



Boundaries with Divorce

Divorce is a huge adjustment in so many ways. One of those areas is in figuring out boundaries for yourself that involve your relationship with your ex-spouse and children. Other areas include handling your own life and emotions as a divorced person. Here are some boundaries you will want to work on:

You will have to work out the custody of the children. You may be able to have some flexibility, if your ex-spouse is reasonable, but if he/she isn't, adhere to the schedule strictly.

If kids don't want to go with the other parent, consult with your attorney for liability so you won't be in contempt of court. The rule of "too big to carry" may apply, which means that if you can't pick a child up and put him/her into a car then you are not responsible for making the child go. If it is because it is an abusive or unacceptable environment, document specifics and seek legal advice for a change in custody.

Don't use your children as conduits of information or as mediators between you and your ex-spouse. This puts too much stress on the children.

Don't try to get the children to side with you against the other parent or make them choose loyalty to one parent over the other. This further damages them emotionally. The divorce is hard enough on them, don't make it worse.

Give children the space to work through their own emotions and boundaries with the divorce and both parents. Expect them to have lots of feelings and go through the stages of grief. Try not to take everything personal that they say about you—much of it will come from their emotional pain. Respect their feelings, but don't tolerate abuse toward you.

Depending on the age and personality of the child, there may be some acting out. Take the effect of the stress over the divorce into consideration, but have boundaries. Get your child professional help, if needed. Communicate with the school and others in the child's life so they can help him/her.

Require respect for your privacy and possessions. Protect yourself against an ex-spouse that would take money and assets from you. Change the key on your residence, if it is clearly yours. Be careful about changing the locks without consulting an attorney, if the residence still belongs to both of you and someone hasn't agreed to leave or been told to leave by a judge.

Don't tolerate verbal and emotional abuse. Set boundaries for interactions both on the phone, in writing, and personally. Discontinue abusive conversations. Consider using email to minimize

arguments. Learn about verbal and emotional abuse, so you can recognize it, detach from it, and say no to it.

Give up trying to convince your ex-spouse of your “truth.” If you could, you wouldn’t be divorced. It is difficult to accept that the person you were married to, who is supposed to love you and support you, will always have a negative opinion of you or a different opinion of why your marriage ended. Again if you both agreed on the problems, you probably wouldn’t be divorcing.

Don’t purposefully try to ask people information to find out about ex-spouse’s new life. This will only upset you and keep your focus on your ex, instead of on building your own life. “Too much information” can apply here. Do you really want and need to know everything?

Have boundaries for yourself and maintain control over your words and emotions. You won’t feel good about yourself, if you lose emotional control and allow your ex-spouse to feel self-righteous about the fact that he/she got you to lose it. Maintain your dignity with your ex-spouse. Talk to other people to get your emotions out a different way.

Develop your new self and life. You are beginning a new chapter in life. Your boundaries need to focus on developing yourself as a single person—like it or not.

Recognize you are not responsible for taking care of your ex-spouse’s feelings or well-being. This may be difficult, especially if you are codependent, but you need to learn to focus on taking care of yourself.

Set boundaries with your friends and family, if needed. Accept that not everyone will understand or stay loyal to you. Don’t let people say negative things to you that pull you down. Don’t let family members trash your ex-spouse, if it upsets you. You can ask for whatever you need to make life easier for you. Let people know if you want to talk about the divorce or not.

Take responsibility for your part in the marriage problems, but don't take responsibility for things that were not your fault.