



A New Beginning: The Opportunities and Challenges of Divorce

“Time heals all wounds” is an old saying, and it’s especially true with divorce.

Divorce is one of the most painful experiences people go through. I liken it to having gangrene and being told by the doctor that you have to cut off your arm. You don’t want to but you know you have no choice. You do what you have to do and yet the adjustment to living life without your arm will be lengthy and your life will never quite be the same, although you will eventually heal and adjust and accept life without your arm. It takes an average of 2 –5 years to fully adjust to divorce for most people.

The aftermath of divorce: single parenthood, financial adjustments, dealing with ex-spouses, your ex’s new spouse/partner, sharing the kids, child support, non-payment of support, family events, financial adjustments, and dating will continue to present new challenges and opportunities to grow.

Opportunities and Challenges ahead with your new life:

1. Developing the “new you:” finding out who you were (and lost in the marriage) and who you will become without your spouse. You may re-energize parts of you that weren’t fully developed due to circumstances that defined and limited you in the marriage.
2. Finding new friendships, social groups, support groups and possibly dating when you are ready.
3. Finding a new vocation or returning to work.
4. Making financial decisions as you adjust to less income and/or a lifestyle adjustment.
5. Adjusting to a changed family structure. Part of you may always grieve the loss of the intact family unit.
6. Dealing with your children’s adjustment to the divorce.
7. Adjusting to single parenthood.
8. Accepting your spouse’s significant other.
9. Negotiating shared custody and adjustment to alone time without the children when they are with your ex-spouse.
10. Dealing with the times where things will feel better and then something will come up and you will need to re-process, re-feel, and re-adjust.

11. Working to get clarity about the failed marriage and your part in it. Working on forgiveness as issues arise and memories surface or as your perspective changes about the marriage. (As you come out of denial and analyze the relationship, this may go either way: you may see yourself as more of the problem or less of the problem.)
12. Finding a new support system that is safe, supportive, helpful, and understanding while holding you accountable.
13. Learning how to be alone without being lonely.
14. Finding new activities that you enjoy. Rediscovering your passions and interests.
15. Learning how to take care of yourself emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually.
16. Learning to ask for help in areas you haven't needed it before.
17. Dealing with the reactions of your family, friends, and church to the divorce.
18. Dealing with the loss of relationships with mutual friends and in-laws.
19. Working through the grief process: denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and finally acceptance. The goal is acceptance of all the things you cannot change, letting go of the regrets and the losses, and living your new life fully.

As you can see, you have much work ahead of you. You can't rush it. Finding a support group or other people who have gone through divorce and have worked through the process will give you hope. Many churches have divorce recovery groups. If yours doesn't, find one in your area and go. Individual counseling is also helpful in assessing what happened to cause the divorce and in helping you work through the grief process. Twelve Step recovery groups can be helpful also.

You can make it through, as many others have, but it will take time. Divorce is the end of a chapter in your life and conversely, the beginning of a new chapter. There are always many exciting possibilities in new beginnings.