

DIVORCE:
PREVENTION, SURVIVAL, & RECOVERY[©]

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SPECIAL THANKS:

THE AUTHORS EXTEND A SPECIAL THANKS TO SUSAN ORMAND FOR HER WRITING, EDITING, AND
CONTRIBUTION.

THE AUTHORS ALSO THANK DR. JAN DELIPSEY FOR CONTRIBUTING HER SOCIAL SCIENCE
RESEARCH FINDINGS.

I. **INTRODUCTION**

Until recently, most marriages in the United States ended by the death of one of the partners, but divorce is now the number one reason a marriage terminates. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the national divorce ratio is one divorce for every two marriages. Because almost everyone is likely to be touched by divorce, whether directly or indirectly, it is important for us to understand how to prevent divorce, or how to survive the divorce process if divorce becomes necessary, or how to recover from the aftermath of divorce.

A research team of psychologists and lawyers has developed the conclusions about divorce prevention, survival and recovery discussed in this paper. The team interviewed 169 attorneys, 126 mental health professionals and 7 ministers about the effects of divorce and coping skills for divorcing individuals.

II. **DIVORCE PREVENTION**

Do you want to live longer, healthier, wealthier and sexier? Stay married. Studies show that married people live longer, suffer fewer health ailments, have higher net worth and more sex than single people. To stay married, couples need to focus on marital enrichment and, should the need arise, marital restoration.

A. **Marital Enrichment**

Communicate: Honest, open and frequent communication is essential in Flexibility and Adaptation: In all areas of marital enrichment, there is a common thread: flexibility and adaptation. People's values and goals evolve; but, perhaps, at different rates or in different directions. It is up to you to find a way to make these goals and values work

together. Focus on friendship and partnership. Ask how your spouse is doing. After you ask, *listen* to the response. Acknowledge that you and your spouse may have different styles and purposes when communicating. Learn what those are so that you respond appropriately. Communication is the fuel you need to cruise love's highway, and, like all fuel, it comes in different grades. Premium fuel for marriage, which will keep your marriage in good condition for the long haul, is *meaningful* communication. Meaningful communication is heartfelt, non-judgmental and, at times, rigorously honest. It is initiated at random times as well as special times, and not just on your anniversary or right before sex. It frequently consists of an unmotivated, voluntary and selfless act or statement, which makes your spouse feel special, loved and appreciated. It can appear to others as a kind of secret code language that only lovers know. Think about how much it means to you when your spouse cooks your favorite dinner as a surprise or leaves an unexpected love note in your briefcase that you open at the office or a spontaneous pause on the way to dinner to say how wonderful you are. This kind of very personal, selfless communication of caring is soul food for your partner.

together. For example, your sexual needs might change. Both partners have an obligation to keep an open mind and meet each other's expectations. You may desire a career change that requires flexibility in financial expectations, time expectations, or geographic

expectations. One or both partners must adapt to these changes. As another example, you may hate horror movies, but occasionally you should sit through one if your spouse loves a good Friday the 13th flick. Flexibility and adaptation enable partners to continuously meet each other's changing needs.

Gender Roles: When you were dating, you may have been looking for a "man that fits the plan" or a "wife that fits your life." By this, I mean that you had an expectation of how your significant other was going to fill the role of husband or wife. Early in life, some women have an expectation that they will work in the home to raise a family while others see themselves in a corporate setting. Some men see themselves as the sole provider and protector while other men have an egalitarian view of marriage. Because of the evolution of values, circumstances and goals during marriage, you need to be flexible in your expectations of gender roles. Equally important, be certain to accurately communicate these expectations to your spouse.

Time and Attention: Men, do you know that the time and attention you gave your wife yesterday affects the quality (or occasion) of sex tonight? It's true. Most women are often more expressive physically when they are satisfied emotionally. Such fulfillment comes from long-term satisfaction with the amount *and* quality of time and attention she receives. Women, this truism may also apply to you. Both genders are more responsive when they are fulfilled.

So many couples complain that they don't have time. Make time. Make time to be together and time to be apart. Spend this time nurturing and displaying affection and communicating from the heart. Do simple things. Spend some of this time on

"everyday" days - not just on anniversaries or birthdays.

