

The
Divorce
WORKBOOK

by Angela M. Doel, M.S.



**Therapeutic Homework Assignments to
Recover and Move on After a Divorce**

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Recover and Move on After a Divorce**

By Angela M. Doel, MS

Between Sessions Resources, Inc.
Coral Gables, Florida, USA

The Divorce Workbook: Therapeutic Homework Assignments to Recover and Move on After a Divorce by Angela M. Doel, MS

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About the Series

The Divorce Workbook is part of a series of therapy assignment books designed to give therapists and their clients easy access to practical evidence-based psychotherapy tools. For additional workbooks go to www.TherapistInYourPocket.co.

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INTRODUCTION

Divorce is rarely an easy experience. It is mentally, emotionally, physically, and financially challenging. Along with the pain of the end of a relationship, people must manage a host of challenging emotions including guilt, fear, grief, and anger. Working with a therapist, counselor, or relationship coach, can provide people with the skills to cope with these difficult feelings and move on to a happier and more hopeful life.

Therapeutic assignments can be extremely helpful to clients, giving them concrete tools to use during the divorce process. The assignments in this workbook will not only teach clients mental health skills that can help them through a divorce, but they can also help clients challenge harmful beliefs and strengthen insights learned during counseling sessions. In addition to giving the therapeutic work context and focus, homework provides concrete feedback for the counselor about a client's progress.

This book offers forty-one worksheets covering a wide range of issues faced by people going through a divorce. Each worksheet has four sections: Objective, What to Know, What to Do, and Reflections on This Exercise. The **Objective** states what the client can expect to have accomplished upon completion of the worksheet. **What to Know** offers background information about the issue(s) being addressed in the worksheet. **What to Do** features a variety of exercises, including thought-provoking questions to answer, charts to track activities, and questionnaires to complete. In the **Reflections** section, clients are asked to provide feedback on the worksheet, including rating how much the exercise helped them and writing what they learned from the exercise. This section is perhaps the most important part of the worksheet because it helps the therapist and the client determine any progress or improvement that was made upon completion of the assignment.

Before you begin giving homework, do an in-depth assessment of the client's issues to guide you in your assignments. Your first few assignments will be critical in motivating clients to do the work. You may want to have clients put completed assignments in a binder that can serve as a record of what they have learned and achieved in counseling. Asking your clients to share their completed assignments is essential. Reviewing the worksheets will validate the importance what clients do "between sessions."

I hope you will find these worksheets helpful in your work. You can find many more worksheets and assignment workbooks at [www. BetweenSessions.com](http://www.BetweenSessions.com).

-Angela M. Doel, MS

Section 1. Immediately Following the Breakup

What to Do After a Marital Separation

Objective

To identify important actions to take immediately after your marital separation, and reduce the stress associated with this process.

What to Know

Separation occurs when one spouse moves out of the marital home—this may (or may not) lead to divorce. Separating from your spouse is a difficult decision to make, and for some, it is a time to evaluate the relationship and gain perspective. For others, it is the first stage of divorce.

You might wonder what to do immediately following separation. While each situation is different, there are things that every person going through a separation should consider.

1. Organize your living situation. Deciding who should move out of the home can be a difficult and painful decision to make. Consider the following points.

- If you are unprepared to handle the financial responsibility on your own, it might be best to move to a more affordable home or consider selling the property.
- If you stay in the home, you have the right to change the locks to all entrances and exits or any security or alarm system passcodes.
- If there is one common computer and you are moving out, make a copy of any files you might need before you leave.
- Document all items within the home using your cell phone to photograph or videotape each room, showing every item of physical property. Include closets, the attic, and outdoor storage areas.
- If you move out, you have the right to gather your belongings from the house—clothing, accessories, personal care products, memorabilia, and so on.
 - if you and your spouse can work together, walk through the house together to gather all your belongings
 - or, you can arrange to have a deputy sheriff accompany you to retrieve your belongings
 - disputed items will likely remain in the home until further proceedings occur
 - do not forget important papers like your passport, social security card, birth certificate, car title, and so on

2. Review finances and assets. Begin the process of separating your finances and dividing assets.

- Address shared bank accounts and open your own bank account. Immediately redirect all direct deposits into your personal account.
- If you keep a shared account, talk to your bank about adjusting the way funds may be used.
- For jointly held loans, such as a mortgage, decide who will be paying such obligations.

- Establish the balance of shared accounts on the date of separation. Access accounts online and download statements—including loans, retirement or brokerage accounts, IRAs, and 401(k) accounts.
- Cancel shared credit cards.
- Open credit cards in your name only.
- Build and maintain good credit to make it easier to buy a new home or apply for a rental.
- Change beneficiaries for retirement accounts, IRAs, 401(k) plans, annuities, or life insurance policies.
- Make a list of the assets that must be divided.
- Regarding your vehicle, retrieve your spare car keys and obtain insurance, if necessary.
- Consult a tax advisor to determine if you should file jointly or separately. You will also need to reach agreement with your spouse regarding who will pay owed income tax or what portion of a refund you will each receive.
- Consider mediation to work out financial details.

3. Review household expenses. Consider who will pay utility bills. If you are leaving the home, continuing to make these payments will not directly benefit you. But if these bills are in your name, your credit might be damaged if they are unpaid. Those bills should be transferred to the spouse who will remain in the home—but it might be unrealistic for that transition to happen in the first few weeks following separation.

4. Change passwords. Change passwords to social media accounts, personal credit cards, and any other online accounts that your spouse should not have access to.

5. Change your address. If you leave the home, immediately place a change of address request with the U.S. Post Office so you do not have to rely on your ex to give you mail. Remember to provide your new address to your children’s schools, doctors, and so on.

6. Keep records. Organize every receipt and invoice (digitally if possible) and maintain a spreadsheet of all such expenses. The more detailed and organized you are, the more likely you will recover everything permitted by the laws of child support, alimony, and equitable distribution.

7. Be mindful of online communication and social media. You might need to set up a new email account. Use that account for all communications related to your divorce, including with your attorney. Consider everything you post and every e-mail or text you send or receive. Be cautious of any conversations you have in text or online with friends and family—and be especially careful how you communicate with your spouse. It is in your best interest to communicate politely and respectfully.

8. Seek support. Family and friends can help you get through this difficult period. You might also need help from a professional, and a therapist or divorce coach can offer a safe outlet and provide tools and resources to navigate the process.

9. Consider your children. One of the most important things you will do during this process is openly talk with your children about what is happening. Be ready to answer questions, and

even if you do not have all the answers, tell them where they will be living and reassure them that you and your spouse love them. Keep discussions age appropriate. Along with deciding how parenting time will be shared, think about how you will make decisions for your children, e.g., medical care or education.

10. Prioritize self-care. Taking care of yourself will help you help you recover and move forward:

- write in a journal to express how you feel
- eat well
- exercise
- get enough sleep
- take time to relax and reduce stress

11. Speak to an attorney who practices family law in your state. Only an attorney can advise you on legal matters about the separation, and they can also help guide you through any other issues you should consider.

What to Do

You might be overwhelmed with all the things you need to do. Referring to the steps above, write down the 3 most important things to do right now for each topic.

Living/Home Arrangements

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Finances and Assets

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Household Expenses

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Make a list of the significant assets that must be divided.

What password changes do you need to make?

What system can you use to track important information and divorce-related expenses?

Who can offer you support?

What can you do to take care of yourself?

What are some other resources that can help you? For example, a support group in your community.

In the following chart, write down one thing you can do each day to reduce stress associated with the separation. Note the date, how you felt before the activity, the activity you did to reduce your stress, and how you felt after.

Date	How you felt before	Activity	How you felt after

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Conscious Uncoupling

Objective

To use the five-step process of conscious uncoupling to end a romantic relationship.

What to Know

The end of a romantic relationship can be very painful. Research shows that a person going through a difficult divorce or bad breakup shares the same brain chemistry as someone who has lost a loved one. You might believe you will never experience true love or real joy again. You might worry you will never heal from the breakup.

There is a way to end a romantic relationship with honor, respect, generosity, and goodwill, navigating through the breakup in a way that fosters “posttraumatic growth” rather than complicated or prolonged grief. This five-step process, called conscious uncoupling, was created by Katherine Woodward Thomas, and it was designed to guide people ending a romantic relationship.

Maybe you are considering ending your relationship, or you have recently experienced a breakup. The process of conscious uncoupling can help you find emotional freedom, reclaim your power, and recreate your life.

What to Do

If you and your partner are working through this process together, make a copy of this worksheet for each of you. After you have both completed it, share your responses without judging or criticizing. You may also complete this worksheet on your own.

After completing each step, move on to the next step when you are ready.

Step 1. Find emotional freedom. The first step involves a meditation. Reflect on your experience when you are finished with this step.

- **Become still.** Find a quiet place, close your eyes, and take a deep breath. Become aware of the feelings and sensations in your body and release any tension you might be holding.
- **Step back from your feelings.** Imagine stepping away from your thoughts and feelings, and simply offer yourself care, compassion, and curiosity. See if you can view what is happening in your life from a larger and well-informed perspective.
- **Connect with a deeper center within.** Keep breathing and become aware there is a center within you that is deeper and wiser than the feelings you are experiencing. Remind yourself you are OK.
- **Extend love to the part of you suffering.** From this deeper and wiser center, extend love to the part of you that is feeling overwhelmed with painful emotions. Pay attention to the pain while continuing to connect with your wise self. Notice where in your body you are holding these emotions.

- **Welcome in and mirror your feelings.** With kindness and compassion, ask yourself what you are feeling. Listen closely for the response and then mirror it back by saying to yourself, “I can see you’re feeling _____ (sad, enraged, hopeless, used, etc.)”
- **Breathe out a blessing.** For each feeling, on your next in-breath, breathe that feeling into the center of your heart, welcoming it, and on the out-breath, breathe out a blessing for yourself and all beings throughout the world who are suffering with this same feeling in this very moment.
- **Name and mirror your needs.** Now, with kindness and compassion, ask yourself the following question, “What do you need?” Listen closely for the response and then mirror it back by saying to yourself, “I can see that you need _____ (love, closure, an apology, justice, safety, support, comfort, to be seen, to be heard, etc.)”

Write down your experiences as you completed Step 1. What was it like to do this meditation? Did you find it easy or difficult? Explain.

Step 2. Reclaim your power and your life. As long as your attention is focused on how your partner hurt you, you are not going to discover all the ways you contributed to what happened. Even if your ex is mostly at fault for the relationship ending, your focus should be on your part in it. Why? Because until you identify how you show up in romantic relationships, you will be unable to trust yourself and fully open up to another person. Reclaiming your power and your life happens when you are willing to see the ways you gave up power, self-sabotaged, ignored the truth, and damaged your own well-being.

What or who do you resent and for what? Write them down, and avoid censoring yourself, or trying to talk yourself out of your suffering, anguish, or rage.

What can you take responsibility for? Taking responsibility is not admitting it is your fault or condoning bad behavior. Consider the following as you answer this question:

- In what ways did I give my power away?
- Where might I have ignored my own knowing, dismissed my feelings, avoided telling the truth, or asked for clarification?
- How was I trying to get him/her to love, want, or approve of me?
- Why did I avoid doing what I knew I should have done?
- How was I selfish, unkind, or even abusive?

What else has it cost you to give your power away?

What amends do you need to make to yourself moving forward? Here are examples:

- I commit to honoring my feelings and needs as much as I honor the feelings and needs of others.
- I am going to negotiate on my own behalf rather than silently suffer.
- I promise to listen to my own inner knowing and have the courage to act.

What new skills or capacities will you need to develop to consistently live this way?

Step 3. Breaking the pattern, healing your heart. You have the power to create new and different experiences moving forward. But first you must uncover your “source fracture story” – the story you created when you were very young about what is possible (or not) for you in love. It refers to your earliest heartbreak and the beliefs you formed about yourself, others, and life in response to what was happening.

The third step involves a meditation. Reflect on your experience when you are finished with this step.

- **Become still.** Find a quiet place, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and relax your body.
- **Become aware of your feelings regarding the breakup.** Identify all the feelings you have about the breakup. Notice where these feelings are in your body.
- **Welcome in your feelings.** Breathe deeply and notice these feelings with compassion. Extend love to the painful feelings, welcoming each one with kindness and care. Reflect on each of your feelings one at a time. Notice that in doing so, your ability to step back and observe your feelings grows stronger.
- **Notice the meaning you are making of the breakup.** Let go of trying to figure anything out, and drop your awareness into your body, becoming aware of your difficult and painful feelings. As though your feelings are speaking for themselves, ask yourself the following questions:
 - What am I making this breakup mean about me?
 - What am I making this breakup mean about my relationship with men/women?
 - What am I making this breakup mean about the possibilities for happiness in love?
- **Identify your source fracture story.** Now integrate your beliefs and feelings into your source fracture story. For example, "I'm not smart or attractive enough. Women like other men more than they like me. I'm always forced to settle for less."
- **How old is this part of you? How big is the energy?** See if you can identify the chronological age of the part of you that is stuck in this story. Define the size of this energy. For example, is it the size of a tennis ball? A balloon? The moon?
- **Open your eyes and shake it out.** To return to your adult self to challenge the meaning being made by your younger self, open your eyes, and shake your body. Ask yourself, "What's the best thing about being my current age as opposed to being me when I was _____?"

Write down your experiences as you completed Step 3. What was it like to do this meditation? Did you find it easy or difficult? Explain.

Now write down the answers to the questions you asked yourself during the meditation. What are you making this breakup mean about you?

What are you making this breakup mean about your relationship with others?

What are you making this breakup mean about the possibilities you have for happiness in love?

Write down your source fracture story.

How old were you? _____ How big is the energy? _____

What's the best thing about being your current age as opposed to being you when you were _____?

Step 4. Becoming a love alchemist. The first three steps were about you aligning with yourself, and step four is about you getting right with your former partner. Now you are ready to clear the air of old hurts and resentments and move forward with a clean slate. To dissolve any lingering tension, anger, or resentment, you will need to be interested in understanding the impact of your choices and actions and making things right.

Identify the hurt, resentments, and disappointments you are still struggling with. List them.

If possible, sit down with your former partner and discuss. Decide who will speak and who will listen first.

For the speaker: Share the hurts you are still struggling with, and the impact your former partner's behavior has had on you.

For the listener: Set aside your defenses and strive to be present and available to hear what your former partner is saying. Regardless of whether you think he or she is telling the story accurately, try seeing the situation from his or her perspective. Take responsibility for the impact of your behavior and avoid minimizing or dismissing what he or she is saying. Instead, discover how you contributed to the upset and pain with which your former partner is currently struggling.

Now, tell your partner what you see about the impact of your behavior.

For the listener: Avoid interrupting unless you are requesting clarification about what he or she is saying. Pay close attention and extend authentic care and concern for the impact your choices and actions had.

For the speaker: Do not move on until you feel your former partner understands the impact his/her actions and choices had upon you.

Make amends to restore wholeness to the situation.

For the listener: Consider the amends you can make to your former partner. While you cannot undo past choices, you can take right action to try to repair the damage. For example, offer to pay for what your mistakes cost or take steps to clean up a mess you helped make.

For the speaker: Consider what will help repair the damage done and allow yourself to receive the restitution being offered.

When the speaker is finished, switch roles so you each have an opportunity to clear the air of hostility, hurt, and resentment.

Note: If it is not possible or safe for you to be in direct contact with your former partner, a loved one or therapist can facilitate an imagined dialogue between you and your former partner. Do this as an imaginary conversation to help heal resentment, hurt, and anger.

Write down your experiences with Step 4:

Step 5. Creating your happy *even after*. In the final step, you begin to consider the healthy and life-affirming choices you can make to reinvent your life. While your new life may not look like the one you left behind, your goal is to imagine what is possible. You might engage in a ritual to mark the end of your relationship, honoring the lessons learned, children created, projects birthed, or growth gained.

What can you do to mark the end of your relationship?

What healthy and life-affirming choices can you make to reinvent your life? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you “consciously uncouple” from your former partner? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Adapted from: Conscious Uncoupling: 5 Steps to Living Happily *Even After* (2015), by Katherine Woodward Thomas, <https://www.consciousuncoupling.com/>

Coping Strategies for Recovering from a Breakup

Objective

To identify ways to cope following the end of a romantic relationship.

What to Know

When a relationship ends, it can be challenging to recover your emotional balance. Here are some typical experiences you might go through after a breakup, with some strategies for coping with the difficult feelings you may have. Check off the items you are experiencing, and then check the strategies you will try to help you cope more effectively. Add your own thoughts and ideas.

LONELINESS

- Tell yourself it is normal to feel lonely after a break-up, and that you can get through this. Breathe slowly until the feeling passes.
- Identify supportive people in your life and plan to increase your contact with them, such as a weekly lunch date with a good friend.
- Use an online meet-up group or join a local organization to find people with common interests (not for romance – just for friendship and activity).
- Your idea: _____
- Your idea: _____
- Your idea: _____
- Your idea: _____

OBSESSING ABOUT YOUR EX

- Talk to a therapist, counselor, or coach about your past relationship.
- While you grieve the loss of your relationship, identify at least two positive things in your life and spend equal time on them (for example, playing with kids or grandkids, spending time with a pet, or doing a hobby).
- If you can't stop thinking about your ex, give yourself a specific time to write in a journal about him or her. Then put the journal away and turn your attention to other things.
- Practice focusing on the present. Do a challenging task and keep your mind on it.
- Your idea: _____
- Your idea: _____
- Your idea: _____
- Your idea: _____

FEELING BAD ABOUT YOURSELF

- Make a list of your positive qualities.
- If you know you made mistakes in the relationship, write out action steps for behaving differently in the future.

