

UNDERSTANDING DIVORCE

“Steps To Consider, Recovery, Survival And Forgiveness.”

THE **HOPE** LINE

TheHopeLine.com



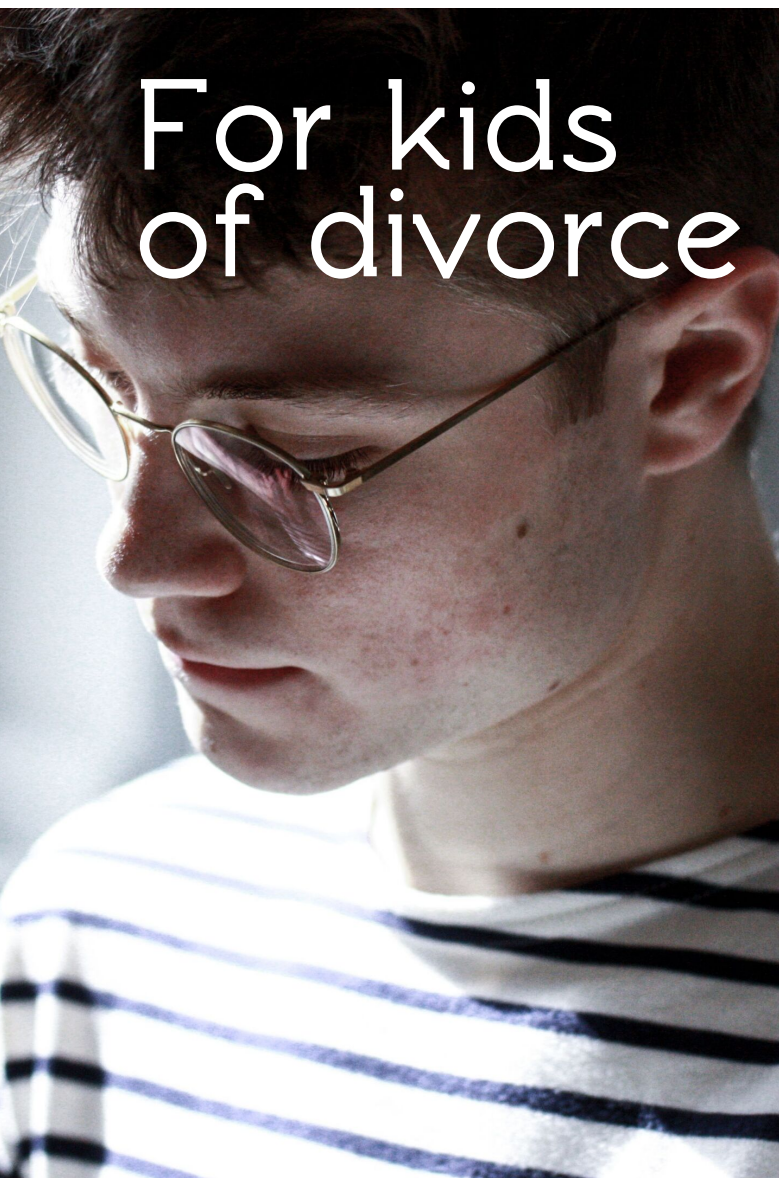
Divorce

It is generally accepted that approximately 50% of marriages within the United States end in divorce. So this is an issue facing MANY people. The purpose of this eBook is to give guidance to those who are considering divorce, but haven't yet made their decision, as well as for those who are coping with life after a divorce, either as a husband or wife, or as a child.