Avoid Relationship Toxins: Relationship toxins are drugs, alcohol abuse, affairs, or violence. When one partner engages in these risky behaviors, it hurts both spouses, and possibly the children as well. Risky behaviors cause irreparable damage; so do not even "taste" a relationship toxin.

Never Stop Dating: During courtship, you probably felt special, cared for and in love. Of course, everyone wants these things, so why stop the behaviors that generate these feelings? Make a date, hold a door, and give a hug. Never stop showing you care, and never stop dating your spouse.

Remember a time in your courtship when you took your wife on a picnic in the park with just a blanket, some food, and a bottle of wine? Why not recreate that sweet moment again, even if it's twenty years later?

Partner and Personal Passions: Although opposites may attract, studies show that couples who are similar are more likely to stay together. To bridge a gap of differences, determine a passion and explore it together: art, yoga, running, baseball, or whatever you both love. By the same token, have a passion that you can enjoy on your own to establish independent satisfaction. A motivating career is a common personal passion, but it can be many things.

Realistic Expectations: Expect "ever after" but know it's not easy to get there. Do not expect that you can change your partner or that your partner will remain the same forever. Frame and re-frame positively. When life turns out differently than you expect, do not blame your spouse. Instead, work together to make a better reality.

Work: By now, you may have noticed that marital enrichment requires plenty of time and energy - actual work. You have to work to be fun, work to keep the romance alive, and work to meet expectations. It's not easy to remain flexible, adapt and re-frame expectations, but if you want a lasting marriage, this is what it takes!

"How'm I Doin', Honey?": People need feedback to improve. At the office, you may have an annual review, and, in school, report cards come out every few months. Why not take inventory of your relationship periodically to communicate achievement, appreciation and an agenda. You can make this a fun and nurturing event instead of a formal or threatening one. Every once in awhile, casually ask, "How'm I doin', Honey?" Make a commitment that when one partner asks this question, you both answer it honestly and lovingly. Make a pact to have an annual date weekend to a beach city, the mountains or skiing when you both agree to focus on enjoying the relationship and communicating about its progress.

B. Marital Restoration

When marital problems arise, accept responsibility for finding solutions, without focusing on blame. Positive change requires effort by both spouses, but consider a neutral facilitator, such as a financial counselor, marital therapist or life coach, to provide direction. A 2005 meta-analysis concluded that marital therapy or intervention produces positive results whether it focuses on emotional improvements, behavioral improvements or both.ⁱ

Communication Problems: Many couples complain of conflict or disconnectedness in their communication -- the root of divorce. Communication problems include the absence of openness, honesty and bilateral interaction, as well as

impaired ability to interpret communication. If communication has been neglected, address this immediately. Communication is the number one area where marital counseling professionals can benefit couples as a neutral facilitator and educator. Although your efforts to communicate must never cease, such therapy only requires ten to twenty-six sessions.

Sexual Needs: The common root of unmet sexual need is unmet expectation. Typically, an unmet sexual expectation occurs because a certain sexual behavior or relationship existed prior to or early in a marriage, and later in the marriage, one spouse loses interest in the same behavior or relationship. Because the other spouse expects the same sexual behavior or relationship, he or she becomes frustrated and feels rejected, perpetuating communication breakdown. The rejected spouse may turn to risky behavior alternatives, such as affairs.

When sexual needs are not met, address them honestly, lovingly, but frankly. Be willing to remain emotionally flexible. Sexual relationships do evolve, but if you think yours will dissolve, seek a qualified sexual "rediscovery" course or counselor. Just as you should continue communicating lovingly, you should continue expressing your love physically, enjoying anticipation and striving to have sex that is not "routine."

The Many Faces of Money: Money has many faces. Of course, you can have too little, the discomfort of which may cause daily stresses that can lead to marital problems. Then, you can actually have too much money, and money, if perspectives are unhealthy, can become more important than people.

Even worse is when partners have a disparate amount of or access to money.

The bottom line is that partners must accept that a healthy relationship is not based on how much money one spouse or the other brings to the table.