- Find a way to help someone else. Volunteer in the community or help a friend or family member with a project. This will boost your self-esteem better than almost anything.
- Your idea: _____
- Your idea: _____
- Your idea: _____
- Your idea: _____

What to Do

Now, use the chart to record what you do to cope and recover from your breakup. Do something every day, even if it is reaching out to a friend. Write down the date, what you did, how you felt afterward, and any notes.

Date	What did you do?	How did you feel after?	Notes

Reflections on This Exercise

Do you have a better understanding of what you can do to cope? Why or why not? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with Loss Following a Breakup

Objective

To identify the losses you experienced following a breakup and identify ways to cope.

What to Know

A deep sense of loss after a breakup is common because many aspects of your life have changed. Perhaps you did not realize the extent of the losses, or how deeply you would feel them. In addition to the loss of the relationship, perhaps you have lost some or all the following:

- companionship
- friendships you shared as a couple
- your ex's extended family
- financial stability
- your standard of living
- intimacy and affection
- time with your children
- your home
- your identity
- the hopes and dreams you had for the relationship

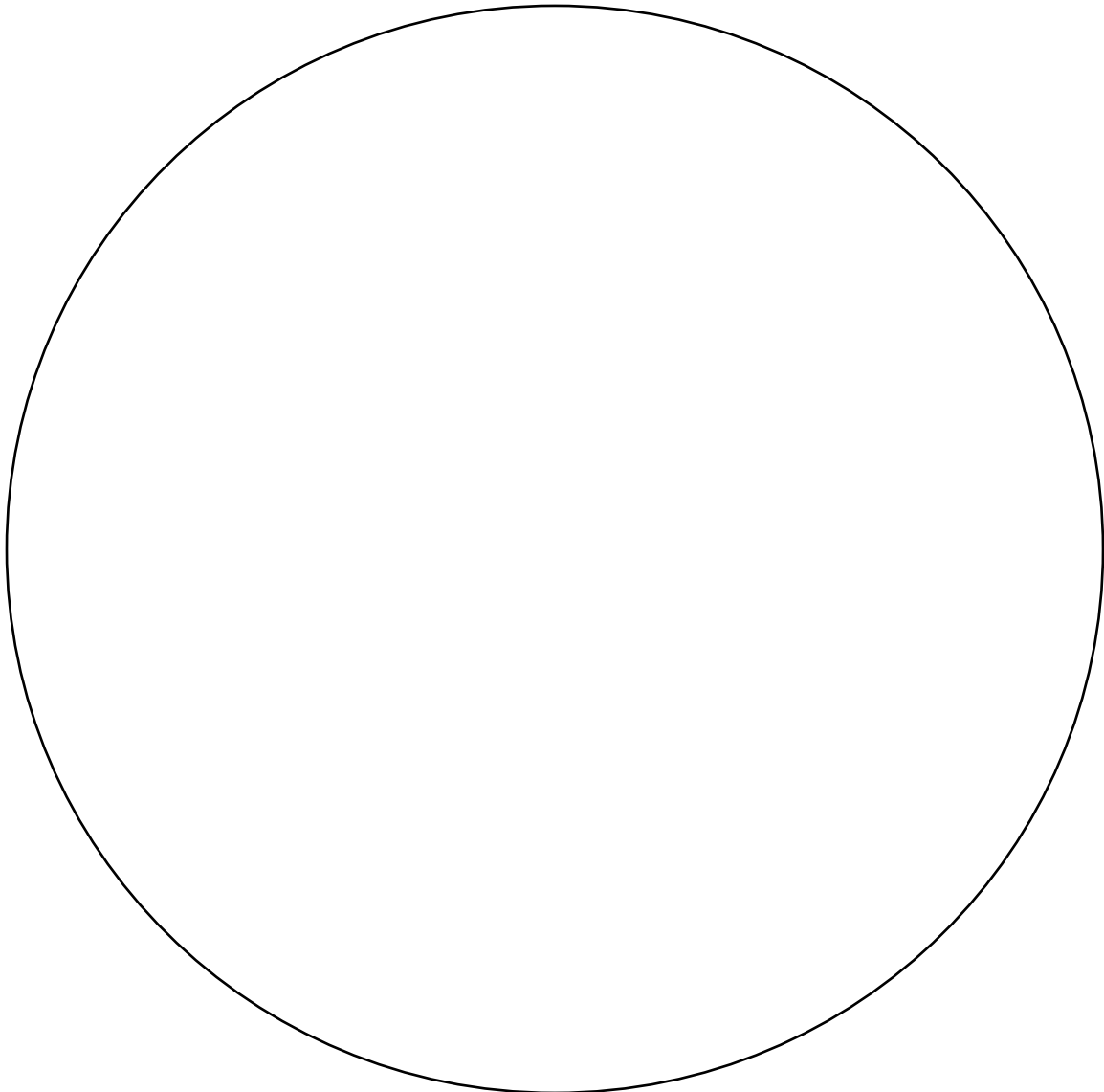
All these losses can be hard to overcome and may contribute to feelings of sadness, hopelessness about the future, and even depression. You might think that ignoring these losses and focusing on other things will help you cope. Unfortunately, even though denial might help temporarily, over the long-term unacknowledged losses can interfere with your happiness and ability to move forward.

This worksheet will help you reflect on your losses following a breakup and identify some ways to cope.

What to Do

First, write down all the things you have lost because of the breakup.

Now, use the circle below to illustrate your losses. Draw lines in the circle and label each section with the type of loss it represents. The larger sections indicate especially painful losses. The smaller sections are for less painful losses.



What are the top two areas you feel the most loss?

1. _____
2. _____

Here are some ways you can cope with your losses.

- 1. Take time to grieve.** There is no shame in getting in touch with your sadness over the end of an important relationship.
- 2. Practice self-compassion.** Avoid self-blame, guilt, and other unproductive negative thought patterns.
- 3. Take good care of yourself.** Adopt healthy habits like getting enough rest, eating nutritious meals, and exercising at least five days/week.
- 4. Rely on people you trust for support.** Reach out to friends, family members, a therapist, a relationship coach, or your religious community.
- 5. Join a divorce or breakup support group.** Tap into community resources or find a group online.
- 6. Write about your feelings.** Take time each day to write in your journal.
- 7. Pursue a hobby or develop new interests.** You might not feel like meeting new people or joining a club, but socializing can reduce your sense of isolation and loneliness.
- 8. If you were forced to move, make your new place feel like home.** Increase your comfort with photos and other personal possessions. Give yourself time to settle in, meet your new neighbors, and get to know your community.

What are some other ways you can cope? _____

Choose at least two of the above activities to try for at least two weeks. What will you do?

1. _____
2. _____

Now, use the chart on the following page to record what you do to cope with your losses. Try to do something every day, even if it is reaching out to a friend. Write down the date, what you did, how you felt afterwards, and any notes (for example, if you will do the activity again).

Date	What did you do?	How did you feel after?	Notes

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you while completing this activity? Explain.

Did this activity help you cope with your losses? _____

Why or why not? _____

Who is supporting you during this difficult time? Has it been helpful? Why or why not?

What else can you do to cope with your losses?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with Living Alone After a Separation

Objective

To identify ways to cope with living alone following separation and divorce.

What to Know

One major adjustment following divorce or separation is learning to live alone again. It takes time to adjust to living alone and managing loneliness. Perhaps the transition will be easy, or it might take months before your new place feels like home. Here are some tips for living alone after a divorce or separation.

Enjoy quiet time to yourself. Learn how to enjoy quiet time alone. Use this time to engage in a pleasurable solo activity, like watching a movie, solving a puzzle, journaling, or other activities. Living alone might involve extended periods of silence. Embrace the quiet. Research has shown that silence is essential for brain health. Just an hour of silence replenishes your cognitive resources, relieves stress, and helps you problem-solve.

Establish a routine. You might not be used to living your life by a schedule, but it is a helpful when you live alone. Being on your own involves freedom, but that can lead to neglecting certain parts of your life. Putting things off means tasks pile up, and those projects, errands, and duties will impact your mental health. So, write down all the tasks and chores you need to complete each week and designate a time and day for each.

Make your bed each day. This is an essential first step in your new daily routine, and you will start your day feeling like you accomplished one small task.

Avoid planning for what “might” happen. First, focus on necessities and what you need in your new home. Initially, try not to spend a lot of money on expensive furniture or items you might not need. Identify what living alone is like and adjust accordingly.

Learn to cook (if you do not already know how). You might be tempted to frequently eat out if you live alone. Learn how to make meals for a single person. You might watch cooking shows or search online for delicious recipes for one.

Say “yes” more often. You might be tempted to say “no” when people make requests for your time, or when you are asked to do things, you do not really want to do. Start saying “yes” to events that get you out of the house.

Get social. Ask friends to stop by to see your new home or meet with co-workers for lunch. Volunteer, get a side job, exercise, join a local club, and put yourself in situations that require you to socialize.

Learn about yourself again. Identify ways you can improve yourself. Try a hobby you put off because you never had enough time. Start with something simple like reading, drawing, DIY hobbies, or even learning an instrument.

What else can you do to cope with living alone?

It will take time to get used to the added responsibilities, the quiet, and the sudden absence of your family. But it will get easier over time. This worksheet will help you identify ways to cope.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

What are some activities you can do to enjoy and appreciate quiet time?

Write down all the tasks and chores you need to complete each week, like food shopping, cleaning your home, or paying bills, and designate a time and day to do each task.

What are some necessities you need in your new home?

What are some things you can do for self-improvement?

What are some hobbies or other activities you put off doing when you were married? Are you interested in pursuing them now? Why or why not?

Use the following chart for the next two weeks. Write down the date and one thing you did each day to cope with living alone. Note whether you made your bed that day and if you followed your routine.

Date	Activity	Made your bed? Y / N	Followed routine? Y / N

Date	Activity	Made your bed? Y / N	Followed routine? Y / N

Did this activity help you begin to cope with living alone? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this activity?

Helping Your Child Adjust Following Separation and Divorce

Objective

To identify ways to help your child adjust to the changes associated with separation and divorce.

What to Know

Separation and divorce involve big changes for family life, impacting all family members in different ways. You are probably concerned about how these changes will affect your child.

It will take time for your child to adjust, and they may experience a range of emotions. A younger child might regress or act out, and older children might be angry or feel overwhelmed. These are all normal reactions and will get better over time. Warning signs your child is having more serious trouble adjusting can include:

- anxiety
- prolonged sadness and depression
- significant changes in eating or sleeping habits
- problems at school
- aggressive behavior

For serious adjustment problems, speak to your child's doctor. For less serious adjustment issues, there are practical things you can do to help.

Plan how to tell your child. It is best for both parents to do this together. Be honest and keep your child's age and developmental stage in mind. Younger children need less detail, while older children might ask more questions.

Be clear they are not the cause. Children sometimes worry that they are to blame for their parents' marital problems. Explain this is an adult problem and there is nothing they can do to prevent or change things.

Encourage your child to talk about their feelings. Listen carefully, be patient, and avoid interrupting. Allow them to be open about their fears and concerns. If your child feels uncomfortable talking to you, find someone they trust such as another family member or school counselor.

Tell them only what they need to know. Avoid discussing adult decisions or arguing in front of them.

Discuss living and visitation arrangements with the other parent before you share the plan. Once you finalize the plan, talk openly about living arrangements. Be clear about who your child will live with and when. Respect an older child's feelings about where they want to live.

Avoid saying negative things about the other parent, extended family, or friends. Set “ground rules” when talking with your ex. If you are struggling, seek support from a therapist or family counselor.

Be polite during pick-up or drop-off times. If you are kind and reassuring, it will help with transitions.

Allow your child to connect with the other parent when they want to. Avoid suggesting that your child is disloyal if they enjoy time with the other parent, or if they express a desire to talk to the other parent when they are with you.

Respect reasonable limits and rules set by the other parent. Avoid undermining authority or reversing decisions. Discuss rules and discipline so you are as consistent as possible in both households.

Do not expect children to act as messengers. Communicate directly with your ex-partner.

Keep it simple. Your child has the right to know what is happening and that things will be OK. Explain in clear, simple, and honest language your child can understand.

Take time with hard questions. Sometimes you may not know how to answer tough questions, so give yourself time to think. Tell your child you will get back to them. You might say, “I’m not sure how to answer that. Your mom and I are still working it out.” Encourage your child to talk to the other parent directly, and let your ex know your child has questions.

Read between the lines. If your child’s questions are motivated by specific concerns, ask them what they are worrying about. Reassure them with simple words that show you understand.

Keep the conversation going. Be prepared to answer questions more than once. Make regular time to talk to discuss concerns.

Talk about feelings. Your child will probably see you feeling sad, angry, or upset. Let your child know you love them, and your feelings are not their fault. Seeing you express feelings in a calm and healthy way lets your child know feelings are OK.

Maintain familiar routines and rituals. Routines help your child feel secure, safe, and in control. Try to keep daily and weekly routines as familiar and stable as possible. You can create new routines and adapt rituals, too. Work toward creating common routines for both households to follow.

Involve your child in small decisions. This can help your child feel like they have some control. Listen carefully and let them know their opinions matter.

Take time to have fun together. Do something spontaneous, like having a picnic at the park.

Read to them. Age-appropriate books can be a great tool. Check out <https://bookriot.com/divorce-books-for-kids/> or do a Google search.

What to Do

Taking the above suggestions into account, use this worksheet to discuss the separation and divorce with your child.

Write down your child's age(s). _____

Do you have any concerns about developmental stage or maturity? Explain.

Label your feelings and put them into words, and then ask your child to describe what they are thinking and feeling. You might say, "I know you're feeling _____. I'm feeling _____, too." Write down your feelings and things you might say to your child.

Feelings: _____

What you will say to your child: _____

Tell your child what to expect to prepare them for changes in their life or routine. Write down what will happen.

Encourage your child to draw pictures or write stories. You might read an age-appropriate book to them. What are some other creative ways you can help your child adjust?

Support groups and counseling can help your family if you require more support. Whom can you ask for help? What resources might support your family?

You might spend a lot of time talking and listening. Occasionally do fun activities together. Play a game, do crafts together, bake cookies, or spend time at the park. What can you do?

In what ways can you keep daily and weekly routines familiar and stable? What are some new routines or rituals you can implement?

What are some small or minor decisions your child can be involved with? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you identify ways to help your child adjust to the changes associated with separation and divorce? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 2. Managing Your Thoughts and Emotions

How Do You Deal with Emotional Pain?

Objective

To identify what causes you emotional pain and find ways to respond in a healthy way.

What to Know

It is normal to feel intense emotions like sadness, anger, exhaustion, frustration, and confusion after you separate from your spouse. These emotions will lessen over time. Even if the relationship was unhealthy, venturing into the unknown is frightening and worries about the future can make you anxious.

You can develop strategies to manage. By examining your emotions and taking action, you will learn to cope with these difficult emotions.

What to Do

Use this chart to keep a record of the thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories that cause you emotional pain. Write down what you did in response and whether your actions led to positive outcomes or outcomes that caused you to suffer more.

Date	Painful Thoughts/Feeling/Sensations/Memories	What You Did in Response	Outcome

Date	Painful Thoughts/Feeling/Sensations/Memories	What You Did in Response	Outcome

Reflections on This Exercise

Was there anything that surprised you during this exercise?

What did you find challenging about this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Becoming Aware of Upsetting Thoughts and Feelings

Objective

To help you become aware of how you are avoiding the things that cause you to be anxious and upset.

What to Know

Many people deal with their problems by trying to avoid painful thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories. They think that if they just distract themselves from these inner experiences, then they will be fine. However, while avoiding these unpleasant inner experiences may help temporarily, these strategies usually only work for a short period of time.

There is also a significant personal cost to your avoidance. Some people spend hours each day avoiding the things that could upset them instead of using this time to enjoy life. This exercise is designed to help you examine how you are avoiding the things that cause you to be anxious and upset, and how this keeps you from having a happier and more fulfilling life.

What to Do

Begin by listing the inner experiences you are trying to avoid. List three thoughts that upset you.

List three feelings that upset you.

List three sensations that upset you.

List three memories that upset you.

Write any additional upsetting thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories here.

List the things you do to distract yourself from unpleasant inner experiences.

List the activities or events you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

List the places you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

List the people you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

List substances you use to try and avoid unpleasant inner experiences (food, alcohol, etc.).

Is there anything else you do to avoid unpleasant or painful inner experiences?

Now go back to what you have written and circle the three things you do most often to avoid unpleasant inner experiences. In the space below, write down how your life might be different if you could accept these unpleasant inner experiences rather than work so hard to avoid them.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with Negative Thinking After a Breakup

Objective

To reduce negative thinking by using several coping strategies.

What to Know

Perhaps you cannot stop the flow of negative thoughts since your breakup. In addition, you might be experiencing grief, uncertainty, anger, and many other emotions. Coping strategies that worked in the past might not be up to the task this time. Here are some strategies you can use if you are struggling with any of these common negative thoughts.

1. “I’m not good enough.” The end of a relationship often brings with it a sense of failure. This thought is particularly common when the other person cheated on or abandoned you. If you are struggling with feeling like you are not enough, try the following actions.

