

Divorce: Facing life on your own again



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By Judy Churchill

Whether you chose to leave, or have been left, never underestimate the impact of separation from a partner and the tidal wave of emotions that you will be going through. It is not going to be easy, in fact quite the contrary; that's the bad news. The good news is that there are ways of dealing with the situation that will ensure you make it through in one piece. The tunnel may seem long and dark at this stage, but I promise you, there is light at the end of it.

The first step is to recognize that both the situation and you yourself are not going to feel "normal" for a while. Normal is what the brain likes to feel. It is most at home with what feels and looks familiar and it will try to nudge you back into anything that resembles what you had before.

You need to recognise that you have taken yourself out of your comfort zone and like any situation where you need to learn new skills, you will be pushing yourself to the limits. There is therefore likely to be a plethora of both physiological and psychological challenges that you will need to cope with.

You will be going through similar emotions to someone who is mourning the death of a loved one. Your mind and body will be in "grief" mode. Your emotions can swing from deep depression one day, to a fighting, defiant combativeness the next.

Rule number one: Do NOT attempt to cope with this on your own. One of the key emotions associated with divorce is shame and this hinders many people from sharing their emotions with others. There is

really no shame. Divorce can happen to any one and probably will happen to most of us. I have been through it and chances are that if you are reading this article you are going through it too or know someone who is.

The very first action you should take is to find your “rock” and anchor yourself to it. The “rock” is a person in the form of a friend, family member, personal life coach, or counselor (not your lawyer) whom you will ask to help guide you through this emotional mine field until you feel ready to cope alone.

Your lawyer is the wrong person to fulfill this role as he or she must remain emotionally detached from the situation in order to defend your best interests dispassionately. Your lawyer will also likely be charging a substantial hourly fee and to use him or her as a shoulder to cry on could amount to a small fortune!

Your rock will help you make sense of your emotions, restructure your days and set you some attainable goals, while always being at hand to catch you if you “fall”.

The person you choose as your “rock” should be someone who necessarily understands the mechanisms associated with divorce, is available when you need help, and can understand your emotions, but is in no way romantically attached or involved with you. You *must* be able to trust this person 100 per cent with your fragile ego and know that he or she will act only in your best interests.

If you choose to use a friend or

family member, you must of course first seek his or her permission to do this and make sure the person is ready to accept this responsibility.

Being human, we often have difficulty dealing with change and transition and even when we recognise the challenge, we grossly underestimate it. Divorce means CHANGE. Successfully negotiating that change means first crossing the swamp (full of emotional and administrative crocodiles) between the END (of the marriage) and the CHANGE (what happens in between, in the middle of the swamp) and the NEW LIFE (the resurfacing on the other side to a new normality). That swamp is called TRANSITION.

William Bridges, in his book *Transitions* (an absolute must for anyone going through divorce or any major life change) explains how change, whether it is self-imposed or thrust upon you, brings both opportunities and turmoil. Obviously the important issue is to cope with the former and seize the latter. This book can help you cope with these issues and provides a truly insightful roadmap of the transition process.

Bridges takes his reader through the three stages of any transition: The Ending, The Neutral Zone, and in time, the New Beginning. He explains how each stage can be understood and embraced, leading to a meaningful and productive migration into a, hopefully, better future.

One of the most important messages to retain within a marriage is that change can come at any time

and as a couple you weather the storms together on many an occasion. However, transition comes along when one chapter of life is *over* and another is waiting in the wings to make its entrance. Needless to say, where divorce is concerned, it is impossible to imagine a new chapter when your partner’s exit from your life has just closed down what feels like your whole life. You simply cannot at this stage imagine a new chapter. It is so important to experience each stage of transition:

The Ending: There must be a realization that the marriage has really ended, not just the feeling of shell shock. **The Neutral Zone:** This awful twilight area where everything about you wants to return to the “familiarity” of before and yet something drives you to move forward. This is the zone that offers you the most opportunities for closure as well as a launch pad for personal growth. This is the stage during which you will need to cling to your “rock”. **The New Start:** Life begins again and you feel truly ready to rise from the ashes and start afresh.

All is not gloom and doom in divorce, but like any major journey, it needs to be well planned for. You need your road map, your compass and your GPS in the form of someone who can objectively and rationally help through this maze. Be kind to yourself, allow yourself time to “grieve”. This is not a time for denial. And, finally, enjoy the rebirth of the new you with all the pleasures and the newly-found impetus it will bring. ●

DIVORCE: ESTABLISHING YOUR NEW IDENTITY

Accept that you are no longer someone’s wife or partner and all the evidence of this (possible reverting to maiden name; being alone in the double bed; ostracism by the social network that knew you as a couple; disappearance of invitations of the “Mr and Mrs” type). Accept having to play the man/father as well as the woman/mother in many contexts. Your “rock” can help you organize practicalities, guiding you with administrative procedures such as changing bank account details, utility bills, ID card, passport, informing social security etc.

The good news is that this can also be the time when you reinvent yourself as the person you have always wanted to be, letting the real you resurface. You can try challenges you would never have embarked upon as a couple, embracing your new-found freedom. Turn a negative into a positive and allow yourself a certain number of treats you would never have indulged in while married, including a possible change of look, such as a new hair cut, different style of clothes, taking up a new sport or fitness regime. Life is for living and you deserve to live it to the full!