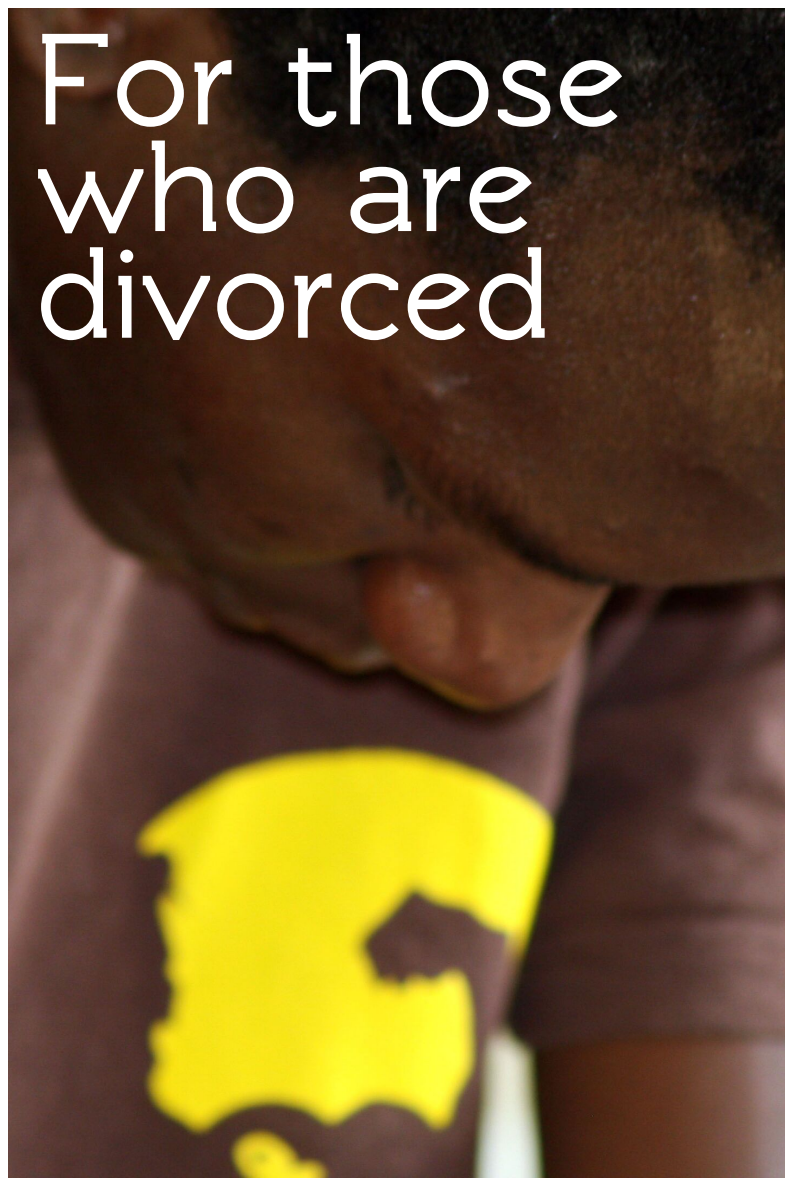




For those
considering
divorce



For kids
of divorce



For those
who are
divorced

FOR THOSE CONSIDERING DIVORCE

Disclaimer: If you are in an abusive relationship, please seek help by contacting your local domestic abuse hotline or TheHopeLine. This section of our Guide is not intended for those suffering abuse.

Is Divorce the Answer?

Every situation is different, but let's start with the fact that it is a false assumption that everyone who is unhappily married, will find happiness in divorce.

A report by a team of leading family scholars examined this assumption and found that unhappily married adults who had divorced were no happier than those who had stayed married. Divorce often creates additional problems and pain that had formerly not existed, such as child custody, financial strain, and heart break. Many of these new problems lead individuals into poverty, depression, poor health and greater likelihood of suicide.

The bottom line is people should give their marriage their absolute best effort before they call it quits. If they don't, they could end up with deep regrets and more unhappiness down the road. Remember, the grass is not always greener on the other side.

To avoid divorce, many assume, marriages must become happier. But it is at least equally true that in order to get happier, unhappy couples must first avoid divorce.