- Collect old letters, cards, emails, texts, and so forth from people who love and care about you. Create a “smile file” (either physical or digital) and spend a few minutes each day reviewing it to remind yourself how others see you.
- Build your physical strength or endurance. When you feel strong and capable, you will begin to believe in yourself.
- If you cannot stop thinking about all the negative things your ex said about you, write down the statements and refute each one. This exercise helps remove the power their words have over you.
- Spend time volunteering or giving back to others. You will benefit from seeing the positive impact you have on those who are less fortunate.
- Limit your time using social media if you find it upsetting.

2. “I wish things could be different.” Maybe you wish you could go back to the way things were, or you imagine your ex acted or responded differently. If you are focusing on the past or ways you could change the situation, do the following.

- Start a daily gratitude practice. Use a journal, app, or even an audio or video recorder. Keep it brief and simple and do it consistently to remind yourself that even though you are experiencing a challenging time, there is still good in your life.
- Divide a piece of paper into two sections and label them *Things I CAN Change*, and *Things I CAN’T Change*. Then write down at least 5-6 items under each column. Spend your time and energy on the items in the first column.
- If you tend to reach out to your ex when you shouldn’t, make it more difficult to contact them. Delete their number from your phone or block them.

3. “I can’t move on without closure.” Do you feel stuck because you believe you require closure? Perhaps you tell yourself you need answers before you can let go and move on. If this is a problem for you, try some of the following actions.

- Use a journal to write about the questions that still haunt you. Explore likely explanations and keep writing until you come up with what might be the truth. Come to terms with the idea that you might never have all the answers.
- Create a closure ceremony by burning old letters or photographs, or repurposing jewelry from your ex. Bury something that had meaning in your old life.
- On a piece of paper, complete this sentence: “Because this happened, I have learned...” Once you identify what you have learned from an experience, you can move forward.

4. “I’ll never be happy again.” It is easy to recall “the good old days” and assume you will never find happiness again. If you are mourning the loss of the relationship and feel hopeless, do the following activities.

- Spending time in nature will remind you that death and renewal are natural cycles.
- See a live comedy show or rewatch favorite funny movies.
- Each week put one small thing on your calendar that you look forward to. Every 1-3 months, schedule something bigger that you enjoy.
- Have a conversation with an elderly person who has a positive outlook. Ask about their experiences. You will probably find they experienced things in their life they worried they would not recover from.
- Write down the expectations you had for your life and analyze them. How many are actually outside the realm of possibility now?

5. “Why did this happen to me?” Maybe you are wondering what you did to deserve these circumstances. Life might feel unfair. If you are feeling victimized or consumed by self-pity, do the following.

- Read a book that features people overcoming obstacles. It will remind you that bad stuff happens to good people, and people overcome great obstacles.
- What can you do to create a sense of purpose from your pain? Maybe you can reach out and help others or apply your knowledge and skills to assist people that are also coping with the end of a relationship.
- Write down some traits that make you capable of handling your circumstances. You might be a great problem-solver or networker. Whatever your strengths, focus on how they can help you now.
- Apply structure to your days and limit down time. Include activities that keep you busy.

6. “Life is too overwhelming.” Moving on after a breakup and rebuilding a new life is a big deal! If you feel paralyzed by the challenges in front of you, take the following actions.

- Identify a small step you can take right now – and act on it.
- Find ways to tap into your determination.
- Create accountability in your life. Set reminders on your phone to tackle one small task each day or make a list and cross off one thing every day.
- Do a required task while doing something you want to do. For example, make important phone calls while you are enjoying a cup of tea.

- Create a doable but challenging goal for yourself.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Write down some of the negative thoughts you have about your breakup.

What are some of the coping strategies you have used in the past that are not working for you now? Why aren't they working?

Who can support you during this difficult time? Write down the names and phone numbers of at least four people.

Write down some ways you can practice self-care. Be specific.

Date	Action or activity	What happened?	How did you feel after?	Were you successful? Y/N

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you while completing this activity? Explain.

What was the biggest obstacle you encountered when completing this exercise? Describe.

Were you successful at reducing negative thinking? _____

Why or why not? _____

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Accepting Your Feelings

Objective

To identify your feelings and learn strategies to accept them.

What to Know

Complicated feelings after separation or divorce can be overwhelming. Sometimes the emotions are so strong it is hard to even sort them out. Perhaps you feel sadness, anger, regret, fear, guilt, shame, anxiety, or a combination of those emotions.

If you have experienced divorce, you might have the urge to avoid your feelings altogether and move on. That is an understandable and natural response. You might search for ways to “get over it,” which, paradoxically, might result in your avoiding or postponing the authentic experience of your feelings.

How do you do that? The first step is to know what it is you are feeling. This worksheet is designed to help you identify your feelings and practice strategies for accepting them, including a simple mindfulness technique.

What to Do

Identifying your feelings, especially when you are distressed, is not always easy. Some emotions blur into others, and it can be confusing to know whether what you are feeling is, for instance, “normal” sadness or “depression,” which can have more severe consequences. Here are the main categories of feelings drawn from psychologist Robert Plutchik’s “Wheel of Emotions.”

- JOY
- SADNESS
- ANGER
- SURPRISE
- SHAME
- FEAR

Which of these emotions are you feeling most strongly currently? There is no right answer (and it might change from day to day, or hour to hour). _____

Now write a few sentences about the emotion you are feeling most strongly.

What other emotion are you experiencing? _____

Write a few sentences about your experience of that emotion.

Below is a list of some other words that describe the range of emotions for the feelings of SADNESS, ANGER, FEAR, and SHAME, which are often associated with divorce. Have you experienced any of these feelings? Check off the emotions that resonate with your experience currently (*from the "Wheel of Emotions"*).

SADNESS

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grief | <input type="checkbox"/> Helplessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness | <input type="checkbox"/> Despair |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned | <input type="checkbox"/> Despondent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scornful | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed | |

ANGER

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> Jealous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Provoked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resentful | <input type="checkbox"/> Vengeful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bitter | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

FEAR

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerable | <input type="checkbox"/> Exposed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Isolated | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned | <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insecure | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weak | |

SHAME

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disgust | <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespected |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guilt | <input type="checkbox"/> Unlovable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed | <input type="checkbox"/> Violated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scorned | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected | |

Now write a few sentences about the feelings you checked off.

So, how do you move toward ACCEPTING your feelings as they are?

You have already taken the first step in identifying *what the feelings are*. Now, you might be thinking, “I don’t like these feelings. I want to be rid of them! What good does it do to focus on them?”

One saying might help you: “What you resist persists.” That is, the more you try to dodge or avoid your true feelings, the more they are likely to hang around.

Mindfulness can help; that is, noticing and allowing what is happening right here and now with acceptance and without judgment. The exercise below can help you practice acceptance.

Name It to Tame It

Pick one of the feelings you identified. Now, get in a comfortable position in a place where you will not be distracted or interrupted. Take a few deep breaths, settling into your body. Relax as best you can. There is nothing you need to change. Choose one emotion to focus on. Perhaps you are feeling “vulnerable.” Close your eyes and repeat to yourself, “I feel vulnerable.” Say it softly, kindly, and with meaning. Feel what you are feeling. You might want to put your hand on your heart or hug yourself as you repeat this phrase. You might begin to cry or get tense. That is OK. Just BE with the feelings, thoughts, and sensations in your body right now. You are safe. You can feel your feelings without needing to do anything to change them. As psychologist Christopher Germer, Ph.D., who specializes in mindful self-compassion, says, “Soften, Soothe, Allow.” That is, soften into the feeling, soothe yourself in whatever way feels natural to you, and allow the feeling to be ... just be.

Practice this exercise at a time when you feel safe enough to experience some mild emotional distress or with someone you feel comfortable with, such as a loved one or therapist. Try the same exercise for different emotions as they arise. Take it slowly. Be kind to yourself

throughout the process. Notice how naming and experiencing the feelings *helps them* move through and then diminish in intensity - like a wave washing ashore: rising, cresting, then disappearing.

Describe your experience during this exercise.

Reflections on This Exercise

What emotion is causing you the most distress at this time of loss?

Did you have a difficult time expressing this emotion before your loss?

Are you avoiding dealing with any particular emotions? How do you think this is holding back your healing?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Become the O.W.N.E.R. of Your Distressing Feelings

Objective

To acknowledge, process, and own your distressing feelings after your divorce.

What to Know

Divorce can trigger unsettling and uncomfortable feelings, including grief, loneliness, despair, guilt, frustration, anxiety, hopelessness, anger, and devastation, to name a few. All these feelings are enough to make you depressed, and you might be tempted to blame your ex-partner for putting you through this.

Painful as they are, these feelings are natural reactions to a very difficult and life-altering situation. However, you can cope with them and gain wisdom, self-compassion, and strength. Instead of avoiding and repressing your feelings – or blaming your ex – become the O.W.N.E.R. of your feelings to effectively cope with them and begin to recover. This process includes the following steps:

Open up your awareness to your feelings and begin to take responsibility for your choices.

Where do you experience your feelings? For example, maybe you feel heaviness in the pit of your stomach.

Name your feelings. Try to be specific. For example, at the root of your anger might be hurt and disappointment.

Embrace your feelings, even if it is difficult, and comfort yourself with the knowledge that they will pass. Journaling or practicing mindfulness exercises can help.

Resist the temptation to evaluate your experience as good or bad. Instead, take a neutral stance, offer yourself compassion, and avoid self-judgment.

When you experience distress, be the O.W.N.E.R. of your feelings and use the above strategies to acknowledge, process, and own them.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Are you willing to be open to your distressing feelings and take responsibility for your choices? Why or why not?

Where do you typically experience feelings in your body?

What specific feelings are you experiencing? Is it sadness, hurt, anger, guilt, fear, or something else?

What are some things you can do to embrace your feelings, reminding yourself that the feelings will pass?

In what ways can you be self-compassionate and avoid judgment?

Use the chart on the next page for two weeks. Record when you have distressing feelings related to your divorce. Write down the date, describe your feelings (be specific!), and note what you did to manage or cope. Write down if you used one of the O.W.N.E.R. strategies described above. Finally, describe how you felt afterward.

Date	Describe your feelings	What did you do?	How did you feel after?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you become the O.W.N.E.R. of your feelings? Why or why not?

Did you feel better when you implemented these strategies? Explain.

What are some ways you can remind yourself to practice the O.W.N.E.R. strategies?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with Sadness

Objective

To identify tools to cope with the sadness and loss associated with divorce.

What to Know

The end of a marriage often involves sadness about all that was lost. Research has found that during and after divorce many people actually move through a grieving process resembling Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's five stages of grieving a death (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance).

The loss associated with divorce can be hard to overcome and can contribute to ongoing feelings of sadness or even depression. Denial of the loss is not a helpful long-term strategy because unacknowledged loss interferes with long-term happiness and moving on.

If you are in the process of divorce, or you have recently divorced, it is worth spending time reflecting on what you have lost. Remember, it is completely normal for you to feel sad or blue following divorce, and dedicating time to grieving the many losses you have experienced. Have a good cry and get in touch with your sadness. Be compassionate with yourself – because divorce is generally not an easy process for anyone.

Divorce often leads to loss of the following experiences. Check off any that apply to you.

Loss of:

- dreams of growing old with your partner.
- someone there with you to face illness, financial problems, or other stressful events.
- companionship to attend parties, weddings, and family celebrations.
- a handyperson who knows how to unclog the sink.
- creating memories and a family home.
- a sexual partner.
- friendship with your partner.
- consistent contact with your children (*if you share custody with your ex*).
- rituals and holiday celebrations.
- sharing inside jokes.
- your ex's family and friends.
- financial security.
- friendships of people who related with you as a couple.

____ predictability and routine.

____ sense of personal competence.

____ faith you will love and be loved again.

____ other: _____

____ other: _____

____ other: _____

The feelings of sadness, hurt, and fear do not end when a divorce is concluded legally. Coping with sadness and loss is a process, and this is a good time to rely on supportive people you can trust. Reach out to friends, family members, a counselor, your religious community, or a support group. Write down some ideas of who you can reach out to for support:

You might find additional divorce support resources available where you live, or online. This worksheet includes exercises that will help you cope with the sadness and loss associated with divorce.

What to Do

Reflection. Take a moment to reflect on the losses you have experienced because of your divorce. Write them down.

Write a “goodbye” letter. In this exercise, sit down and write a goodbye letter to everything and everyone that has changed since your divorce. Some of the things you might want to say goodbye to are your role as spouse or traditions and rituals you shared as a family. Some of the people you might say goodbye to are your ex or your in-laws. Writing a goodbye letter takes courage because it requires you to face what you have lost with the end of your marriage. But, you will have clarity about your losses and have a better idea of what you can do to move on.

This is a sample goodbye letter:

Goodbye to everything I thought my life was and everything I thought my life would be. Goodbye to intimacy and emotional security. Goodbye to my home — the place where we raised our children. Goodbye to the belief that marriages can last forever. Goodbye to the belief that my spouse would never cheat on me. I thought you were someone you weren't — loyal, respectful, and in love with me. Goodbye to excusing your disrespectful and condescending behavior. My dreams have been shattered. Goodbye to our future together as I create something completely new for myself.

Write your letter below.

Write a “hello” letter. In this letter, write about all the things you are happy about, including the things you will no longer have to deal with and the new things you can now look forward to. Writing this letter is a great way to start setting your sights on what is good and positive in your life – and begin to plan for the future. By becoming aware of what is truly good, your sadness will begin to lessen. Because this is a powerful tool for moving on from divorce, writing a “hello” letter can be repeated. As you discover more things that are good about your life, you can write a new letter or add on to your original one.

Pay attention to self-talk. If you are like most people who have divorced, your internal self-talk is probably not as positive as it could be. A great way to change your inner conversation is to start “name-calling” – in other words, refer to yourself in positive, uplifting ways. For example, instead of beating yourself up and saying things such as, “I was a horrible housewife because I didn’t clean our home enough to satisfy my partner,” or, “I was a terrible husband because I didn’t always appreciate my wife,” make validating and positive statements about yourself. Your sadness will only be compounded if you speak to yourself in negative ways about past choices. Write down positive statements, or ways you can talk to yourself in an uplifting manner:

Get more human touch. Research indicates one of the things divorced people miss the most is the casual contact of marriage — hugging, cuddling, handholding, and even bumping into one another in the kitchen. If you miss casual physical contact with another person, plan ways to get physical touch. Ideas include getting a massage, hugging your children or friends, or getting a manicure and/or pedicure. What can you do to get more physical touch? Write down your ideas.

Reflections on This Exercise

What else can you do to lessen your sadness following divorce?

On a 1 to 10 scale, rate how successful you were in finding ways to cope with the sadness and loss associated with your divorce, where 1 = not at all successful, and 10 = completely successful: _____

After completing these exercises, are you feeling more hopeful about the future? Explain.

Do you feel differently about yourself or your life now that you have completed this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Coping with Depression

Objective

To increase your coping skills to manage breakup depression.

What to Know

Stressful life events like romantic breakups and divorce can significantly impact your emotional wellbeing, triggering sadness, anger, bitterness, regret, anxiety, and stress. All these emotions are normal after a breakup, but if they lead to prolonged feelings of sadness and apathy, there might be something more serious going on. Researchers actually found that “normal” post-breakup emotional states closely resemble clinical depression.

Feelings of grief and sadness can be mild to severe following a breakup. Sometimes these feelings are strong for a brief period of time, but in other cases symptoms linger. Because emotional responses vary, it might be hard to tell if what you are feeling is normal or something more serious. Post-breakup symptoms that may indicate depression include:

- hopelessness or helplessness
- body weight changes
- change in appetite
- sleeping too much or too little
- loss of pleasure and interest in activities you previously enjoyed
- feeling worthless
- sadness or feeling “empty” inside
- intense self-blame or guilt
- fatigue and lack of energy
- listlessness
- apathy
- loneliness
- restlessness or irritability
- body pain, headaches, or stomach problems
- trouble thinking clearly or making decisions
- loss of self-esteem
- thoughts of death or suicide

Are you experiencing any of the above symptoms? If so, list them.

The good news is even if you are experiencing any of the above symptoms, they usually begin to subside on their own around six months after the breakup. As time passes, you will begin to

recover and gradually feeling better. Whether you are having normal post-breakup sadness or clinical depression, there are steps you can take to cope.

- Give yourself time to grieve the loss of the relationship.
- Avoid checking up on your ex on social media.
- Avoid your ex, or limit contact as much as possible right after the breakup.
- Set thought boundaries to avoid rumination (when you repeatedly think about something). Gain some control over your thoughts by reserving only a certain amount of time each day to process the breakup.
- Meditate and focus on the present moment.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes per day, five days per week.
- Avoid isolating yourself. Connect with others in-person, by text, or in a video chat.
- Look to the future and find a sense of purpose.
- Form a strong social support network.
- Practice good self-care habits.
- Learn problem-solving skills.
- Work on improving your confidence and self-esteem.
- Set goals.
- Write about what you are feeling, things you are grateful for, and positive experiences.
- Find ways to stay occupied to keep your body and mind busy.
- See a therapist, counselor, or relationship coach to help you gain perspective, address negative thought patterns, and establish coping skills.

If your symptoms get increasingly worse, you are using alcohol or drugs to cope, or you are considering suicide, contact your doctor or call the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357.