Couples fight about money they do or do not have and what they do or do not do with that money. When spouses disagree on how to allocate income, seek professional advice from a financial counselor or an online personal finance program to take some of the positioning out of the allocation decision. Again, putting a neutral professional's advice between your positions bridges the path to solution.

III. DIVORCE SURVIVAL

A. Personal Survival

The emotions generated by the process of divorce are comparable to only one other tragic life event: the death of a loved one. Death, however, typically carries with it a more finite and healthy healing process because there is an impetus to that healing process (a grieving period and a funeral) that is absent in divorce. So that recovery can begin, you must take care of yourself and any children you have while enduring the legal process of marital dissolution. Research indicates that while divorce negatively impacts physical and mental health of men, women and children, certain coping strategies and thinking behaviors can minimize many negative consequences of divorce. So what can be done to curtail the negative impact of divorce?

Self-Help Program

Establish a routine, following a custom-designed self-help program. Whether you are religious or not, practice meditation, and, if you have never practiced meditation, learn how.

Money is a kind of power, so an imbalance of money creates an imbalance of power.

Far too few of us practice meditation, an excellent technique for relieving stress. Most think of meditation as "mysterious" or "eastern." However, in reality, most of us have experienced meditation without even knowing it. Meditation is simply a slowing down of the mind. We experience it when we sit quietly and watch the ocean waves or a fireplace burn.

For some of us, meditation is a time to get in touch with God. For others, it is simply a time to get in touch with our "inner spirit." Whichever suits your personality and beliefs, try meditation and you will find it to be one more component in the quest to lessen stress.

The practice of meditation has many forms. Some techniques emphasize mental imagery; some use visual forms, such as a candle or religious symbol. Still others require that you be perfectly still while meditating. Meditation can also be accomplished during a walk or jog. Browse through a section of a good book store and discover which form of meditation is best for you.

Follow your meditation with a few moments of positive reflection. Inspire your reflection period with a motivational writing or passage from a religious text, or a book by Dan Baker or Wayne Dyer. Start your day on a positive note, and end it the same way.

When you begin to feel tense or when you feel the onset of negative emotions (fear, worry, hostility, anger, self-rejection) pause for a moment and become aware of your breath. Observe how this disturbing emotion has caused

you to have a disturbed breathing pattern. Starve this negative emotion by taking long, deep breaths to restore peacefulness and balance to your mind. This should be done

Our mind, body and behavior are all closely intertwined, and they constantly affect one another. We are not made up of body parts that do not communicate.

Use Therapists and Medication Appropriately

You may find that you need or want to speak to a professional therapist about your coping. Some objective re-alignment is useful, but pick the right therapist. Pick a person who has a positive approach to therapy. Pursue therapy for only a limited number of sessions.

Also, if you are having trouble sleeping, go to a specialist who regularly deals with this type of problem to see if you need medication. But you must treat the underlying problem and not become dependent on sleep aids. However, this advice is not meant to discourage persons with true pathology from receiving ongoing mental or psychological services and/or medication.

You might also want to seek out a competent life coach. A life coach is a person who, based on wisdom and past experience, can mentor you through a particular process such as divorce. With a life coach you can make an authentic and high risk self-disclosure about yourself and receive unfiltered but non-judgmental feedback. More particularly, if you are contemplating divorce or currently going through one, a litigation life coach will be able to guide you through the very real pressures of litigation. A litigation life coach provides an environment of safety where you can express your anxieties, fears, and frustrations and get the needed help, advice, and understanding.

Get Active and Eat Right

for a minimum of two minutes and can be done anywhere, whenever stress occurs.

It does not matter what you do - bike, jog, yoga, row - just get active. It is well-documented that exercise strengthens the heart, improves your immune system and bone density, reduces depression and anxiety, elevates your mood, and improves concentration and productivity. When you find yourself in the middle of a divorce, your stress will not be reserved for the weekend. You will have marked stress seven-days-a-week. Thus, you need to seek daily activity. Think about it: if you run three miles twice a week, it helps alleviate two out of seven days of stress. But what about the other five days of stress? Get *some* exercise every day.

Eat right. You need nutritious food for health. Do not go on a low-calorie diet in the survival stage because you need energy now. Pick low-fat foods and incorporate plenty of fruits and vegetables in your diet. Avoid alcohol, because it is a depressant and it will only increase your stress level.