Things to consider before taking the final step of divorce:

1. Have you tried talking to a marriage counselor?

It's important to seek outside advice and gain perspective before jumping into divorce proceedings. If your partner won't agree to counseling consider how you approach them.

- a. Find the right time. Do not have this conversation when they are distracted, stressed or tired.
- b. Do NOT be confrontational – show respect, don't condescend, control your anger, don't accuse.
- c. Use language that suggests you are a team..."We need help," not "You need help."
- d. If conversations always end up in a fight, consider writing a letter.

2. Have you taken an honest look at your heart and actions and owned your side of the relationship?

Let your defenses down for a moment and take time to consider what you can do on your own to adjust your attitude toward your spouse. Loving someone is a choice you have to keep making. It's not just a feeling. The Love Dare challenge might give you a place to start:

The Love Dare: 40 Days Love Journey

3. Have you tried to understand your spouse better?

Learn how your spouse communicates love to you and how they feel loved in return. A good book on this subject is **The 5 Love Languages**. The author of this book and marriage counselor, Gary Chapman, says, "I am convinced that there are five basic love languages – five ways to express love emotionally. Each person has a primary love language that we must learn to speak if we want that person to feel loved." They are:

- a. Words of Affirmation
- b. Acts of Service
- c. Receiving Gifts
- d. Quality Time
- e. Physical Touch

For more information on The 5 Love Languages visit: [Understanding the Five Love Languages by: Gary Chapman](#).

4. Are you looking for a quick fix?

Couples who lose patience and want things to become instantly better in their marriage often become frustrated and abandon the marriage too early, not allowing adequate time for healing and understanding to occur.

5. Are you prepared for the financial burden?

Expenses will begin to mushroom as soon as the divorce process starts. Legal fees, court costs, new living expenses, and a myriad of other costs will drain your financial resources. Money previously used to support one household must now stretch to support two.



FOR THOSE WHO ARE DIVORCED

Even if you're escaping a terrible situation, the effects of divorce can be hard to cope with. The book, **Starting Over**, by Thomas A.

Whiteman and Randy Peterston identifies six stages of divorce recovery. These stages are normal and important for you to work through.



6 Stages of Divorce Recovery:

Denial – Pretending the divorce never happened or downplaying its significance in your life. Denial is a way to shut down until you are ready to deal with the pain. Counseling is important during this stage.

Anger - Once you are past the initial pain, you still may be left with deep anger. It may be well justified, but that doesn't mean it's healthy. You need to control your anger and find a healthy outlet for it. Exercise can be a great outlet...find something you like to do; such as, running, going to the gym, swimming, walking, kickboxing, Crossfit, etc. Also, finding a hobby you love can be a great outlet.

Bargaining – Desperately trying anything to gain back the spouse (jealousy, a makeover, promises to never do something again, a vacation together, etc.). Unfortunately it's probably too late for quick fixes at this point and you are just setting yourself up for more hurt. Support groups can be very helpful at this stage.

Depression – It is normal to grieve the loss of your marriage and during this stage your emotional tank is empty leaving you feeling very down, exhausted, irritable. Confide in a good friend at this point who encourages you by supporting you, not by telling you to "snap out of it."

Acceptance - The time has come when you realize the past is past and it's time to live in the present and think about the future in a new light. You will reach this stage in your own time and all of a sudden be ready to move on.

Forgiveness – Releasing bitterness toward the ex-spouse and developing a new relationship with civility and effective boundaries. As long as you are holding onto every bad thing that happened to you in your marriage, you are keeping yourself imprisoned by it. Forgiveness frees you to move on. And remember to forgive yourself in the process for any mistakes you



Steps for Survival:

- 1. Seek out a support network** - No single strategy will ease the pain and loss that divorce brings. But time and time again, when asked how best to weather the effects of divorce, respondents say this: lean on a support network. This may include current friends and family, but often a divorce support group who have gone through the same experience as you will be very helpful as well.
- 2. Redefine yourself** - Going through a divorce means no longer being part of a couple. Looking at this time as a period of self-exploration is one way to overcome feelings of isolation and fear. Spend time discovering what you are interested in and try new things.
- 3. Minimize the impact on kids** - You will undoubtedly be dealing with a lot of personal grief and strong emotions toward the ex-spouse, but it's important if kids are involved to not criticize the other parent in front of them or ask them to take sides. Keep things as amicable as possible.