If your symptoms are mild to moderate, you may be able to handle them on your own by practicing the above steps.

What to Do

Choose some of the above activities to try over the next month. Using the following chart, write down your experiences. Include the date, describe what you did, and note how you felt after doing the activity.

Date	Activity	How did you feel after?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did practicing any of the activities decrease your feelings of depression? Explain.

What was your favorite activity? Will you continue this activity? Why or why not?

Who is supporting you during this difficult time? Has it been helpful? Why or why not?

After completing this exercise for one month, would you say your symptoms have decreased? Explain.

What else can you do to feel better following the breakup?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Managing Overwhelm

Objective

To reduce overwhelm following your divorce.

What to Know

Perhaps you have felt overwhelmed since your divorce—especially if you are working, raising children, and managing day-to-day responsibilities as a newly-single person. Maybe you find yourself mindlessly scrolling through social media or you are paralyzed by indecision. Functioning and completing everything on your to-do list are not easy tasks when you are overwhelmed.

Since your divorce, you might feel depleted, lacking the energy to fit everything into a 24-hour day. Perhaps you feel like you are disappointing others and not doing enough.

Overwhelm can show up as procrastination, and it can look like binge-watching a show or doing tasks that do not really matter. So, what can you do if you are overwhelmed? In addition to exercising, meditating, and practicing gratitude, here are some additional suggestions.

1. Be present and ground yourself using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique. Follow each step to ground yourself in the present moment.

5 - Look around and name five things you can see, right now, from where you are.

4 - Listen and name four things you can hear.

3 - Notice three things you can touch.

2 – Breathe in and name two scents you can smell.

1 - Name one thing you can taste.

This brief activity connects you to your senses and interrupts worry and racing thoughts.

2. Clean up your surroundings. When you are overwhelmed, decluttering or tidying an area restores order and supports you in moving forward. You can do something simple, like organizing a stack of mail or wiping away dust.

3. Prioritize. Focus on things that need to get done right now.

4. Stop multitasking. If your nerves are frayed, do one thing at a time.

5. Take the next step. Focus only on the next step—even if it is a tiny step.

6. Note your impulses. Instead of getting distracted, keep a sticky note next to you and jot down impulses or random thoughts.

7. Rethink your to-do list. Long lists of tasks might just add to overwhelm. Bring some order to to-do lists. For example, chunk like with like items or write the list based on your schedule. You might plan a big project for the morning and schedule mundane tasks for the afternoon slump.

8. Accept what you cannot do or control. There will be things you cannot do or control. So, you can choose to radically accept them. Radical acceptance means allowing for uncertainty—without struggle or complaint—and do what you *can* do.

What to Do

Make a list of everything on your mind that is contributing to overwhelm. No overthinking—just write.

Make a list of your worries.

Write down things you must do regardless of how you are feeling.

Make a list of long-standing tasks or to-do list items that can wait a few weeks—or even a few months.

Write down some ways you can streamline your schedule, declutter your surroundings, or rethink your to-do list.

Finally, what are some things you cannot do or control? Be specific.

Are you willing to practice radical acceptance? Why or why not?

Write down some areas of your life where you need help. Who can help you?

Using the chart on the next page, keep track of one thing you do each day to reduce overwhelm. Write down the date and level of overwhelm you feel, where 1 = very little, to 10 = extreme overwhelm. Write down the activity (or activities) you do to reduce overwhelm. For example, you might declutter your desk and take a long walk. Afterward, note how overwhelmed you feel. Do this exercise for two weeks.

Date	Level of overwhelm before 1-10	Activity	Level of overwhelm after 1-10

Date	Level of overwhelm before 1-10	Activity	Level of overwhelm after 1-10

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you reduce overwhelm? Why or why not?

What are some other ways you can manage overwhelm?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Dealing with Shame and Guilt

Objective

To relieve the shame and guilt that make life unbearable.

What to Know

Sometimes people become fixated on blaming themselves for certain situations or events. They blame themselves for something terrible that has happened as if they were the sole cause of a particular misfortune, yet it is very rare that a single person causes a complex event. People who have divorced sometimes feel shame and guilt. This worksheet is designed to help you reduce your shame and guilt by thinking about the many factors that might have caused your divorce.

What to Do

Describe a situation related to your separation or divorce where you blamed yourself.

List other factors that contributed to the situation.

List three ways that blaming yourself has kept you from living your life more fully.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Who else was to blame in that situation?

What are some ways you can let go of the shame and guilt you have been carrying? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Dealing with Excessive Thinking & Worrying After a Breakup with the TRAC Technique

Objective

To identify healthy ways to cope by using the TRAP/TRAC tool.

What to Know

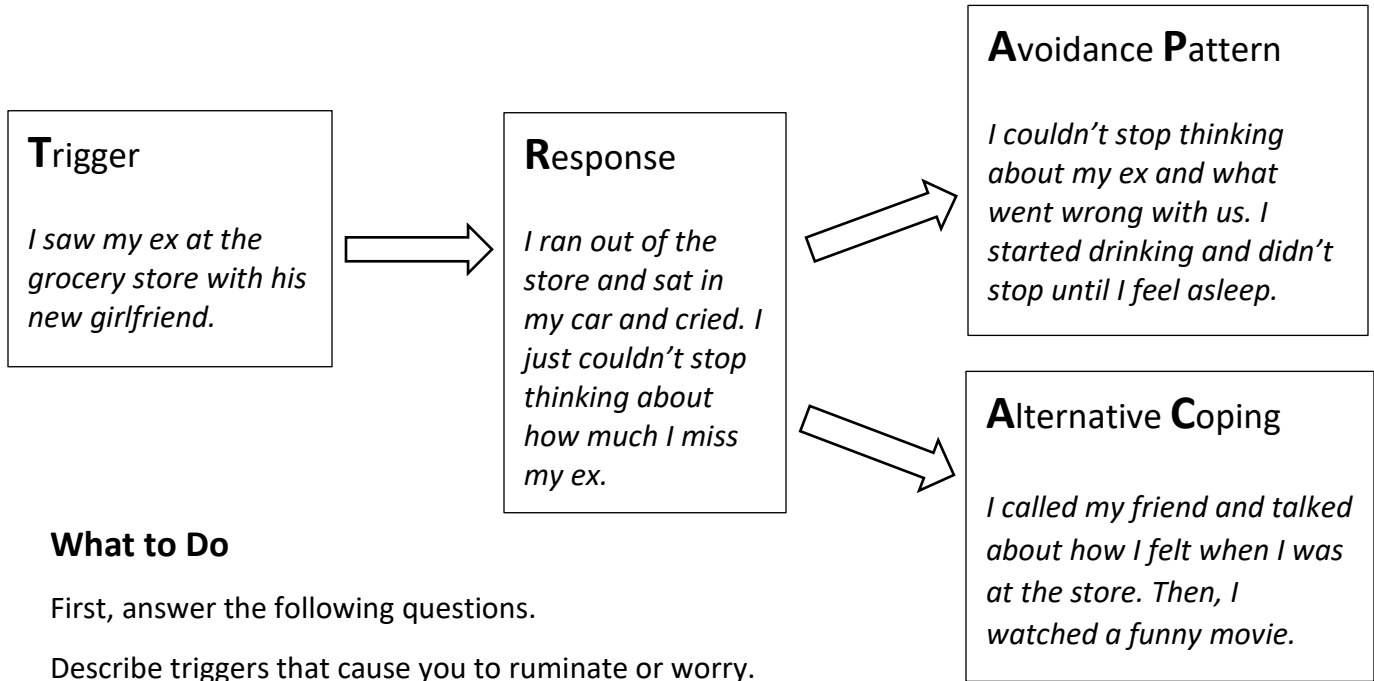
After a breakup, rumination and worry can trap you in an emotional loop. Perhaps you believe it will help with reducing upsetting feelings, understanding what happened and why the breakup occurred, and eventually moving on. Unfortunately, rumination and worry are usually unproductive – and can actually make your situation worse. To react with rumination (*excessively thinking the same negative thoughts about the past*) and worry (*thinking about the future in a way that makes you anxious*) is like grabbing a shovel when you are trapped in a deep hole. You might believe that digging hard and fast is productive, but in fact it just takes you deeper into distress. If you have gotten into a habit of ruminating, it can be harmful to your mental health, as it can:

- prolong or intensify depression
- increase negative thinking
- decrease effective problem-solving
- increase uncertainty
- impair your ability to think and process emotions

If you find yourself frequently ruminating or worrying, it can be hard to stop. Ask yourself if there is something healthy you can do instead. If there is – do it. If you cannot think of anything – redirect your attention and energy to something more productive.

Active problem solving is different from rumination and worry, which happens solely in your head. Choosing an alternative way to cope is more helpful, and you are more likely to think clearly and come up with solutions. You might take a walk, spend time with loved ones, or engage in a hobby – all of which can help pull you out of the TRAP and get you back on TRAC.

If something triggers you into rumination or worry, acknowledge what is happening and pull yourself out of the TRAP. Get back on TRAC by choosing alternative ways to cope. Review the following example.



What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Describe triggers that cause you to ruminate or worry.

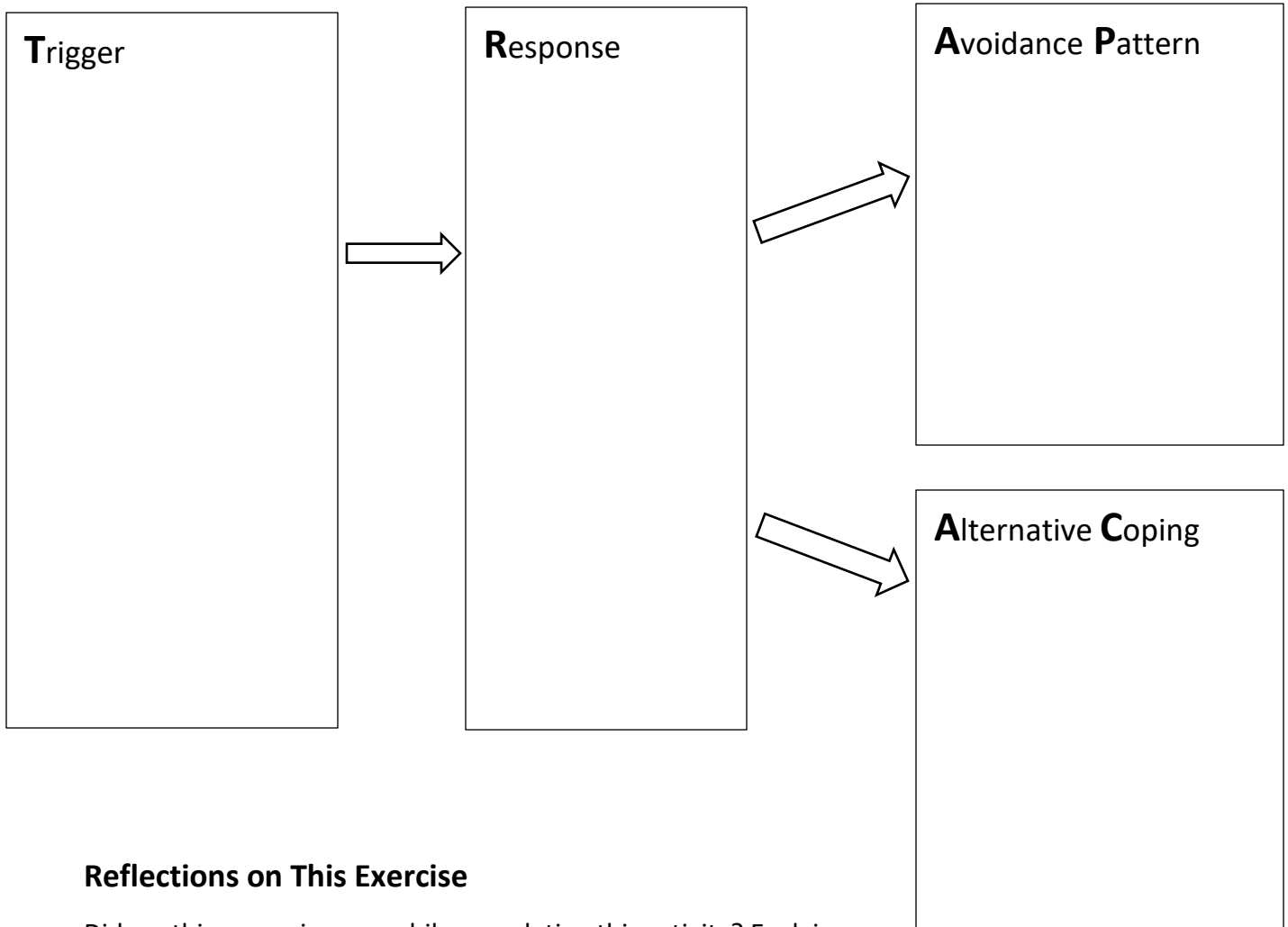
How do you usually respond?

Are there certain times of day you are more likely to ruminate? To worry? Explain.

Have you noticed a pattern in the way you tend to get trapped in worry and rumination? Describe what happens.

What are some alternative ways you can cope? In other words, instead of getting trapped in worry and rumination, what can you do instead?

Fill in the following diagram when you are triggered. Describe the trigger and how you responded. In the “Avoidance Pattern” box, describe how you might normally react (when you are in the TRAP of rumination and worry). In the “Alternative Coping” box, write down some ways you can get back on TRAC and break the pattern of rumination and worry.



Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you while completing this activity? Explain.

What was the biggest obstacle you encountered when completing this exercise? Describe.

Were you successful at getting back on TRAC? _____

Why or why not? _____

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Managing Anger After a Breakup

Objective

To manage your anger following the end of a romantic relationship.

What to Know

Going through a divorce or breakup is never easy, and one of the emotions you might be experiencing is anger. Anger is a normal emotion, but perhaps it is more intense for you, and it has started to impact your daily life. If you continue to feel intense anger, it might increase stress, leaving you drained and exhausted. What can you do?

Suppressing or denying your anger is not a good idea and exploring your feelings with a counselor or coach can be helpful. In addition to this type of support, you can also identify ways to minimize the anger you feel toward your ex.

Here are eleven tips to manage your anger following a breakup.

- 1. Awareness.** Start by acknowledging how you feel. If you are denying how you feel, you cannot change it. It is important to be honest with yourself. Awareness helps you own your feelings and let them go. In addition, be honest with yourself if you are avoiding your anger. Are you turning to alcohol, overeating, or drugs? Are you overworking, shopping, or overexercising to avoid how you feel? Perhaps you are angry with yourself, or maybe you are judging how you feel. What might happen if you accept you are angry, and show yourself some compassion?
- 2. Acknowledge and accept your anger.** This can be as simple as stating out loud that you are angry and why, or you might write about your feelings in a journal. You can write a letter to your ex that you do not send.
- 3. Forgive your ex.** If you continue to dwell on your anger, it will be difficult for you to move forward. Instead, forgive your ex – for your own wellbeing.
- 4. Identify and avoid your triggers.** Make a list of everything that sets off your anger and identify ways you can avoid those triggers. For example, if you get angry when you see your ex's social media posts, unfollow, or block them.
- 5. Practice self-care.** This includes practicing good hygiene habits, getting enough rest, and eating nutritious food. Allow yourself time to rest, reflect, get angry, cry, and grieve the loss of the relationship.
- 6. Exercise for 30 minutes, 5 days per week.** Getting regular exercise can help you release anger and improve your mood. You might even try a form of exercise that helps you release aggression, like kickboxing, hitting baseballs, or learning karate. Conversely, you can walk in nature to calm down.

7. Use relaxation techniques. Set aside at least 15 minutes every day to meditate, practice yoga, breathe deeply, take a bubble bath, listen to calming music, or engage in other relaxing and soothing activities.

8. Ask questions to stop cognitive distortions. When you mindfully listen to your thoughts, you might be surprised to find that sometimes your own thoughts trigger your anger – rather than anything your ex did in the past. Sometimes your anger is an interpretation of what you *think* happened. If you get stuck in negative or unhelpful thought loops, ask yourself questions about the thoughts. Are they true? What evidence do you have to support or refute them? What are more realistic thoughts you can replace them with?

9. Talk about your feelings. Choose someone who you trust like a good friend, family member, relationship coach, or therapist. A supportive person will listen carefully to what you have to say, and will not share your comments with your ex.

10. Use “I” statements if you talk to your ex. If you must talk to your ex (such as if you have children together), practice using “I” statements, which place the focus on what you are feeling. “I” statements prevent you from making accusations and putting your ex on the defensive.

11. Join a support group or online forum. You can talk with others who have experienced a breakup and learn how they deal with anger.

This worksheet will help you identify ways to manage your anger following a breakup.

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

How big is your anger? When did you last feel so angry?

Is this anger triggering older upsets?

What do you think is behind your anger (for example, fear, sadness, or despair)?

Are you turning to unhealthy coping methods to deal with your anger? If so, describe.

Are you angry with yourself? If so, why?

What might happen if you accept you are angry, and show yourself some compassion?

What can you do to acknowledge and accept your anger?

Is it possible for you to forgive your ex? Why or why not?

Make a list of everything that sets off your anger and identify ways you can avoid those triggers.

Take stock of your self-care habits to determine if there is anything you can improve. Perhaps it is something small, like taking a walk outdoors in nature after work each day.

What are some ways you can move your body five days per week?

What are some relaxation techniques you can use to soothe anger?