Additionally, you must balance your stress with self-help. Think of your stress and your self-help as two weights in opposite pans on a balance beam. When the weights are equal, the horizontal beam is in equilibrium. When you balance your stress with equal amounts of self-help, your mind will meet an equilibrium.

Acceptance

We can all appreciate the message of the serenity prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to

know the difference.” Why waste time and energy worrying about something that is certain? By the same token, when you have a chance to make a positive change, do it.

You need to understand your core values first, and then prioritize your goals. What are the values which are most important to you - respect, power, money, success, love, honesty, loyalty, intellect, compassion, integrity, etc.? Your core values are the foundation of your life goals, and, while your foundation of core values may remain the same, your goals may evolve during divorce. Make room for the evolution, expect it, acknowledge it and embrace it.

B. Situational Survival

During a divorce your everyday life will be different. Certain coping mechanisms will help you survive these situations.

Approach Coping and Compartmentalization

“Approach coping” entails reaching out to others to communicate stress. Be with people. If “people” means the sales lady while fragrance shopping at the nearest Neiman Marcus or Bergdorf Goodman counter, so be it. Go for a walk with your sister or ask a buddy to meet you for lunch. Spend time with some friends whom you do not use as sounding boards about the divorce and spend some time with the few people in whom you do confide about your divorce stress. Choose positive friends as opposed to friends who only want to bash your spouse or former spouse, and ask for help when you need it.

On the other hand, compartmentalize your venting. When you do talk about divorce stress, do so only for a restricted period. Allow yourself to be open, but set a time limit. If you’re at dinner, tell yourself you will only talk about the divorce during the first course. By the main

Prioritize

course, focus on the future. If you fail to compartmentalize, you will lose one of the most therapeutic benefits of socialization: enjoyment of the present and focus on the future.

Lawyers Practice Law

Leave the law to lawyers and your support to supporters. Your lawyer may have good advice about divorce survival, but the people who know you best (your friends and family) will lend the emotional support you need. Turn to them. Your lawyer is not a licensed therapist. Similarly, turn to your friends and family for emotional support, but do not heed their legal advice, unless they are divorce lawyers.

Also, do not obsess about the divorce. A good lawyer will worry about it for you. Instead, practice some diversion techniques. Focus on your work and your hobbies. Spend time with loved ones.

Time

Managing your time is the key to situational survival. You have to keep living your life, and that includes completing the everyday tasks. The phrase “I don’t have the time,” should be a red flag. If you cannot fit in a necessary task (and this includes your exercise), wake up earlier. Make a task list and stick to it.

The separation period is tough. You may shift from being a stay-at-home mother to a single, working mom. You may be a working dad who is left with total responsibility for a child. Life doesn’t stop for divorce. You have to deal with life’s problems, and time management is the key.

Further, while nobody can predict how long your divorce will take, accept that it will probably last longer than you hoped. If you are not in a situation where settlement is likely, a divorce of any complexity is probably going to take a year or more.

Do not obsess about possessions, let pride overcome you, or make a competition of dividing pots and pans. If you truly value something, there's nothing wrong with asking your lawyer to fight for it, but engage in cost-analysis. If a battle over a belonging begins, consider how much it will cost for your attorney at his or her hourly rate to fight for it. Consider that your lawyer might not win the battle. Consider that you may be able to pay for a replacement less expensively than you can pay your attorney's bill. Is it really worth the fight? Don't sweat the small stuff!

C. Coping With Your Spouse

Your relationship with your spouse may never end, especially if you have children together. The sooner you work through any hurt or anger caused by your spouse, the sooner you will experience less stress in inevitable future communications with the spouse. If you asked for a divorce, keep in mind that you had time to digest the reality of divorce and are probably further along emotionally than your spouse. Likewise, if you were approached by a spouse asking for a divorce, expect an emotional roller-coaster and use approach coping.

Until you reach the point of effortless communication (even if that's never), "fake it 'til you make it." Be poised and polite. The key is to remain civil, even when you do not feel like it, and to project a certain "learned indifference." However, if you cannot muster the discipline to fake it, avoid speaking to your spouse during the divorce at all. Let the lawyers communicate, but realize this is not an option if you have

Divorces are marathons, not sprints, so pace yourself. Remember that judges literally have hundreds of cases on their dockets, and they do not care how fast you want your divorce finished.