FOR KIDS OF DIVORCE

Whether your parents are separated, are going through, or are already divorced, it's very normal to experience many different feelings and have a lot of questions. It's also very normal for you to feel like you're the only one who has ever had this happened to. Rest assured, you are not alone. Whatever you are feeling, it's normal! It may not be healthy, but it is normal.

Here are some emotions you may be feeling. Perhaps this list will help you put words to what you are feeling:

Shock – especially if you were not expecting the divorce

Anger – either directed at your parents or at no one specifically

Sadness

Guilt – you feel like the divorce is your fault

Anxiety – worrying about the future and who is going to
take care of you

Fear – afraid of losing a parent

Embarrassed – you do not want people to know that things in your family are changing

Depressed

Helpless or Powerless

Rejected

Distrustful

Lonely - no one who understands what you're going through.

Distracted

It's difficult to trust God



Here are some questions you may be asking:

- **Why did this happen?**
- **Is it my fault? What if I had done better in school, or not gotten into trouble, or helped more?**
- **Could I have prevented this from happening?**
- **Will they ever get back together?**
- **Will things ever be normal again?**
- **Did my parents ever really love each other?**

How to cope and move forward:

1. Don't blame yourself

No matter what that little voice inside of you says, the divorce is about your parents and the problems they have with each other. It was not your fault. Your parents are adults and are responsible for the commitments they made toward each other.

2. Don't isolate yourself

We naturally put up walls, which are filled with denial, silence, and distance between us and others. Yet, these techniques fail us every time. Talk to your friends, go out with your friends, and don't hold everything inside. Confiding in a friend, mentor, pastor or counselor, will help you process your feelings and keep you from feeling bitter and depressed.



3. Be honest about the pain

Some experts believe the trauma of divorce is more difficult than even the death of a loved one. With the death of a parent, the loss is complete. But with divorce, the loss seems to have no ending. You may hold onto hope your parents will get back together again. One of the worst things you can do is ignore your true feelings and tell yourself lies to seemingly help take away the pain. Suppressed or unexpressed feelings can lead to anger, depression, and even addiction.

4. Allow yourself to grieve

When your parents divorce, a part of you is ripped away. Something that was so important to you is now gone. Divorce shatters the sense of security you had when there was both a father and a mother who loved each other and who would love and provide for you. There's nothing weak about grieving.

5. Don't take sides

Be fair to both parents. If your parents are persuading you to pick their side, tell them you do not want to and share with them how being caught in the middle makes you feel. You need to be able to talk openly with both parents or spend time with each. Sometimes when a conflict arises you may feel obligated to take a side or keep the peace, but you can't play referee or gossip to one parent about the other. It's not fair to you.

6. Talk to your parents

Share with your parents your concerns about how their divorce and living separately will affect your future. Be open with any struggle you may face in coordinating both parents coming to your events or games. Some parents feel awkward going to events when the other parent is there. If this is the case, work with them to figure out how to best handle these situations.

7. Forgive

Forgiveness is a struggle you may deal with for a long time. It's not easy to forgive. Anger can pop up at a memory or because something is missing from your life. The scars will remain. However, when you learn to forgive your parents, you will be able to start letting go of bitterness and negativity and not allow that to control your emotions.



8. Keep living your life

Sometimes a divorce can make you feel like you have to put your life on hold to deal with your parents' problems – but you need to live your life. Do what you love to do and if you need support, lean on your friends, other family members, and trusted adults. The fact of the matter is that you are an innocent bystander, experiencing a tragedy to those closest to you. You cannot experience this without it having a profound impact on your life.