Who can you talk to? Write down two or three people.

Are there online resources or support groups you might be interested in to deal with your anger? Write down some ideas.

Over the next two weeks, use the following chart to note how you managed your anger each day. Choose one of the eleven techniques from the list above or come up with your own ideas. Note the date and the level of your anger, where 1 = very minimal, to 10 = the angriest you have ever felt. Write down the technique you used to reduce your anger, or an action you took to manage how you felt. Then describe how you felt after. Make copies of the chart if you need additional space.

Date	Anger level 1-10	Technique use or action taken	How did you feel after?

Date	Anger level 1-10	Technique use or action taken	How did you feel after?

Did this activity help you better manage your anger? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise that was helpful?

Tolerating Uncertainty

Objective

To increase your tolerance of the uncertainty in your life.

What to Know

Uncertainty is an unavoidable part of life. No one can predict the future, so you must learn to accept there is some degree of uncertainty in everyday life. In some situations, there is a great deal of uncertainty.

Most people simply accept uncertainty as a natural part of life, but after a separation or divorce you might find it hard to accept uncertainty. If you find yourself worrying, uncertainty can magnify your worries, anxious feelings, and even physical problems associated with stress.

With practice, you can learn to accept aspects of life that are ambiguous and uncertain that cause you to worry unnecessarily. This worksheet is designed to teach you a simple process that can help you deal with uncertainty. The acronym, A-P-P-L-E, will help you remember the mindfulness skills you need when you are uncomfortable with uncertainty.

Acknowledge - Notice and simply observe uncertainty as it enters your awareness.

Pause - Let go of the impulse to react. Put your mind on “pause” and breathe calmly.

Pull Back - Remind yourself worry is talking, and your need for certainty is unhelpful and unnecessary. It is only a thought or feeling. Thoughts are not facts.

Let Go - Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass and you do not have to respond. Imagine it floating away in a bubble or cloud.

Explore - Explore the present moment. Notice your breathing and the sensations in your body. Notice the ground beneath your feet. Look around and notice what you can touch, see, hear, and smell. Shift your focus to something else – mindfully and with your full attention.

You can tolerate the thoughts and feelings that go with uncertainty, and you can learn to live in the moment. You can use the APPLE technique to develop an attitude of acceptance, letting go, and paying attention to your thoughts and feelings rather than trying to avoid them.

What to Do

Using the chart below, describe situations that commonly trigger your uncertainty. Rate how uncomfortable you feel, where 0 = no discomfort, to 10 = extremely uncomfortable. Then choose at least one situation to practice the APPLE technique. See how many minutes you can spend each week tolerating uncertain situations, and eventually see if you can spend *more* time tolerating uncertain situations.

Situation	Date	Rate your discomfort	Minutes

Situation	Date	Rate your discomfort	Minutes

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 1 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Do You Complain Too Much About Your Divorce?

Objective

To identify if you are complaining too much, become aware of the function complaining serves, and find alternatives to this behavior.

What to Know

Talking about your struggles with someone you trust can be helpful, and sometimes you just might need to vent. But habitually complaining can be counterproductive, and research has shown that compulsive complaining harms your brain and overall health. There is a difference between constructively processing your feelings and complaining. How can you tell if complaining has become a habit? Here are some signs:

- you frequently talk about your divorce or ex-spouse in negative terms
- you discuss your divorce-related struggles with people who are not equipped to support you, like your children or acquaintances you run into in public
- people avoid you or quickly change the subject when you bring up your divorce
- you are getting tired of thinking about and talking about your divorce

If you think you complain too much, avoid beating yourself up. Instead of judging yourself, examine why you might have developed this habit and offer yourself compassion. Check off if you can relate to any of the following:

You want or need something to change – you are just unsure what to do.

You bond with others who are going through a divorce or complain about their ex-spouses.

You want others to know how much you are suffering and understand what you are going through.

You hope others will agree with your perception of events. When others agree with you, you feel your actions are justified.

Complaining has become a habit.

Complaints can be in your head as well as in conversations with other people. Check off the statement that best describes how often you complain.

I never complain.

I occasionally complain.

I complain more often than I would like.

I have perfected the art of complaining.

The good news is you can train yourself to stop complaining. It is a choice to complain – not an automatic or uncontrollable reaction. Follow these steps.

1. Define your complaints. Focus on what is bothering you, and whether you have valid reasons for complaining.

2. Monitor and track your complaints. Determine how often you complain and track triggers. You might quickly realize you complain more often than you believed! In addition to writing down your complaints, note who you expressed these grievances to, how they reacted, and how you felt after complaining. After a week or so, you will be able to identify your patterns.

3. Remove yourself. One of the easiest, most effective ways to stop complaining is to remove yourself from stressful situations and stop engaging with toxic or negative people. Take a break, but if you cannot leave a situation, schedule time to clear your head. For example, take a walk or meditate for a few minutes. Evaluate the people you spend time with because you may begin to mirror the negative traits of others who whine or complain.

4. Turn complaints into action. Learn to complain constructively, where you do something about what is bothering you. Try:

- focusing on feelings instead of facts to invite others to understand.
- talking through what is frustrating you so the listener can relate and empathize with you.
- sandwiching your complaint by placing it between two positive statements.
- telling others how a situation affects you so they understand where you are coming from and how they can potentially help.

5. Find the positives. Do something positive to replace the negative. Write about the problem and how it makes you feel in a journal. Include possible solutions and any positive aspects of the situation. Get into the habit of practicing gratitude, which can help you appreciate what you do have and recognize that things may not be as bad as you think.

6. Use thought-stopping. When you start to complain, visualize a stop sign and move on to a different thought. Change how you communicate by using the "but-positive" technique. For example, you might say, "My divorce was brutal, but I'm grateful it's over."

Complaining is a sign that something needs to change, so focus your energy on what you can do. This worksheet will help you find alternatives to over-complaining.

What to Do

Take a few moments to write down your complaints.

Do you have valid reasons to complain? If yes, list them.

Perhaps you are unaware of how often you complain. Check with loved ones who are willing to give you honest feedback. Who can you ask? Talk to them, then write down what they said.

Can you think of more effective ways to get your needs met (other than complaining)? If so, write them down.

Use the chart on the next page for one week. Write down every time you catch yourself complaining. Describe the complaint and what triggered you. Note if the complaining happened inside your own head, or if you complained to another person. Describe how you felt after complaining, and if you did anything to stop yourself. Finally, write down what happened, such as whether you solved the problem.

Complaint	Trigger?	Who was involved?	How you felt after	What you did to stop yourself	Outcome

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you reduce your complaining? Why or why not?

Did you feel better when you chose an alternative to complaining? Explain.

What are some ways you can remind yourself to avoid over-complaining?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 3. Focus on Self-Care

Practicing Self-Care After a Breakup

Objective

To identify and implement self-care habits to cope with a breakup.

What to Know

After a breakup, it can be easy to forget the importance of taking care of yourself. Self-care refers to the things you might do to reduce stress, recover from the breakup, feel better, and move on. It is helpful to "be your own best friend" by nurturing yourself with the love you might show one of your friends who has just experienced a breakup.

In the days and weeks after a breakup, you might experience overwhelming emotions and be forced to reorganize your life. Here are some suggestions to practice self-care.

- 1. Get plenty of rest.** Sleep is a vital part to mental health, and studies show that people who do not get enough sleep are more likely to be depressed. Especially during an emotionally difficult time, you need restorative sleep. Aim for 7—8 hours each night.
- 2. Seek support.** Have people around you who can listen and remind you of who you are. During distressing times, you might forget how strong and confident you actually are!
- 3. Do your best to eat a nutritious diet.** You might find this difficult if you emotionally eat—or lose your appetite during stressful times.
- 4. Limit alcohol and drug use.** Although you might be tempted to self-medicate, limit your intake. Alcohol and drugs are not a healthy way to deal with emotional pain.
- 5. Maintain a routine.** This will be the foundation for recovery, as it provides some stability in a time of upheaval. Familiarity can be comforting when everything is changing around you.
- 6. Review the positive and negative qualities of the relationship.** Explore what went wrong and if you ignored the signs. The key is to learn from this situation. Knowing what went wrong—and your part in it—will only help you grow. Identifying what was good and healthy allows you to build on those aspects for future relationships.
- 7. Reconnect with your community.** When you were in the romantic relationship, you might have neglected loved ones. Now is a great time to rebuild and maintain those healthy connections.
- 8. Exercise.** Exercise not only helps with depressive symptoms, but it also reduces anxiety. In addition, you might feel better about yourself after doing it.
- 9. Avoid rushing into another romantic relationship.** Although a new person might initially take away hurt feelings, they will not solve them. Instead, take time to grieve, heal, and nurture hope. Take the time you need to recover.

10. Establish boundaries. If seeing your ex-partner is too painful, set boundaries and keep them. Though having no contact might be difficult, it will allow you space to grieve and time for healing.

This worksheet will help you identify and implement self-care habits as you move on following a breakup.

What to Do

List the activities that are important to your wellbeing and that you can engage in daily or weekly to take care of yourself.

Select at least one new strategy or activity that you can include in your self-care plan.

Identify people that might be good resources for exchanging new self-care ideas and strategies, as well as provide you with support and encouragement.

List other forms of support such as support groups, religious groups, community groups, clubs, and so on.

List people you can talk to on a regular basis.

What can you do to ensure you get regular exercise (at least 30 minutes each day)?

List hobbies or other activities you can enjoy on a regular basis.

List ways you can improve your sleep habits.

List ways you can improve your diet.

List ways you can have fun.

List anything else you can do to take good care of yourself.

Now, write down a daily or weekly plan incorporating all the information above.

What might get in the way of successfully implementing your self-care plan? What can you do to remove these barriers? List at least 3 or 4 obstacles or barriers and how you can address them.

Using the chart on the next page, implement your self-care plan and keep track of how you are doing. Write down your self-care activities for two weeks. Write down the date, the activity (or activities) you do each day, and any obstacles you encounter. Finally, write down how it went.

Date	Self-care activity	Obstacles encountered	Outcome

Date	Self-care activity	Obstacles encountered	Outcome

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you practice self-care activities each day? Why or why not?

Did you feel better when you implemented self-care activities? Explain.

What are some ways you can remind yourself to practice self-care activities?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using the H.A.L.T. Technique to Cope

Objective

To apply the H.A.L.T. self-care tool to cope after your divorce.

What to Know

You might sometimes interpret your frame of mind or emotions as part of the process or moving on following your divorce. What you might not have considered is your emotions might be compounded by things you have some control over.

Sometimes angry or sad feelings might threaten to overtake you. You might just want to be alone, and maybe you wonder if you will ever feel better. When you have intense feelings, you can stop, calm down, and think. H.A.L.T. can help you remember to do this.

When you are overwhelmed by your emotions, H.A.L.T. and ask yourself, “Am I hungry, angry, lonely, or tired?” Review the questions below.

H = Am I Hungry? Some people overeat when they are distressed, while some people avoid food. Each choice can have a negative impact on your health and mental well-being. Ask yourself:

- Have I eaten something within the past 4-6 hours?
- Have I had enough water in the past 2 hours?
- Have I eaten too much sugary food today?
- In general, is my diet balanced and nutritious?
- Am I grazing and/or overeating?
- Do I have an underlying medical condition such as diabetes which might impact my ability to think clearly?

Take note: If you have ever been diagnosed as borderline diabetic, intense feelings can send you over the edge. Make an appointment with your doctor.

If you forget to eat or you do not feel like eating, set an alarm on your phone to remember to eat. Fueling your body appropriately is important so you have the energy to do all the things you need to do. If you are overeating, portion out healthy snacks that will help you feel full. Instead of grazing or eating sugary snacks, take a walk or do some stretching exercises.

A = Am I Angry? It is OK to be angry; let go of any guilt you have for your anger. Ask yourself:

- Did someone say something that upset me?
- Has someone done or *not* done something?
- Am I angry at God?

- Am I angry at my ex for leaving/for choices they made?
- Am I angry at myself for things I really could not control?
- Am I angry with others?
- Am I angry at the world?
- Am I angry at friends or other loved ones that have not “been there” for me?

First, acknowledge your anger. If you are angry with someone else, can you talk to them and mend the relationship? If that is not an option, what boundaries can you put in place while you are experiencing intense feelings? If you are angry at God or your ex, express it in a journal or letter, or talk about it with a loved one or counselor. Perhaps you just need to express yourself. It may not “fix” things, but it makes them more tolerable.

L = Am I Lonely? You might feel isolated after your divorce. There might be days when you feel very alone. Ask yourself:

- Do I feel isolated?
- How long has it been since I spent time with other people?
- Have I called/texted/messaged anyone today?
- Has anyone called/texted/messaged me today?
- Do I feel like nobody understands me?
- Do I feel like God abandoned me?
- Do I feel unable to talk to anyone anymore?

What can you do to reduce your feelings of loneliness? Perhaps you can join an online divorce support community where you can vent your feelings, or local support group where you will be received, affirmed, and understood. You might just need someone safe to talk to. If you do not have friends or family that can fill that need, consider counseling.

T = Am I Tired? Perhaps you suffer from insomnia or find you cannot stay asleep once you fall asleep. Ask yourself:

- Did I sleep last night?
- Am I going to bed too late or waking too early?
- Am I keeping myself so busy that I have run myself down?
- Am I getting adequate and appropriate exercise?
- Am I taking medication that makes me sleepy?

If you are struggling with sleeplessness, consider asking your healthcare provider for help. There are natural sleep remedies that might be appropriate, or you might consider a prescription medicine to help break the cycle of insomnia.

Hunger, anger, loneliness, and feeling tired are not the root cause of your distress. But any one of them, or a combination, can make you more vulnerable to feeling worse. You will feel pain and sorrow, but you can make adjustments in your lifestyle and life choices to make it easier to

cope. This worksheet will assist you in applying H.A.L.T. as you cope and move on following your divorce.

What to Do

It might be helpful to have a plan in place when you need to H.A.L.T. On the card below, write down your H.A.L.T. Plan. What will you do when you are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired? Write some specific things you can do. You can make your H.A.L.T. card on cardstock or laminate it and cut it out. Place it in your wallet, or where you can see it. You can even type the plan into the “notes” on your phone.

My H.A.L.T. Plan	
When I am...	I will...
Hungry	_____
Angry	_____
Lonely	_____
Tired	_____

Reflections on This Exercise

Was it helpful to apply the H.A.L.T. tool? Why or why not?

H.A.L.T. will not make your difficult feelings go away, but did you find you felt better when you attended to self-care? Explain.

What are some ways you can remind yourself to H.A.L.T.?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Developing Self-Compassion

Objective

To help you become more self-compassionate.

What to Know

You might have something about yourself that you do not like; something that causes you to feel shame, to feel insecure, or to feel not “good enough.” Everyone does—even people who seem to have everything—beauty, wealth, intelligence, and more—are often living with a sense of great inadequacy.

Do you think you are self-critical? Do you often feel you are not as good as the people around you or that there is something wrong with you? Ask yourself if you really need to suffer from your sense of not being “good enough.” Suffering is part of the human experience, and we all will have times of pain, failure, and loss. But do you really have to add to your suffering? Do you have to make yourself suffer more?

Kristin Neff, a psychologist who has dedicated her life to teaching the importance of self-compassion, notes that self-compassion is not self-pity. She explains:

When individuals feel self-pity, they become immersed in their own problems and forget that others have similar problems. They ignore their interconnections with others and instead feel that they are the only ones in the world who are suffering.

Self-compassion is also very different from self-indulgence. Self-indulgence is merely giving yourself short-term pleasure, which may get in the way of your happiness and wellbeing. You may indulge yourself with a big bowl of ice cream, or buying something special, or binge-watching your favorite show. These indulgences are fine occasionally, but as you can see, they have little to do with self-compassion.

This worksheet is designed to help you bring self-compassion into your life. It will help you show the same compassion to yourself that you would show to someone you care about very much.

What to Do

Begin by writing something about yourself you don't like. Write down one issue or thought that often makes you feel inadequate or bad about yourself, such as your physical appearance, your work, a relationship issue, a mistake you made, and so on. Describe that issue below by completing the sentence.

I feel bad about myself because:

What emotions come up for you when you think about this aspect of yourself? Write down as many emotions as you can.

Now take a moment to sit with these emotions even though they may make you uncomfortable. Just feel them without judging them. You might have some images or words come to mind. Don't judge them or try to get rid of them. Just observe them. *They are not you, but rather only thoughts and images you have in your mind.*

Write down any images or words that come to mind.

Now imagine an incredibly caring friend who understands and accepts you. Now that you are in touch with your self-critical thoughts and feelings, think about an imaginary friend who is unconditionally loving, accepting, kind, and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and all your weaknesses, including the aspects of yourself you wish you could hide from others.

Reflect on what this friend feels toward you and how he/she loves and accepts you exactly as you are, with all your very human imperfections. This friend has a profound understanding of what it means to be human. This friend is kind and forgiving toward you. This friend loves you unconditionally despite what you think of as your problems and faults. In his/her great wisdom, this friend understands your life history and the millions of things that have happened in your life to create you as you are in this moment.

This friend understands that the things which make you feel bad about yourself are connected to many aspects of your life you didn't choose: your genes, your family history, the place where you were born, and many other things outside your control.

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend – focusing on the

perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for. What would this friend say to you about your flaws from the perspective of unlimited compassion?