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff
children together.

As you cope with hurt or anger, keep in mind that your feelings are normal. Those we love the most have the ability to hurt us the most. Once we fall out of love with a spouse, we take away their power to hurt us. Be careful not to fall too far in the opposite direction though, for there is a very fine line between love and hate. Hate yields the very same power as love: those we hate have the power to make us just as angry and as hurt as when we loved that person. As the saying goes, you better dig two graves if you're seeking revenge, because it will destroy you too.

Just as you must avoid being controlled by your spouse, accept that you cannot control the other person. You can only control you. Be responsible for you.

D. Coping With Your Child

The effect of divorce on children can be very negative. As a result of divorce, children may experience sadness and depression, aggressive behavior, frequent illnesses, abdominal pain, headaches, difficulty in school, eating problems and sleeping disturbances.ⁱⁱ Compared with children from intact families, children of divorce exhibit more conduct problems, more symptoms of psychologic maladjustment, lower academic achievement, more social difficulties and poorer self-concept.

Recall how every child of a certain age remembers exactly where they were when they learned J.F.K. was shot or the Twin Towers fell. Every child of divorce

remembers where they were when they were told that their parents would divorce. When you announce the divorce to a child, break the news with your spouse, and state four things without bringing up the adult

2. "This divorce is not about you."
3. "You did not cause this divorce, and it is not your fault."
4. "Your life is going to be good."

As far as communication is concerned, use the vocabulary of survival. Do not say "my" son; say "our" son. Never use the child as a messenger. Remember that gestures and tone of voice communicate messages just as words do. Do not send your child mixed messages.

You cannot bad-mouth your former spouse to your child. Understand that a child views himself or herself as made up of half of the mother and half of the father. Every time a mother says, "your father is horrible," that child hears, "you are half-horrible." Use survival vocabulary.

Include the other parent in the child's birthdays, graduations and other life events. Do not create a cloud of worry for your child over every happy hallmark. Cooperate with the other parent. Ensure that your child has an ample relationship with both parents. Remember that you are the person who chose your child's other parent, the child did not get to pick parents, and the child deserves two parents.

The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers pamphlet, "Stepping Back from Anger - Protecting Your Children During Divorce," contains the following Ten Steps for Divorcing Parents:

Never disparage your former spouse in front of your children.

reasons for the divorce:

1. "Your father and mother will always love you, but we are not going to live together."

Because children know that they are "part mom" and "part dad," the criticism can batter the child's self-esteem.

Do not use your children as messengers between you and your former spouse. The less the children feel a part of the battle between their parents, the better.

Reassure your children that they are loved and that the divorce is not their fault. Many children assume that they are to blame for their parents' hostility.

Encourage your children to see your former spouse frequently. Do everything within your power to accommodate the visitation.

At every step during your divorce, remind yourself that your children's interests - not yours - are paramount, and act accordingly. Lavish them with love at every opportunity.

If you have a drinking or drug problem, get counseling right away. An impairment inhibits your ability to reassure your children and give them the attention they need at this difficult time.

Your children may be tempted to act as your caretaker. Resist the temptation to let them. Let your peers, adult family members, and mental health professionals be your counselors and

sounding board. Let your children be children.

If you are the non-custodial parent, pay your child support. The loss **If you are the custodial parent and you are not receiving child support, do not tell your children.** It feeds into the child's sense of abandonment and further erodes his or her stability.

If at all possible, do not uproot your children. Stability in their residence and school life helps buffer children from the trauma of their parents' divorce.

E. Coping With Your Lawyer

Your lawyer is your legal counselor and your representative, but he or she is not your buddy. You must communicate in an open manner and with frequency, but limit the scope of communication to legal advice and only a small amount of situational advice.

