

Life after Divorce

■ by Kathy Konrath, MA, LCPC, LMHC



Divorce can be a traumatic event.

trauma = a deeply distressing or disturbing experience

When someone experiences trauma, there is a recovery process required for healing. The dissolution of a marriage disturbs the physical, mental/emotional and spiritual life of a person. There is no specific formula to follow or prescription to take that will heal this type of trauma. You can, however, implement coping strategies to help you heal from divorce and live the life that follows.

1. **Grieve the loss.** When someone you love (or once cared about) dies, you go through a grieving process that involves a range of experiences, including denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The sense of loss may return when unsuspected triggers bring back the pain. Unlike the loss you experience when someone dies, with divorce, the person is “resurrected” every time you run into them or hear about the life they now lead without you. As a result, you may re-experience all or part of the original grief. Prepare for this, and know it is normal.
2. **Be sure to H.A.L.T.** Don’t get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. Each of these components is like a wheel on a car. When one wheel is deflated, the car can run, but it is a bumpy ride. Keep driving on a flat tire and you will be in for some damage. When all four wheels are flat, you are geared up for a major breakdown. HALT from time to time and ask yourself how you are doing in these areas. If one area is “flat,” head to the repair shop and get it restored.
3. **Be mindful of your thoughts and emotions.** Notice your emotions. Feelings are not good or bad, they just are. How you respond to the emotion is more or less effective in helping you live a meaningful life. Notice your thoughts. Are you caught up in the past or imagining the future? Catch yourself in these thoughts and return to the present moment. It is ok to feel, to remember, and to dream, but don’t get lost there. We can only experience God in the present moment. Remember to come back to the present and focus on doing the next right thing.
4. **Be kind to yourself.** This is a good time to ask yourself what you really need. Is it a hug? A vacation? A hot meal? A laugh with a friend? Move towards self-care.
5. **As you move toward self-care, let go of “should.”** When someone “shoulds” you (i.e., “You should be over this already!”), you rarely feel motivated to move forward. “Should” reminds you that you did not meet a certain standard, which produces a sense of failure. Instead, accept where you are as exactly where you need to be in this moment. Find what you could do, and do it to the best of your ability. The Serenity Prayer says, “God (One who is outside of my SELF), grant me serenity (peace), to accept (surrender...take a deep breath), the things I cannot change (other people, what has happened in the past), the courage (action in the face of fear) to change the things I can (myself, my actions, my thoughts), and the wisdom (God) to know the difference.”
6. **Find your resolve.** David cried out to God in the book of Psalms. David felt every emotion, let it all out, and held nothing back. And at the end of his cry, David found his resolve (“...I will yet praise Him.” Psalm 43:5). You can also find your resolve. It will not look like David’s, your friends’ or anyone else’s. It will be your own personal resolve. Some things I know to be true as you work towards your resolve are these:
 - a. God has a plan for your life and it is a good plan (Jeremiah 29:11).
 - b. God promises to work ALL THINGS together for the GOOD of those who love God and are called according to HIS purpose (not our own – Romans 8:28).
 - c. God started a good work (Isaiah 43:19).
 - d. And He will finish what He started (Philippians 1:6).



Kathy Konrath is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (IL) and Licensed Mental Health Counselor (IN). She sees clients in our Evergreen Park, IL and Schererville, IN locations.

Article taken from the Jan | Feb 2016 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center
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800.361.6880 | info@chicagochristiancounseling.org

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