In the words of this friend, express the deep compassion he/she feels for you, especially for the pain you feel when you judge yourself so harshly.

Write down what this friend would say to alleviate some of your pain.

Write down what this friend would say to help you feel that you are only human, that all people have both strengths and weaknesses.

If you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, write them down. Make sure these suggestions would embody feelings of unconditional understanding and compassion.

What else would your friend say to you to express their acceptance, kindness, and caring for you?

What would this friend say to express their desire for your health and happiness?

Take a few minutes to feel this compassion. Feel the compassion from your imaginary friend as it soothes and comforts you. Sit back and close your eyes and feel what it is like to experience unconditional love from someone who accepts you exactly as you are without thinking for a moment even the slightest critical thought. Hold on to this feeling for another minute or two. Now, imagine that your friend wants to leave you with one important thought to carry with you. Just reading this one thought pours soothing compassion into you and comforts you like a cool breeze on a hot day or a warm blanket on a cold night.

Write down this one thought.

Now, write down this thought again very slowly. With each word, see if you can feel the compassion and acceptance behind this thought.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise?

Silencing Your Inner Critic

Objective

To reduce self-criticism and increase self-compassion following a breakup.

What to Know

Rejection and feeling like you failed because your relationship ended can contribute to a downward spiral of negative self-talk. You might believe your inner voice because it offers you “evidence” that what you feel so intensely is true.

Relentless self-criticism prolongs and complicates the grieving process following a breakup. Perhaps you are hard on yourself about your personality, your appearance, your intelligence, or things you said (or failed to say). Rather than beating yourself up, questioning your choices, and agonizing over what could have been, use this challenging time for self-care and compassion. Here are some suggestions to silence your inner critic.

1. Appreciate who you are – apart from the relationship. Who were you before your ex entered your life? Who do you *want* to be? Analyze your interests, hobbies, and friendships to begin the process of moving on. Make some short-term goals and use this time to grow into the person you wish to be.

2. Are your expectations unrealistic? Perhaps you blame yourself for not meeting a cultural standard that seems easy to achieve for others. The expectation that you should know exactly what makes the perfect relationship is unrealistic and self-defeating. Whenever you criticize yourself for being single, remember you are not flawed if you do not currently have a partner.

3. Consider what you learned about yourself. Each failed relationship is an opportunity to reflect on what you learned about yourself. When you notice you are in a self-critical spiral, take out a journal and write about what the relationship taught you. For example, “I know I could work on improving my communication skills,” or “I’d like to increase interests and hobbies of my own.”

4. Imagine how you will feel about the breakup in ten years. There will come a day when this loss does not feel so painful.

5. Pay attention to your thoughts. Be the observer the next time you criticize yourself. Notice how you feel, and if your thoughts make you feel awful, replace them with different, healthy thoughts. Create positive statements to replace the critical or negative ones.

6. Practice loving kindness. Be gentle with yourself when you are overwhelmed with negative self-talk. Keep in mind that beating up on yourself creates trauma. Talk to yourself as if you are a child being criticized. Be loving and kind to this child.

7. Avoid comparing yourself to others. Comparing yourself to others can create fear that impacts decision-making. If you believe you never measure up, you might wonder what the

point is in trying.

8. Ask yourself, “Is this true?” Whenever you criticize yourself, ask this question.

9. Be your own biggest supporter. Consider your past accomplishments, including the good things that happened during the relationship. Take time to acknowledge yourself.

10. Keep a gratitude journal. Reflect on what you are grateful for that happened in the past. Note all the good things currently in your life.

11. You are not the “mistake” – and you are not a failure. Everyone makes mistakes, and you are not a terrible person because of past relationship decisions.

12. Ask for help. Sometimes you might require outside help, and following a breakup is a great time to seek help so you can move forward with a clean slate.

13. Immediately stop negative thoughts. Create a positive statement to replace negative self-talk. The most powerful words are, “I am.” For example, you might say, “I am smart, funny, and a great cook.” Be mindful of the statements you say to yourself when you are upset, angry, and fearful. Turn those statements around as quickly as possible using positive “I am” statements.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Who were you before your ex entered your life?

Who do you *want* to be?

Write down some of ways you criticize yourself.

Who can support you during this difficult time? Write down the names and phone numbers of at least four people.

Write down your interests, hobbies, and friendships and make some short-term goals.

Write about what the relationship taught you. If you need additional space, use a journal or notebook.

Imagine how you will feel about the breakup in ten years. Be as detailed as possible.

What are some positive statements you can use to replace the critical or negative ones?

Next, examine what you have written down and review the list of thirteen suggestions above. Write down all the actions you can take to silence your inner critic. Brainstorm ideas – you do not necessarily have to do everything in this list.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you while completing this activity? Explain.

What was the biggest obstacle you encountered when completing this exercise? Describe.

Were you successful at silencing your inner critic? _____

Why or why not? _____

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Write a Letter to Move on Following a Breakup

Objective

To write a letter to cope with a breakup.

What to Know

It can be healing to write a letter to your ex if you are struggling to move on. Writing is a way to release any remaining emotions and thoughts. If the relationship was difficult, or the breakup was unpleasant, you might not have experienced proper closure. Writing a letter allows you to honestly express how you feel.

You might wonder what you will do with this letter. You will write it for yourself—not for the other person. So, there is no need for you to actually send the letter. You can choose to keep it or dispose of it in some way—such as safely burning it, burying it, or ripping it up. Do whatever you need to do to let go and move on. It is not so much about what you do with the letter, but what you put into it—how you feel while writing it and how you feel after.

In this exercise, you will write a letter to your ex. You might want to include feelings, things you want to say, or maybe thank them for being part of your life. You can express anger, pain, regrets, or say sorry. You might express love or explain how they hurt you.

What to Do

Writing a letter to say things and express feelings to your ex can make you feel better—and allow you to feel a bit more in control of a painful situation. You can even write the letter with someone else who experienced a breakup.

Who might that be? _____

If you decide to write the letter with someone else, sit down together and share what you would like to say before writing your letter.

What are some things you would like to include in the letter?

Think about what you feel and what you would like to say to them. What do you need to get off your chest? What were some things left unsaid?

Perhaps the relationship taught you something valuable, and though you did not see it before, you do see it now. What did you learn?

Would you like to offer or ask for forgiveness? Explain.

On the next page, write your letter. You can make a copy if you need more space or use additional pieces of paper. Take some time to reflect on what you want to say. Recall what happened, and how it made you feel. Consider how you feel now.

Once you have written your letter, decide what you want to do with it. What will you do with your letter? Why?

How did you feel when you were writing the letter? Be specific.

Did this activity help you cope with the breakup? Why or why not?

If you decided to write the letter with someone else, was it a positive experience? Why or why not?

What are some other things you can do to move on?

Are you ready to move on? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you while completing this activity? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Talking About What Happened

Objective

To increase the ease with which you can talk about a distressing situation with someone you trust.

What to Know

Sometimes finding the words to talk about something upsetting can be hard. If you are having difficulties talking about an upsetting or stressful situation, use this worksheet to help you talk about it with someone you trust.

What to Do

First, write down what happened. Describe using as much detail as possible.

When did this happen? Circle your response.

Today Yesterday One month ago One year ago Other: _____

Check off some of the feelings you had when this happened.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scared | <input type="checkbox"/> Sad |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alone | <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upset | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious | <input type="checkbox"/> Unsafe |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ashamed | <input type="checkbox"/> Worried |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hurt | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Could you manage your feelings? Why or why not?

Were any of your feelings overwhelming? Describe.

Did anyone help you? _____ Who? What did they do to help?

Answer the following questions by circling the answers that apply to you.

How frequently did the situation happen?

Once	A few times	Often
------	-------------	-------

Did you know it was going to happen?

Completely unexpected	Some notice	I was prepared
-----------------------	-------------	----------------

How stressful was this for you?

No stress	Some stress	A lot of stress
-----------	-------------	-----------------

How much stress did this cause your family?

No stress	Some stress	A lot of stress
-----------	-------------	-----------------

How much change did this cause?

No change	Some change	A lot of change
-----------	-------------	-----------------

How do you feel now?

I can handle it	I need some help	I really need help
-----------------	------------------	--------------------

If you need help or support, describe what you think might help you.

Is there anything else you want to share about the situation? If so, write it down.

Did this exercise make it easier to talk about what happened? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Identifying Your Support System

Objective

To identify people who can support you in various areas of your life following your divorce.

What to Know

If you have experienced a divorce, you might find yourself isolating from others, and you might find it easier to be alone rather than talk about what you are going through.

However, avoiding people can keep you from getting support, which can help you through this difficult time. We all need other people in our lives. Even if the people you know cannot help you, just being around others can contribute immeasurably to your happiness.

This worksheet can help you think about people who can support you in various areas of your life. Often, you will find you can get the support you need just by asking for it.

What to Do

Write down at least one person you know who fits into each category.

Someone I can discuss a personal problem with: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who enjoys similar activities: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me with a task: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can cheer me up when I am down: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who builds my self-confidence: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can give me helpful feedback: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who is a good listener and who is understanding: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can be honest with me if I make a mistake: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can hold me accountable: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me conquer bad habits: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me solve serious problems: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone I can count on to make me laugh: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can comfort me: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can care for me when I am ill _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who will be proud of my achievements and let me know it: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Local organizations and resources:

Online resources:

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Dealing with Upsetting Memories Through Mindfulness

Objective

To deal with upsetting memories using mindful meditation.

What to Know

Many people have recurring memories that they find disturbing. This is a common problem for people who have experienced events like a divorce, a serious illness, or the death of a loved one.

One of the most useful ways to handle upsetting memories is to practice mindfulness. The concept of mindfulness comes from a Buddhist tradition which encourages people to focus on accepting rather than fighting the thoughts and feelings that upset them. When you have an upsetting memory, you are encouraged to just pay attention to it without judging that it is good or bad. Be aware of your thoughts and feelings as well as your body and your senses. Observe what is happening in your mind, as if you were observing something outside of yourself.

What to Do

Many people find that the regular practice of mindfulness (also called mindful meditation) is extremely valuable for dealing with a wide range of emotional problems. This worksheet will help you in learning this technique.

Write down the memory you find upsetting.

Rate how upsetting this memory is to you from 1 to 10, where 1 = not very upsetting, to 10 = very upsetting: _____

1. Consciously think about this memory for about a minute, without judging it as good or bad.
2. Sit comfortably and relax your body and breathe slowly and deeply.

3. Now stop consciously thinking about the memory and just “observe” your thoughts, feelings, and your body. Observe and accept what is happening, without being the least bit judgmental.

Write down your thoughts without censoring them in any way.

Rate how you feel, where 1 = calm, to 10 = very upset: _____

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you notice about using mindful meditation to deal with the upsetting memory?

Was this exercise easy? Challenging? What can you do to continue practicing this skill?
Elaborate below or on a separate piece of paper.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practicing Radical Acceptance

Objective

To use radical acceptance to tolerate overwhelming emotions in a difficult situation.

What to Know

No matter how you live your life, there will always be situations and events that cause great sadness, anger, or frustration. You may wish to avoid these painful and sometimes overwhelming emotions but avoiding them is not helpful.

What would happen if you accepted things as they are – without trying to change, escape from, or eliminate them? What would happen if you refocused your attention on what you can do *NOW*? This is called radical acceptance – accepting even the most difficult situations the way they are rather than trying to avoid them.

When you practice radical acceptance, you acknowledge the current or past situation without judgment, and without criticizing yourself or others.

Why should you practice radical acceptance?

You may have heard the saying “The only way out, is through.” This means you must go through the pain to get to the other side of it.

Remember:

- Rejecting things that make you uncomfortable does not make them go away.
- Pain is a signal that something is wrong.
- A refusal to accept reality can keep you trapped in sadness, shame, anger, or other painful emotions.
- To successfully change something in your life, you need to accept it first.

Here is the example of Kendra, who struggled with the infidelity of her husband for years before she practiced radical acceptance:

Kendra and Jon were married for 16 years when she noticed that he seemed to be losing interest in her. Jon was always going away for weekends and even when he was home, his mind seemed to be in another place. He was constantly on the computer and texting people, but Kendra was afraid to ask him what was going on.

Kendra told her sister and her best friend that she thought Jon was having an affair. She wondered if she should try and spy on him or even hire a private detective. She started thinking about Jon and what had happened to their marriage all the time. She felt guilty, angry, and worried about what will happen to her children if they divorce. The only thing that would quiet the voices in her head was taking a few drinks and she did this every night.

Using radical acceptance, Kendra learned to acknowledge her feelings rather than giving them power over her or trying to avoid them. She stopped blaming herself and even stopped blaming Jon. Once she could accept that this was a difficult situation (but a common one), she contacted a marriage counselor and asked Jon to go with her to a session.

What to Do

There are several steps to practice radical acceptance:

- Stay in the present moment and pay attention to the emotions you are experiencing.
- Remind yourself that the unpleasant reality cannot be changed.
- Remind yourself that the past or present reality is shaped by numerous factors, decisions, and events that took place over time.
- Practice accepting with your mind, heart, and body. This can include relaxation techniques, mindful breathing, prayer, or visualization.
- Listen to your body's sensations (tension, tightness, etc.) as you think about what you need to accept.
- Allow disappointment, sadness, or grief to surface.
- Recognize that life, even when it is painful, can be worth living.

There are also statements you can say to yourself that may be helpful during this practice:

- "I can't change what's already happened."
- "It's impossible to change the past."
- "The present is the only moment I can control."
- "This situation is the result of countless other decisions and actions."

Now, consider radical acceptance as it relates to your own experiences. Think of a recent situation that you found distressing and answer the following questions.

Describe the situation.

What were the past events that led to this situation?

What role did you play in causing this situation?

What role did others play?

What did you have control of in this situation?

Where did you lack control in this situation?

How did you respond to this situation?

How did this response affect your thoughts and feelings?

Did you avoid dealing with upsetting thoughts and feelings?

How could the events have played out differently if you had practiced radical acceptance?

Now, practice radical acceptance on a current situation that is causing you distress. Describe the situation.

What are your thoughts and feelings about this situation?

What can you do to help you accept this situation?

Did you notice any shift in your thoughts and feelings about the situation after practicing radical acceptance? Describe those changes.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Rely on Your Problem-Solving Ability Even When You Feel Hopeless

Objective

To identify one or more strategies to solve specific problems in your life and to develop a “problem-solving attitude” to cope with life’s difficulties.

What to Know

You might feel so hopeless about your current problems that you feel there is nothing you can do about them. But is that true? In fact, there are very few problems that cannot be made better. You simply must be creative about finding solutions. Solutions may not always be simple, nor do they always address the whole problem that is causing you distress. However, even small changes can make a big difference in your life. Having a problem-solving *attitude* is the most important part of getting over your depression and hopelessness. This assignment is intended to help you develop a problem-solving attitude toward your life, rather than just dwelling on your problems and feeling hopeless.

Finding solutions to the problems that are weighing you down requires a different way of thinking. Albert Einstein once said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.” In other words, to solve your problems, you need to change the way you think.

There are many different approaches to solving problems. Cognitive psychologists tell us that there are at least 60 different problem-solving strategies. This worksheet reviews five popular ones.

To understand how you can take different approaches to the same problem, consider an example, John, who described himself as being “hopelessly stuck” in his life. John was depressed because his wife had just left him, taking their two small children. He had a low-paying job and was deep in debt. He could barely afford to pay his rent and buy food. He could not see any way to make his life better, until he decided to try some new problem-solving strategies. Here are the different strategies that John used to get “unstuck.” These may help you, too.

Break your problem into small solvable steps.

John knew that there are two ways to get out of debt - make more money and spend less money. He decided to look for small ways to do both. He was able to save over \$100/month by getting rid of his cable TV and just watching shows on Netflix. He also found that he could make money by selling things on eBay. This seemed too easy, so he began to look at other simple ways to change his finances. Can you think of two or three small things you can do that might impact your problem? Write them below.

Ask for help.

When people are depressed, they tend to isolate themselves, forgetting that there are many people who can help with their problems. John was a veteran and found free counseling advice as well as free financial advice at veteranscrisisline.net, a service of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Other free advice and support can be found through places of worship or community service organizations - and remember your network of friends and relatives. Write down several people or organizations that could give you help.

Try a brainstorming session.

Sometimes you must be really creative to solve a problem. Brainstorming is best done in a group of four people or more, but it can be done with just one other person. The idea of brainstorming is to come up with as many possible solutions to a problem as possible without worrying about whether they are realistic solutions or not. Make a list of all the possible solutions, no matter how far-fetched they may be. Then, review the list and find a solution that is most practical and most likely to succeed.

John had a brainstorming session with his brother Matt. They came up with a list of more than 100 ways to make extra money. Eventually, John decided to borrow Matt's lawn mower and he began cutting his neighbors lawns for \$25 a lawn.

Write down a problem that you can brainstorm solutions.

Write down the name of people who help you brainstorm. _____

Try brainstorming solutions to this problem for at least 30 minutes *without censoring any solutions*. The purpose of brainstorming is to come up with as many possible solutions as possible, and then choose the ones that seem the most likely to succeed.

Write down all your brainstorming ideas on a separate piece of paper and then write down the two or three best solutions here.

Challenge the assumptions about the nature of your problems.

Often it is hard to see new solutions when you are viewing your problems through false assumptions. Try making a list of all the reasons your problems are unsolvable, and then sit down with a trusted friend or a professional and determine which of your reasons are not based in fact.