Also, limit the amount of calls you make to your lawyer. Do not expect to be able to reach your lawyer several times a day, but don't settle for a law firm where you can never access your lawyer. During a divorce, you may think of ten questions during the day. You're going to waste a lot of attorney's fees making that many calls to your lawyer. Keep a notepad to write down questions as they arise so that you can make one phone call to your lawyer every few days, getting all your answers at one time. Remember to write "Attorney-Client Privilege" on that notebook so that its contents cannot be used against you in court.

It is imperative that you communicate your goals to your lawyer, and that you are satisfied with the quality of the communication. However, after you

of income facing many children after divorce puts them at a financial disadvantage that has a pervasive effect on the rest of their lives.

communicate your goals to your lawyer, be open-minded when the lawyer opines whether your expectations are reasonable. A good lawyer is not afraid of his or her ability to achieve your goals, but is knowledgeable and up-front about what can realistically be achieved within the legal framework. If your needs are not being met, express that frankly and early on.

If you want good representation, you must disclose all of the facts to your lawyer, even the bad ones. Many clients are relieved after they tell their lawyer bad facts because the lawyer can predict whether or how the bad facts will follow them into the court room. Often, clients are relieved to find out that, for evidentiary reasons, the opposition cannot use certain bad facts in the court room. Also, you want your lawyer to be ready to handle bad facts in the court room if they do get into evidence. Your divorce lawyer will not be shocked by bad facts. He or she has probably heard it all before.

F. Surviving the Legal Process

Take time to learn what to expect in the legal process of divorce: the rough legal framework as well as the landscape of negotiation, mediation, deposition and trial. Cooperate with your lawyer in this endeavor, and do not try to buck the system. Use the system to your advantage.

Get the Best Lawyer You Can

Although a recommendation by a friend who liked his or her divorce attorney's performance can be helpful, avoid the advice of people who like to give advice but have no idea what they are talking about. Remember that advice from a friend is only one source to be considered and, unless they are divorce attorneys, your friends usually have no expertise in the field. Likewise, your priest/minister/rabbi, the random person two heads over at the spa or the golf course, and the company publishing the yellow pages should not be those to select your divorce lawyer. Once again, this is only one source to consider in your search. You should do your own research. It's not as hard as it sounds:

1. Get online and read attorneys' web sites.
2. Look for a lawyer who is a specialist (board-certified). Another factor to consider is whether your candidate is not only a member, but is or has been an officer of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and of the Family Law Section of their state's Bar Association. These things show that the lawyer is at the top of the field and respected by his or her peers. You will also want to see the articles written by an attorney whom you are considering.
3. Don't go for a cookie-cutter divorce lawyer. If you had to have triple bypass surgery, would you go to any old surgeon or would you go to the most sophisticated coronary bypass cardio-expert you could afford? If you expect a custody battle, find an attorney who specializes in custody cases, and if you have complicated business and property holdings, find an excellent property lawyer. You can identify an attorney's focus by reviewing articles he or she has published, which should be listed on the web site.

Fight Fear of the Unknown

A simple antidote to fear of the unknown is knowing. You can't predict the detailed outcome of your divorce, but your lawyer can give you a big-picture appraisal and can explain the process of a divorce so you know what is expected of you and what stressful events you may have to endure. Just knowing more about the process can alleviate much unnecessary fear. Spend time learning with your lawyer, sit down with your laptop and surf the net about divorce procedures in your state, or go observe court room proceedings in a family law court. "Demystify" the process.

Breathe

Sounds simple. Breathe. Deep breathing has many of the benefits of cardiovascular exercise. In a 2005 empirical review of several medical studies, Dr. Richard Brown, M.D. and Dr. Patricia Gerbarg, M.D. concluded that deep-breathing techniques are extremely helpful in handling depression, anxiety, and stress. A deep breath triggers a relaxation response by signaling to your parasympathetic nervous system that a stressful event is not occurring, and breathing relaxes muscles, expands the lungs and restores a normal heart rate, thus relaxing the breather.

Use this Canyon Ranch technique: Let a random item symbolize the need to take a deep breath. It can be a blue sticker that you place on some item you carry, like a notebook that you always have with you. During a stressful event, such as your first deposition, you will see your sticker and be prompted to take a deep, calming breath.

IV. DIVORCE RECOVERY

Recovery from divorce will likely begin as you go through the legal process of divorce, but don't expect full recovery until long after the divorce is final. In recovery, you will need to make changes both on the inside and outside of yourself.