These are questions you may want to ask yourself if you feel you are in the middle of your parent's divorce.

You are not a marriage counselor, are you?

This is not a dig against you. It is just a fact, that you don't have the expertise to be a counselor for your parent's marriage problems. They need to seek professional help.

You don't really know the full story do you?

You've been there, seen and heard the fighting but you may not know some of the reasons for the dysfunction. You may not realize there are deeper issues going on.

You are biased one way or the other, aren't you?

It's impossible to be unemotionally involved. You have a history with your mom and dad, you have the good and the bad memories. You are going to have an opinion about who is doing what wrong and who is at fault. Your opinions may be 100% valid but a biased person should not be the one counseling two people in the middle of a dysfunctional marriage.

HOW TO FORGIVE?

Forgiveness is not about saying what happened was okay, it's about letting go of the hurt and pain you are carrying inside. It's about releasing those feelings of pain and anger and bitterness and replacing those things with peace. **The only thing that can release us from the grip of the hurt of divorce is forgiveness.**

Learning to forgive will be one of the hardest things you will ever do but if you want to be happy you have to learn to forgive.

1. Write down the name of the parent/partner who has hurt you. Write down how their actions hurt you and why it's not okay. Get it all out. Then say out loud: *I choose to forgive (insert spouse or parent's name). I let go of the anger and bitterness I feel towards them. I choose forgiveness.* You can burn or tear up the paper when you are finished.

2. Realize forgiving is a spiritual, supernatural exercise. In fact, it is impossible to truly forgive others without God's help. God has forgiven tens of billions of people, He also has the power to help you. You might say a simple prayer like this: *God I admit I can't forgive (insert spouse or parent's name) with my own power. Please help me. Help me to understand how much You have forgiven me, so I can forgive the person who has hurt me.*

3. You can't truly forgive unless you have grasped the extent of the hurt and resentment you are feeling. With the help of a counselor, minister, or another professional, you need to seek to understand how the divorce has affected your self-esteem, your security, your trust and your faith.

4. Now it's time to make the big decision to surrender. Let go of your deep desire to get even with the spouse or parent who has hurt you. Come up with a prayer or statement announcing your decision. For example: *By an act of my will, and God's power, I give up my rights to get even with (insert name). I make a commitment that when those feelings come over me again, I will release them.*

5. Make a choice to have compassion on the person who hurt you. One way to show compassion is to pray for the person who has hurt you. Jesus said, "Pray for your enemies." He knows it is impossible to continue to pray for someone, and still hate them.

6. Move on. It's time to stop dwelling on the past or what "could have been". Let go and move forward with your life.



A Spiritual Perspective (Taking comfort and hope from God!)

Wherever you are in the process of divorce, God will help you through it. In the Bible it says, "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:18) Is that how you are feeling right now? If so, pray to God. Ask him to surround you with people who can bring you His comfort in your time of sorrow. You might even consider writing a letter to God, expressing your sadness. God knows your heartache and wants to help you.

A divorce can also cause much anxiety about the future. But God says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) God never promises us that life will be easy, but he does promise that he will never leave us alone.

God also wants to use you to help other people who are struggling with the pain of divorce and its consequences. God doesn't want you to continually see yourself as a victim. Instead, He wants to help you so that by His power you can overcome these difficult experiences and in turn help others. Instead of getting bitter, He will help you get better.



If you want to know more about having a relationship with God or have questions about divorce, chat online with a HopeCoach at TheHopeLine.com.

Check out our other Guides:

Understanding Depression

Understanding Suicide

Understanding Self-Worth

Understanding Lying

Understanding Dating

Understanding Anxiety

and more at:

<http://www.thehopeline.com/guide/>

SOURCES

<http://www.safeteens.org/relationships/dealing-with-divorce/>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/get-help/when-your-parents-divorce/>

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<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>

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