John assumed that he could not get a better job because he barely finished high school and had no real skills. Over time, he realized that neither of these assumptions were true. Through a friend, he found a job salvaging automobile parts, where he was making twice what he made at his previous job. John enrolled in a school to learn to be an auto mechanic, which he felt would be a permanent solution to his money problems.

Write down any assumptions you have about your problem and then ask someone you trust to help decide if they are true or false.

Root Cause Analysis.

You might only view a problem as it exists in the present. However, serious problems usually go far back in your life. Identifying the root causes means going back to where the problem might have originated. Understanding the root cause can give you deeper insight into what is the underlying cause of a problem.

During therapy, John talked about when he started to feel hopeless and powerless. It was not when his wife left him. It was not when he left the military. He remembered having these feelings when he was just nine years old, and his parents were getting a divorce. He remembered that his mother was very depressed, and his father was distant and always drinking. John felt that perhaps his own divorce triggered memories about this time and made him identify with his parents. He eventually realized that he did not have to relive his parents' mistakes, but instead could make his own choices and certainly be a more active parent with his own children.

Write down your thoughts on what could be some of the root causes of your current problems.

Secret of Success: When you practice problem solving, you are working your survival muscle and getting mentally stronger, much like working out in the gym makes you stronger. Try focusing on solutions throughout the day. Even when faced with small problems, be aware that you are always finding solutions.

What to Do

What are the problem-solving strategies you think could be most helpful to you?

Are there any problems in your life that you think are unsolvable? What are other ways to cope with these issues? Describe.

Do you know anyone who could be a mentor in helping you develop better coping skills? Is there anything preventing you from talking to this person on a regular basis?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful to 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 4. Moving Forward

See the Big Picture

Objective

To manage your emotions by making sure you are seeing the “big picture” and not just paying attention to the negative aspects of a situation.

What to Know

When a situation triggers overwhelming emotions, it is common to only pay attention to the upsetting or painful parts of your experience. As a result, you may overreact to the situation and jump to conclusions that are not based in reality. By focusing on the negative things you experience – a type of thinking called “negative filtering” – you limit your ability to experience the realities of that situation.

Here are some examples of negative filtering thoughts:

- Amy accidentally deleted one page of notes before her class presentation. As she spoke, she tried to remember those missing points but became increasingly self-conscious, stammering through the rest of the presentation.
Negative filtering thought: “I can’t do anything right.”
- Mike broke his ankle after slipping on an icy sidewalk and it prevented him from going on an important business trip.
Negative filtering thought: “This is just my luck. Why does this stuff always happen to me?”
- Cassie’s boyfriend broke-up with her after dating for 5 months. This was her second breakup in less than a year.
Negative filtering thought: “Why can’t I find the right guy? What’s wrong with me?”

What to Do

Seeing the “big picture” means evaluating a situation from all sides, not just the negative aspects. Seeing the big picture enables you to take a step back from a difficult situation and observe things in a more objective way. This helps you better manage the thoughts and emotions that arise.

There are several questions that can guide you to see the big picture. In this example, Amy will answer the questions.

- 1. What happened during this situation?**
“I deleted a page from my presentation and got so distracted that I had a hard time focusing.”
- 2. How did you think and feel because of this situation?**
Thoughts: *“I can’t do anything right.”*

Feelings: *“Embarrassed and mad at myself.”*

3. What evidence supports your thoughts and feelings?

“In spite of the hours I spent preparing, I still screwed up.”

4. What evidence opposes your thoughts and feelings?

“I’m doing well in this class and my other classes, too.”

5. What would be a more accurate and objective way to think and feel about this situation?

“I’m disappointed in myself. I moved too fast and deleted an important page. I’ll be more careful next time.”

6. How could you react to that situation in a healthier way (e.g., calling a friend, using positive statements)?

“I’m human, and mistakes happen to everyone.”

Now, it’s your turn. Think of a recent negative situation where you felt badly because you were only seeing the negative aspects of the situation. Use the following chart to help you see the big picture.

Questions About the Situation	Your Answers
What happened during this situation?	
How did you think and feel because of this situation?	Thoughts: Feelings:
What evidence supports your thoughts and feelings?	
What evidence opposes your thoughts and feelings?	
What would be a more accurate and objective way to think and feel about this situation?	
How could you react to that situation in a healthier way?	

Do you often only see the negative aspects of a situation? Give another example of when you have done this.

What is an area of life where it will help you most to see the “big picture” (e.g., work, school, relationships, family, and so on)?

Do you know of anyone else who has difficulty in seeing the “big picture?” How does negative filtering affect them?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Moving on After Divorce

Objective

To decrease distressing thoughts and emotions, increasing the likelihood of acceptance to successfully move on following divorce.

What to Know

Acceptance is the most important step you can take to release distressing thoughts and emotions and move on following divorce. Accepting your reality as it exists – what it *is* and not what you think it *should* or *could* be – and giving up blame, resentment, and regret is required to successfully heal following divorce. For many people, acceptance is the hardest part of the divorce recovery process.

What can you do to accept your current reality and release distressing thoughts and emotions? Although it might take time and patience, it can be done. Here are some suggestions:

1. **It *is* all about you.** You can only control yourself. You cannot change anyone, but you can work on yourself for dramatic and positive change. If you blame someone else for your situation, you are powerless to do anything about it because you have chosen to absolve yourself of responsibility. You can create changes that will make your life better, but not until you stop trying to change what you cannot control.
2. **Get support.** If you think you can get through the divorce process alone, you might be surprised to learn support is very important for successfully moving on. Research consistently shows that getting support in *any* challenging situation leads to greater success. Whether you choose a divorce support group, a therapist, a member of the clergy, or a life coach – seek help. Getting support is an indication you really are serious about moving on.
3. **Get through the initial stages of loss: denial, grief, anger, depression, and other emotions you experience in the divorce process.** These emotions are natural, and each feeling needs to be embraced and fully experienced. Remember, there is a difference between fully experiencing emotions and getting stuck. Be aware of excessive self-pity or depression.
4. **Consider facts vs. interpretations.** You might get stuck when you confuse facts for your personal interpretations of reality. For example, you might believe you have been emotionally abused by your ex, while your partner may feel you are the one that is abusive. An outside observer might see a totally different picture. When you are honest with yourself, you can see the facts versus the drama or story of the divorce – moving you closer to acceptance.
5. **Be honest and take responsibility.** By acknowledging the truth, you can look at your life for what it actually is, versus a story about your divorce. You can then accept full responsibility for your life. If you cannot take responsibility, you remain a victim.
6. **Learn the difference between what *is* and what you think *should* be.** You might have a list of “should be’s” running through your mind: “I should be happier,” “I should be getting more

support,” or “I should still be married...” By concentrating on what *should* be, you ignore what actually *is*. You can begin to move on when you acknowledge your “should be’s.”

7. Release distressing emotions. Let go of emotions like anger, bitterness, hatred, resentment, or rage. These emotions harm you, not your ex. Work through them and release them, because they will weigh you down and block you from moving forward.

8. Forgive. You might not be able to practice forgiveness early in the divorce, but forgiveness of your ex (and yourself) will help you move on. Remember, forgiveness does not mean condoning bad behavior – instead, you free yourself from the burden of holding on to resentment, bitterness, or hatred.

9. Make conscious decisions. Making conscious decisions means you are no longer letting your mind chatter, the past, your emotional wounds, or your interpretations of reality run the show.

10. Focus on the positives. Most things have hidden gifts. If possible, search for the gifts of your divorce.

Successfully moving on following divorce takes work. This worksheet will help you examine your distressing thoughts and emotions to eventually accept what is and move on.

What to Do

Review the previous list of ten suggestions and answer the following questions.

Who or what are you currently trying to control?

How can you get support? List 2-3 people or resources that can help you.

Are you still experiencing some of the initial stages of loss discussed above? Do you feel “stuck” in any of those emotions? Explain.

What can you do to cope with distressing thoughts and emotions? Be specific.

What are your “should be” thoughts? List them.

Can you identify any distressing emotions that are holding you back? Explain.

What can you do to let go and accept these emotions?

Can you think of the “silver linings” or positive aspects of getting divorced? Describe.

Can you forgive yourself for your part in the divorce? Can you forgive your ex? Explain.

Sometimes it can be helpful to develop a symbolic action to help you let go and move on. For example, you can write about the distressing thoughts and emotions you are experiencing. Ceremoniously tear up the paper and burn the pieces. Or you can place the paper in a box and hand it over to a higher power. What can you do to help you let go?

When will you do it? _____

After you have completed this exercise, write about your experience.

Reflections on This Exercise

After completing this exercise, did you find that your distressing thoughts and feelings had lessened? Why or why not?

Do you think this exercise helped you move on following your divorce? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Taking the High Road After Divorce

Objective

To relate to your ex-partner in a healthy manner following divorce.

What to Know

“Taking the high road” refers to following a course of action which is the most moral or most correct and which is least likely to harm or upset others. It often makes things turn out better for you, and it is often the best choice during and after divorce because it means doing the right thing even if it is not popular or easy – even if your ex is behaving poorly.

You probably know it is best to take the high road in life – you often know what you “should” do. But following divorce, emotions can become intense when you are communicating with your ex about practical matters like negotiating parenting schedules. Especially if your divorce was contentious, it might be easy to communicate in a disrespectful way. Perhaps it is tempting to disregard your ex’s feelings, but there are benefits to choosing your words carefully and conducting yourself in a way you will not later regret.

But what exactly does it mean to take the high road following divorce? Here are some suggestions.

1. Mindfully communicate and manage your emotions. This is not about ignoring your feelings, because you do need to acknowledge, express, and release them. But your emotions should not serve to damage communication channels with your ex. For example, when you write to your ex:

- use email rather than text so you have a record of correspondence
- and you are feeling emotional, take a few breaths, and write your letter in a Word document or your phone’s ‘Notes’ and save it
- ask a trusted friend to read an emotion-laden text or email
- write as if you are speaking to a loved one instead of your ex
- hire a divorce coach or therapist to help you manage emotions and learn to communicate effectively

2. Be respectful – even if they do not deserve it. No matter what your ex has done in the past, you owe it to them to be civil – especially if you have children together. Reflect and choose your words carefully and remain as neutral as possible to preserve your dignity. Your ex is more likely to receive your message if you are non-reactive and respectful.

3. Share information about your children. Openly sharing information about the children is a powerful way to build a relationship as co-parents.

4. Be flexible. Perhaps you are irritated because it seems like you constantly rearrange your schedule to accommodate your ex. If it is best for your children, try to be flexible.

5. Avoid telling your kids the gritty details of the split. You want to be honest with your children, but there are some things they never need to know – no matter their age. You protect them when you hide inappropriate details about your marriage from them.

6. Avoid using damaging information. This might go against what your divorce attorney advises! Maybe you have the power to destroy your spouse legally, financially, or emotionally, but at what cost?

7. Choose when to engage. If your ex says something mean, does something aggravating, or intentionally pushes your buttons, take a deep breath, and walk away. It might take a great deal of self-control, but you do not have to react. The more you fight, the greater your stress – and the more your children are negatively affected. “Giving in” does not make you a wimp. Controlling your temper is the strongest, most courageous choice.

8. Cut the cord. Avoid constantly texting or calling your ex or stalking them on social media. This is self-torture, and you might have a hard time letting go, but failing to do so only harms your wellbeing.

9. Avoid lying, cheating, or hiding resources. If preserving your own integrity is not reason enough to take the financial high road, observe it from a practical perspective. If you have evidence your ex has been dishonest, and you must return to court for any reason, your case will be stronger if you have maintained your integrity.

10. Do not be a doormat – choose your battles wisely. If your ex needs to “win,” allow him or her to feel like a “winner.” In the end, you will be much better off if you rise above your ex’s pettiness.

11. Apologize if you make a mistake. You may not owe your ex an apology but strive to be the kind of person you want to be – and set an example for your children.

12. Do not take things personally. Taking things personally may cause you to feel offended or defensive – leading you to spend time and energy convincing your ex of their flawed perspective. Then, your ex becomes invested in showing you the inaccuracy of your perspective. This can become a never-ending cycle where no one wins.

12. Be honest. Telling the truth is easier than telling (and remembering!) a lie. An atmosphere of trust improves communication, allowing for productive and mutually beneficial agreements. Lies, silence, evasiveness, ambiguity, or vagueness create an atmosphere of anxiety, anger, distrust, and fear. Telling the truth in the kindest way possible is *not* being “brutally honest,” which can be hurtful and unnecessary.

13. Avoid assumptions and ask questions. Making assumptions leads to misunderstandings, distrust, and poor communication. Divorced couples often assume the worst. Assuming and then reacting to what you believe to be true creates drama. In addition, do not assume your ex can read your mind. Hinting, crying, throwing tantrums, or gossiping are not substitutes for asking questions and clearly expressing your requests, goals, intentions, or concerns.

14. Maintain your integrity and your legacy. Your words always leave a trail, and at some point, you may look back and regret your tone, the accusations you made, or name-calling. If you are a parent, remember that saying horrible things about your ex hurts your children. Maintaining your integrity is far more valuable than acting in ways you will later regret.

15. Prioritize kindness. You may have mixed feelings following your divorce – anger, sadness, loneliness, grief, and many other emotions may cause you to neglect self-care. Be kind to yourself.

Taking the high road during and after your divorce is not easy. It might even seem unfair. Why would you want to do anything good, fair, or kind to someone who destroyed your family and your dreams for the future? Committing to taking the high road increases trust, minimizes anxiety and fear, and benefits you and your children.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

What are some ways you can improve communication with your ex? Be specific.

What are some ways you can be more flexible?

Is taking the high road difficult for you? Why or why not?

What are some things you can do right now to take the high road? Explain.

Did this exercise help you take the high road with your ex? Why or why not?

What else can you do to relate to your ex-partner in a healthy manner? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Creating a Forgiveness Ritual

Objective

To take action toward someone who hurt you through a forgiveness ritual.

You Should Know

Forgiveness is a conscious decision to let go of anger or resentment you feel toward a person who has hurt you. Forgiveness does not mean you have forgotten, minimized, or excused an offense. Instead, it means recognizing it and making a conscious decision to let go of the pain. When forgiving someone, it is not necessary to reconcile with the person. You might believe reconciliation occurs along with forgiveness, but this is not always the case. For example, you may be able to forgive a family member who said hurtful things to you, but it might be harmful, both mentally and physically, to maintain a close relationship with that person. Forgiveness might take time, especially if the offense was serious. When someone causes serious harm, either deliberately or accidentally, true forgiveness can be challenging.

Here are some suggestions to forgive someone who has hurt you:

- Understand why the other person hurt you by talking about the issue.
- Empathize with the other person's situation.
- Avoid focusing on the feelings directed toward the person who did wrong.
- Reflect on when you hurt someone else and treat forgiveness of another person as forgiveness of yourself.
- Tell the other person directly they are forgiven.
- Draw from spiritual, cultural, and/or religious teachings.

Forgiveness benefits you as well as the person you choose to forgive. Studies show an inability or unwillingness to forgive can have a negative impact on your mental health and well-being, contributing to depression and anxiety. If you forgive easily, you tend to experience increased happiness, better physical health, and stronger relationships. In general, you are less likely to experience the negative effects of stress. You can resolve conflicts more easily, repair damaged relationships, and experience higher levels of empathy. You are also likely to be more resistant to illness than those who hold grudges, as studies show people who hold grudges are more likely to have compromised immune systems.

According to acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), like all other thoughts and feelings, the thoughts and feelings that accompany forgiveness exist to be observed and held lightly while focusing on your personal values. Forgiveness is viewed as an action, not a feeling. If you offer forgiveness, you will likely feel a sense of relief, lightness, peace, and ease. However, these feelings will come and go. In the past, you might have forgiven someone and felt good, only to realize later your positive feelings passed and anger replaced them! What can you do?

Feelings and emotions come and go, so that is why it is useful to view forgiveness as an action. You can choose to behave in a forgiving manner as your feelings come and go.

What to Do

One action you can take is creating a forgiveness ritual. You can use your creativity to adapt this exercise into something more relevant and personal to you.

First, think of a time when someone hurt you. Choose a situation that is unresolved, and you have not forgiven the person. Describe.

Step 1. Complete the following statements:

The thoughts, feelings, and memories I have been holding on to:

Holding on to these feelings and thoughts have hurt me in the following ways:

Step 2. In your own words, write a commitment statement that describes how you will let these painful thoughts and feelings come and go, no matter how many times they return— without holding on to them, getting caught up in them, or allowing them to cause additional hurt.

My commitment is to:

Step 3. Now, plan to read your answers from steps 1 and 2 aloud to a trusted family member or friend. Write down who you will read your statements to, when you will do it, and where you will do it.

Step 4. After you read your statements, do something that symbolizes starting over—for example, burn your statements and scatter the ashes. Write down what you will do.

Step 5. After completing the ritual, do something to nurture and care for yourself. Describe what you will do.

Reflections on This Exercise

After completing the forgiveness ritual, reflect on your values. If you could respond mindfully when someone hurts you, acting on your deepest values, what would you say and do? Are you willing to forgive, let go, and move on? Are you willing to release your painful feelings and let go of unhelpful thoughts? Explain your answers.

When someone you care about hurts you, how will you ideally respond?

When you hurt someone, how will you ideally respond?

What will you say or do to make amends?