A. Individual

Divorce recovery is like going to work. Some days you just don't want to be there, but you have to, so you make yourself go. With divorce recovery, a person must, as Nike says: "Just do it." There is little room for procrastination or failure. Recovery must begin and end so that rebuilding can start. As you rebuild the new you, you will become stronger than ever before, you will know yourself better, and you will have an opportunity to start a happier, more fulfilling life.

Recovery is healing from the inside out. In the survival stage, you assimilated change and poured time and energy into resolving the legal aspects of your divorce. In the recovery stage, you have to let go of pain, anger and stress that result from that process. If you harbor anger or hurt about your divorce, plan a purging event. Write the things you wish you could tell your ex in a letter. It can be scathing or not - as you wish. Throw it in the ocean or the toilet or a fire, and make up a song and dance to celebrate "getting rid" of those feelings.

After you purge these toxins, build a new you from the inside out. You must be happy with yourself, so begin with serious self-analysis. Now is the time to take up Journaling as a healthy outlet. Write down what was unhealthy about your last relationship and the lessons you learned. This is a "Been There, Done That Memo." Determine the goals you want to accomplish going forward. Make a "Gratitude List," pointing out the positive people and facets of your life. These are your life's foundations and you will eventually rebuild upon them.

During this self reflection, be careful to analyze who you are today, and not who you were yesterday. Marriage may have changed you, and divorce will likely change you again. Acknowledge how your personality and perspective have evolved and how you may desire different types of people and experiences

New You

in your life now. Let this be a chance to set new goals and to strive to be a better, stronger, wiser person.

As you rebuild your inside, reflect the healthy changes on your outside. Eat right, exercise, and limit alcohol. Change your hair style or whiten your teeth. Dress up "just because." Do whatever helps you embrace this new life and reflect the positive, healthy changes you are making.

New Life

As you come to know yourself again, start to reach out of yourself for life fulfillment. Reach out to new friends and new interests. Broaden your horizons. Try ballroom dancing, return to college or start a second career, or take up jogging, hiking, or yoga.

Think about the compromises you made in marriage. You don't have to give up these things anymore. You can do whatever you want, so be a little self-indulgent. Whatever you do, don't stay in the survival mode. Reach out to a new place and celebrate your new life.

So what if you gave your ex "the best years of your life." Are you going to give your ex the rest of them too? How do you know the best years are not yet to come? After all, you are learning what you really want in life and how to get it. Surely, you will begin to make better choices for yourself and find greater happiness.

The one thing you must take from divorce is that you have an opportunity to start over again, and from a position of greater wisdom. You are free to make this experience into something truly incredible. Renew old passions or find new ones; start liking your life and taking the chances you could not take before.

New Love

When you find yourself ready to love again, be courageous about seeking a healthier relationship. As you recover, you will be happier with yourself and will have learned from your past. You will be prepared to make better choices about other people and your own behavior. Although your first marriage was a leap of faith, you have the advantage of making a more educated choice your second time around because you have more information about marriage, relationships and your own wants and needs.

You must commit to learning from your mistakes and avoiding patterns of bad decisions.

Why did you choose your former spouse, and what was wrong with that choice for you? Apply these answers to your future selection process. Be cautious when you sense familiarity in a potential partner. If that familiarity is reminiscent of your ex, taking comfort in this person may be a repeat of a past mistake.

Take time to really think about what you want in a new mate. As seasons of life change, you will find yourself looking for a partner to share different experiences: have children, enjoy careers, share dreams and grow old. You may find that you do not care for what society dictates is an ideal partner. Whatever you truly want is what you should look for. Be honest with yourself.

One positive aspect of today's dating scene - the Internet - is that you can pre-screen your dates to be compatible psychologically and socially. Some web sites, like www.match.com, actually administer psychological tests to pair up compatible people. This is helpful both in making a good match and for continuing your own self-evaluation process. These tests help you articulate what you want in a new relationship and what kind of person you are.

