mindedness which many divorcing people report. Make a list of important account numbers, telephone numbers, and the like, and keep them in a safe place.
10. Watch out for too many changes in your life as you recover from the divorce and the changes in your life circumstances. Change causes stress, and you have enough right now.
11. Let people help you.
 - If it's impossible to reciprocate, say so.
 - People know that your life isn't like it used to be.
 - Don't let your inability to reciprocate prevent you from accepting what people willingly offer.
12. Let go of your need for perfection. You will not survive emotionally unless you lower your expectations.
13. Develop your ability to be flexible and find creative ways to solve problems.
14. Learn to set priorities. Do the most important things first.
15. Trust your gut feelings. Pay attention to your instincts and act on them.
16. Simplify everything in your life. You cannot afford to keep it complicated.
17. Find an outlet for your anger. If a friend is not available, look for a minister, rabbi, or professional counselor. If money is an issue, look for a therapist who will see you for a low fee.
18. Teach yourself to let go of guilt. You don't have time for it and it's not necessary.
19. Focus on issues you have control over. If something is beyond your control, don't waste your emotions on it.
20. Create a ceremony to acknowledge your divorce.
21. Learn to be assertive. You can't say yes to every request, whether it is from your family members or people in the community who want your time and resources. If you give it all away, you will have nothing left for yourself.
22. Find ways to take care of your body. Get regular checkups and make time to exercise. You need rest now more than ever. Watch your alcohol intake.

23. Find someone who will listen to you. Sometimes you have to ask, for example, “I need a sounding board right now. Can I have 15 minutes of your time?”
24. Rent a sad movie and let yourself cry (when the kids aren’t around). Crying allows you to release the sadness that you are sure to feel.
25. Do at least one fun thing for yourself every week.
26. In your private journal, make a list of all the things you’re afraid of.
27. In your private journal, make a list of all the things you worry about.

If you have children:

28. Manage your own emotions so you will be able to help your child manage his or her struggle.
 - Learn as much as you can about how children respond to divorce and life in a single-parent home.
 - Do not expect your child to respond the same way you do.
 - Take your child’s developmental stage into consideration when responding to his or her behavior.
29. Make it okay for your children to talk to you about their feelings.
30. Keep appropriate boundaries.
 - Don’t give in to the temptation to let your child take care of you.
 - Let your children be children.
 - Avoid burdening them with your feelings and the facts of the divorce.
 - Find another adult to be your sounding board.
31. Even though you may be unable to be present as much as in the past, your children still need adult supervision. Look for ways for other adults to look in on your kids when they are home alone, even when they are teenagers.
32. Just because your child appears to be handling his or her emotions well, don’t assume that he or she is okay. Some kids respond to divorce by becoming overly responsible or by closing down their emotions. They may need to hear, “Tell me how you’re feeling.”
33. While it is important to listen and accept your children’s feelings, it is equally important to set limits on behavior.
34. Keep a private journal where you express your feelings. Be sure to keep it in a private place where your children won’t find it. A journal provides a place to express anger, sadness, loneliness, and fear—all of those feelings you feel every day as a single parent.
35. Remind yourself that recovering from divorce will take time. Your recovery will happen on its own schedule, and it will happen. You will get through this intact.
36. Get together with other single-parent families. Sharing times with people facing similar issues can make you feel normal.

Suggested Reading

William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. New York, Addison-Wesley, 1980.

Marjorie Engel and Diana Gould, *The Divorce Decisions Workbook*. New York, McGraw Hill, 1992, page 109.

Abigail Trafford, *Crazy Time: Surviving Divorce and Building A New Life*. New York, HarperCollins, 1992.

Judith Wallerstein and Joan Berlin Kelly, *Surviving The Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope With Divorce*. New York, Basic Books, 1980.