B. Children

You must also respect the time your

You actually have a DUTY to recover from divorce if you have children. Children tend to cope with divorce only as well as the most healthy parent copes with divorce. This means that no matter how your former spouse handles divorce, if you climb the steps of recovery and rebuild, your child has a high probability of adjusting in a healthy way. This should be a major motivating factor in your recovery. You recover better when you see your child is adapting, and your child recovers better when he or she sees you adapting. Look at the process as a way to help your child become a stronger person who can deal with adversity. As in survival, even if you cannot stand your former spouse, you need to pretend as if you do - even if your ex never reciprocates. The learned indifference you strived for in survival should be practiced as long as you need to; that is, until you can sincerely be nice to your ex without learned indifference and feigned respect. You must never criticize your child's other parent in front of the child, and you must never use a child as a messenger or a lobbyist. If you do need to discuss disagreements with your former spouse, do so at a planned time when the child is not a witness.

Showing your respect for the other parent fosters your child's respect for the other parent. Statistics show that children having healthy relationships with both parents are better adjusted socially and psychologically. Show your respect in little ways. For example, always buy a gift for the child to give the other parent on birthdays and other holidays and don't take sides with a child who is angry at the other parent. You will be surprised that these behaviors not only improve your child's recovery, but help your own recovery by prohibiting you from falling into the consequences of vengefulness.

child spends with the other parent. Schedules

change, and both parents must be reasonably flexible for children. Do not limit the child's phone calls to your ex and encourage your child to have fun being with his/her other parent. Not only is it constructive for your child to build a secure relationship with your ex, but your child's time away gives you free time to enjoy.

Also, as you rebuild your love life, it is essential that you keep this element separate from your life as a parent until the right time comes. It is important to be up-front about being a parent while dating and to explore potential partners' feelings about children. However, only when a new love relationship becomes very serious, should children be exposed to this part of your life. If you do choose to remarry, keep the role of step-parent distinct from that of a biological parent. Do not request that your child call a step-parent "mom" or "dad." A step-parent can be a healthy addition to a family, but not a replacement for a child's parent.

C. Extended Family

Understand that while you may divorce your spouse, your ex's family is going to show up a lot down the road - such as at graduations, weddings, bah mitzvahs, etc. Why be unpleasant? Not only does this ruin an occasion for your child and foster perpetual worry about family gatherings for him or her, but any negativity on your part will bring reciprocal negativity from the extended family. If you can reach inside yourself for the patience and discipline to practice learned indifference to your former spouse, surely you can command the same response in dealing with your ex's extended family.

V. CONCLUSION

No matter how divorce touches your life, whether you find yourself trying to prevent it,

If you are in a marriage now, remember that happy marriages take hard work. You must work to be fun, affectionate, supportive, and happy. For, as

Anais Nin so eloquently observed:

survive it or recover from it, divorce, or the threat of divorce, will make you work. It will impose choices on you, and it will impart wisdom.

Divorce can tear you down, but it can make you stronger, too. If you must weather the trenches of divorce, there is at least an opportunity to become a stronger and wiser person, for every goodbye holds a lesson. Recovering from a goodbye, Veronica Shoffstall wrote:

“After a while you learn that even sunshine burns if you get too much. So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul, instead of waiting For someone to bring you flowers. And you learn that you really can endure... That you really are strong, And you really do have worth And you learn and learn With every goodbye you learn.”

Let a goodbye be the dawn of a new day, an inspiration to find a stronger you and the pathway to an exciting life.

Until that time, in the survival stage, know that you will have a recovered self and a full life in your future. Do not regret your choice to have married, but learn from that choice. We have all heard Alfred Tennyson's famous quote:

“‘Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.”

From every relationship there is wisdom to be taken. This is why even broken love is worthwhile.

“Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don't know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It

dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings.”

Pay attention to your relationship. Nurse it; value it; work for it. Hard work will be well rewarded, and the first step is choosing to have a happy,

successful marriage and then committing the time and energy to make this goal a reality. The choice is yours.

Endnotes

i. Nathan Wood, et. al., “What Works for Whom: A Meta-Analytic Review of Marital and Couples Therapy in Reference to Marital Distress,” *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 33:273-287 (2005).

ii. Amato, P. R. “Life-span Adjustment of Children to Their Parents’ Divorce,” *Future Child* 4:143-64 (1994).