What did you learn about yourself during this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Learning to Forgive Yourself

Objective

To identify a mistake or choice you regret and begin the process of self-forgiveness.

What to Know

Everyone makes mistakes, and the trick is to move forward following poor choices or mistakes – rather than dwelling on them and beating yourself up. It might be painful or uncomfortable, and will include self-forgiveness, which involves accepting responsibility for your actions without making excuses or beating yourself up. Forgiving yourself requires self-compassion, kindness, and self-understanding.

Research indicates that people who practice self-forgiveness have better mental and emotional health, more positive attitudes, and healthier relationships. Lack of self-forgiveness leads to an increase in stress, pessimism, anxiety, depression, or substance abuse.

There is a simple 4-step process you can use to forgive yourself, called the “4 R's of Self-Forgiveness:”

- 1. Accept Responsibility.** Forgiving yourself isn't just about moving on and letting go of the past; it also includes accepting responsibility for your part in what happened. Facing what you have done or what happened is the first step in forgiving yourself. It might be the most difficult step for you. If you've been making excuses, rationalizing, or justifying your actions, it's time to take responsibility.
- 2. Express Remorse.** You'll probably experience a range of emotions, including guilt and shame. These feelings are normal and can lead to positive behavior change. Use a journal or write a letter to increase your self-awareness and express your regret.
- 3. Repair the Damage and Restore Trust.** Making amends is an important part of self-forgiveness. One way to release guilt is to take action to rectify your mistake. Apologize and identify ways you can make it up to whomever you have hurt. This step might appear to benefit only the person you've harmed, but repairing the damage means *you* can begin to move on.
- 4. Focus on Renewal.** Rumination, self-hatred, or self-pity is damaging to your self-esteem and motivation. Forgiving yourself requires learning from the experience and growing as a person. So, begin to understand why you made the choice or behaved the way you did. Reflect on what you can do to prevent similar choices or behaviors in the future.

This worksheet will help you identify a mistake or choice you have made and begin the process of self-forgiveness.

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

Describe the mistake or choice you made that hurt another person.

Why did you make the choice or behave as you did?

What are some things you say to yourself regarding this situation?

How do you feel about yourself?

Are you able and willing to recognize, accept, and own your feelings? Y / N

Why or why not?

Indicate the percentage of guilt and shame you feel (out of 100%).

Guilt (regret about you have done): ____%

Shame (feeling unworthy, undeserving, and deficient): ____%

Is your guilt appropriate? Y / N

Explain your answer.

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = extremely low, and 10 = very high, rate your self-esteem: _____

As you examine how you feel about yourself, you might realize that beneath your feelings of guilt, shame, or other unhealthy reactions that there are untrue beliefs you hold about yourself. Some of these beliefs might have been based on what others said to you. Can you identify any of these false beliefs? If so, write them down.

Are you willing to release these beliefs? Why or why not?

Are you willing to take responsibility for your actions? Y / N

What can you do to take responsibility?

Is there anyone you need to make amends with? If so, who? Write down the name(s).

What did you learn from this experience?

Reflect on what you can do to prevent similar choices or behaviors in the future.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Letting Go of Grudges

Objective

To identify and let go of your grudges.

What to Know

Do you hold grudges? Holding a grudge involves replaying a past injustice over and over in your head. If you are holding a grudge, you repeatedly get caught up in the emotions associated with the situation long after it has passed. Do you really want to stay “stuck” and keep rehashing painful situations? What will it take for you to move on and let go?

Holding grudges weighs you down. When you hold grudges, it is not possible to heal your emotional pain. And holding grudges may actually harm your health. In one study, adults who held grudges for more than a decade experienced more significant cognitive decline than those who were more forgiving. Some studies even suggest that holding grudges may increase stress hormones such as cortisol, negatively impacting your immune system.

The longer you hold a grudge, the more difficult it is to forgive and move on. To let go of a grudge, shift your focus off the person who “wronged” you and the story of your suffering. Here are steps you can take to let go of a grudge.

1. **Acknowledge the problem.** Identify the grudge and what is causing you to hold onto it.
2. **Identify your feelings.** A grudge can form when a problem is not fully confronted or solved. Clarify your feelings on the situation. Then, decide if this is something you will work on yourself or if you need to contact the person involved.
3. **Gain understanding.** Sometimes it is helpful to put yourself in the other person’s shoes to understand their point of view and behavior. Understanding the other person does not justify their behavior or that you were wronged, but it might make it easier to let go of the grudge.
4. **Acceptance.** Consciously choose to release the grudge – with or without an apology. The other person may never come around, and they might have forgotten about the issue or not even realize how you were affected. Even if you do not receive an apology, the other person might be remorseful. Some people are unable to apologize.
5. **Move on and avoid dwelling on it.** Once you decide to move on and release the grudge, keep moving forward. Do not spend time thinking about the situation, or repeatedly discuss it with others. If the issue is brought up in conversation, change the subject.

6. **Consider the positive.** You can view the situation that caused your grudge as a learning experience. Trying to understand the person you were angry at can help you let go of the grievance and release lingering resentment.

7. **Let go.** Making a determined and sincere effort to let go of a grudge can lead to feelings of calm and greater happiness.

8. **Forgive.** Forgiving the person does not mean forgetting about what happened; it is simply acknowledging differences and accepting that everyone makes mistakes. Forgiving is not always easy – especially if you have experienced hurt and pain – but it is an important way to have more peace in your life.

What to Do

First, reflect on grudges you are holding against other people, including family members, friends, or a spouse or partner. On the chart on the next page, write down the grudges you are holding, and next to each statement, rate the intensity of your anger on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = little to no anger, and 10 = extreme anger or fury.

Name of person	Grudge	How long have you held this grudge?	Intensity (1-10)

Which grudge is hardest to release? _____

Which grudge might be easiest to release? _____

Choose one grudge to work on releasing. Write it down. _____

How does it benefit you to hold onto this grudge?

Is this a grudge you can let go of yourself, or do you need help from a professional?

What can you do to understand the other person and their behavior better?

Are you able to accept the situation as it is, even without an apology?

What can you learn from this situation? About yourself? About the other person?

Reflections on This Exercise

What else can you do to let go of grudges?

On a 1 to 10 scale, how successful were you at letting go of your grudges, where 1 = not at all successfully, and 10 = completely successful: _____

Are you ready to let go of additional grudges? Explain.

Do you feel differently about yourself or your life now that you have completed this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise that was helpful?

Exploring Your New Identity Following Divorce

Objective

To identify interests and positive qualities as you create a new identity following divorce.

What to Know

Divorce is a significant life transition, an event that shifts your status, your roles, and your identity. Transitions mark the endings of old phases and the beginning of new ones, producing changes in your life trajectory. A major transition like divorce will cause you to rethink your identity.

Your identity answers the following questions: “Who are you?” and “What does it mean to be you?” Identity includes the basic values that shape your choices and what you value related to relationships, career, and more. You might hold many identities: parent, partner, teacher, or friend, for example.

When you divorce, you might experience an identity crisis. Not only do you lose your spouse, but also your lifestyle and way of being in the world. Your identity is closely connected to your relationships. So, when relationships change, how is your identity affected? You are no longer someone’s spouse, you file your taxes differently, and you might have less money to spend – affecting the way you live your life and see yourself. Your identity as a parent might change, and you might even lose friends. The key is to recognize your identity will change following divorce and take proactive steps to create a new identity.

If you connected your identity to your ex-spouse, you might feel lost when the relationship ends. This worksheet will help you identify your interests and positive qualities to create a new identity following divorce.

What to Do

First, examine the changes that have occurred since your divorce, some of the qualities you have discovered in yourself, and interests you might like to cultivate. Focus on your strengths and skills. In your post-divorce life, you will build on these capacities to create a new identity.

Describe five changes you have experienced because of your divorce. This might include where you live, whom you live with, job status, and so on.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Describe how you have adjusted to these changes. Are you having difficulties or challenges? What has this transition been like for you? Explain.

Describe qualities, beliefs, personality traits, and anything else about you that has remained unchanged by your divorce.

Describe five positive qualities or traits you have discovered or developed since your divorce. For example, you might have discovered you are independent, financially savvy, or courageous.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What are five interests or activities you would like to explore?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Did this exercise help you create a new identity? Why or why not?

Did anything surprise you as you completed this exercise? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Finding Happiness

Objective

To increase positivity and happiness following divorce.

What to Know

If you have recently experienced a divorce, perhaps you wonder if you will ever feel happy again. If you are depressed, disappointed, or experiencing other challenging emotions, you might believe the possibilities for happiness are limited. There are actions you can take to eventually regain hope and feel happy again.

Divorce recovery takes time, but there are ways to find happiness. Here are fifteen tips to become more positive and cultivate happiness after your divorce.

- 1. Pay attention to your thoughts.** Re-train your mind by tapping into the power of positive thinking to increase your happiness. Whenever you have negative thoughts, replace them with more positive or even neutral thoughts.
- 2. Focus on what you want.** Put your attention on the things you desire. For example, if your desire is to experience more happiness, commit to spending more time doing things you enjoy. If socializing with loved ones brings you joy, schedule regular get-togethers.
- 3. Believe you can be happy.** Even though you feel sad now, recall happy memories and tap into joy by doing something you love. Continuously remind yourself that you *can* have or be whatever you want.
- 4. Take intentional actions.** Do things that are positive and inspirational, like reading books, attending seminars, listening to audios, or watching YouTube videos.
- 5. Practice gratitude.** Begin each morning by saying, “Thank you!” – even if you are struggling. Appreciate all the good things in your life and all the wonderful things that are coming. Use a gratitude journal and take time to write in it each day. Always look for the good things you have in your life.
- 6. Be patient.** It will take some time to adjust to life after divorce. It is not always easy to accept that you are powerless over some situations, and if you struggle with being patient, remind yourself that you are taking the necessary steps.
- 7. Seek support.** Identify the people you can rely on for support. Speak to your religious leader or hire a therapist or a divorce coach. You can also attend an in-person or online divorce support group.
- 8. Release animosity.** By letting go of anger or hatred, you will more easily move forward. This is an area where a strong support network is helpful as you process these feelings.

9. Remember why you got divorced. Perhaps you forget the negative experiences, and you might even miss your ex-partner. This is natural, but you divorced for valid reasons. So, when you start to have regrets or miss your old life, remind yourself why you chose to move on.

10. Discover yourself. Finding happiness is a process that involves self-discovery. Identify new experiences and get out of your comfort zone. Doing things for the first time will increase your confidence. Here are some examples:

- travel
- take a class
- try a new hairstyle
- learn a language
- train for a competitive event
- sample new foods at a restaurant you have never visited
- go to the theater

11. Remain single for a while. Rushing into a new relationship too soon can lead to more heartache. Take time to figure out what you want in your post-divorce life and allow yourself time to heal.

12. Take accountability for your happiness. At any moment, you have the choice to be happy. Here are some ways to take accountability for your own happiness:

- stay optimistic about the future
- live in the moment
- practice mindfulness exercises
- meditate
- set goals for the future
- deepen your faith
- find reasons to celebrate

13. Mind your finances. One of the most challenging aspects of divorce is the financial strain it can cause. To avoid financial problems, be mindful of your financial situation, create a budget, and seek the assistance of a financial advisor if needed.

14. Care for your physical health. Eat a healthy diet, exercise, and get enough sleep. Not only will you have more energy and confidence, but others will see you the way you want to be seen.

15. Practice self-love. Self-love and nurturing are the key to finding happiness after divorce. If had an unhappy marriage, you might not know how to show yourself love. Here are some ways:

- spend time alone doing things you enjoy
- go on a trip by yourself
- celebrate big and small accomplishments
- create a vision board
- enjoy a spa day

- list all the things you love about yourself
- learn to say no
- establish strong boundaries

Caring for yourself, staying optimistic, looking toward the future, and following these suggestions will help you find happiness in your post-divorce life.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Do you find yourself caught up in negative thinking? What are some positive (or even neutral!) thoughts you can have to replace your negative thoughts?

What do you want in life? Be specific.

Do you have goals? What are they? What are some concrete steps you can take to achieve them?

What are some positive or inspirational intentional actions you can take?

What are you grateful for? What (or whom) do you appreciate?

Are you struggling to be patient with your post-divorce journey toward happiness? Explain.

Who can support you? Loved ones, a divorce coach, counselor, support group?

Are you willing to seek support? Why or why not?

Make a list of all the new experiences you would like to try.

How can you be accountable for your own happiness? Be specific.

What can you do to practice self-love?

Is there an area of your life you can improve that will help you feel happier? It could be physical health, finances, or something else. Describe.

Referring to the above fifteen tips, do at least one thing each day to increase your positivity and happiness. Use the following chart to record your progress over the next two weeks. Note the date, what you did, how you felt after, and if you will do it again. Have fun with this exercise and move outside of your comfort zone!

Date	What did you do?	How did you feel after?	Will you do it again? Y / N

Date	What did you do?	How did you feel after?	Will you do it again? Y / N

Did this exercise increase your positivity and happiness? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Redefining Your Relationship with Your Ex

Objective

To define the role your ex-spouse will have in your life after divorce.

What to Know

When you are going through a divorce, the thought of maintaining a relationship with your ex is probably the last thing on your mind. However, you might find you need or want to have some connection with your former spouse – particularly if you have children together.

There is no simple formula for defining your relationship with your ex, and it is not always an easy process. Several issues must be considered, including the circumstances surrounding your divorce, whether you have children, your ex's past and current behavior, and your own preferences. Keep in mind you can always choose to redefine the relationship, and you can establish boundaries as needed. Here are a few possibilities for you to consider. It is ultimately up to you to decide what is best.

- 1. Remain Cordial.** If your divorce was amicable, you can keep things professional or polite, content with everything that has happened between the two of you. You treat your ex like an acquaintance – you are not enemies, yet you are not friends. You might decide to remain cordial because you work with your ex. Remaining cordial and gracious allows you to retain your position in your social circles and career while establishing firm boundaries.
- 2. Become Friends.** It is possible to become friends with your former spouse, and it is a healthy way to maintain the bond that brought you together. This sort of relationship can only work if the level of upset has declined, both people are interested in maintaining a friendship, and there is no risk of physical or emotional abuse.
- 3. Co- or Parallel Parenting.** Co-parenting is a collaborative approach to raising children together after divorce, and it requires maturity and a commitment to prioritizing the well-being and best interests of your children. It is not always easy, but it has several advantages. Co-parenting allows both parents to have the opportunity to be part of their children's lives – creating a strong support system. With the help of a detailed custody agreement, shared calendars, and even mobile apps, it is possible to develop a situation where both parents are equally involved in the day-to-day lives of their children. Parallel parenting involves minimal communication with your ex. Rules for children might differ between households, and each parent agrees not to undermine the other parent's authority. There is less of a united front, but it is better for children than high-conflict parenting (when children are placed in the middle of communication and/or arguments between parents).
- 4. No Contact.** If you did not have children together, there might not be a reason to maintain contact. If you prefer to end the relationship, you can detach from them physically and virtually. Delete your ex on social media, distance yourself from the social circles you two once shared and keep physical distance. In cases where divorce occurred due to domestic violence, abuse, or toxic behavior, it might be safest to cut your ex out entirely to protect yourself.

How else might you redefine your relationship with your ex? What does this relationship look like?

Other Things to Consider

Set Boundaries. Boundaries are necessary for emotional well-being, and if you intend to remain cordial or become friends, be sure to set clear boundaries or strict limits. You might consider topics of discussion you are comfortable engaging in or how/when you will communicate. You might keep things impersonal at first so you can sever the emotional tie you shared in your marriage – allowing you to form a different connection.

When it comes to co-parenting or no-contact situations, you might require boundaries around time, space, or other issues. It is important to keep your children out of the middle, including parental communications and tasks. Ask yourself:

- Am I comfortable with my ex coming into my home, or do I prefer they just honk when they are outside to pick up the kids?
- How do we negotiate late drop-offs and pickups?
- Am I comfortable with my ex calling me to vent?
- Is it best for us to only communicate via text or email?

Without clear boundaries, you might find yourself engaged in old patterns – arguments, conflict, overreliance, or manipulation.

Let Go. Sometimes it is hard to accept change, even if it is change you want or need. But you are now independent, even if you share the responsibility of raising children together. Cutting the intimate ties that connected you and your ex can be difficult and requires maturity and self-control. If you struggle with this, rely on your support system, family, and close friends.

Remember, nothing is set in stone. You can decide that no contact is best for you as you heal and grieve, but someday you might want to be friends. You might try a certain type of relationship with your ex and realize it does not work for you. If you raise children together, you might spend several years co-parenting, and then decide to sever the connection with your ex once your children become adults. You can change your mind and adapt as circumstances change.

Review the chart and reflect on how you can redefine the role your ex-spouse will have in your life moving forward. Be specific.

Considering all the information above, what role would you like your ex to play in your life? Explain.

What type of relationship do you see yourself having with your ex-spouse (*friends, remain cordial, and so forth*)? _____

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you redefine your relationship with your ex? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Are You Ready to Date?

Objective

To help you clarify your thoughts about dating so that you can make decisions that are best for you.

What to Know

The media in our culture sends out constant messages about the importance of dating and being in a relationship. You might believe that if you do not immediately start dating after your divorce, there is something wrong with you. Friends, family members, even strangers might ask you who you are dating or if you have “moved on.”

This can feel like a lot of pressure, especially if you do not yet feel ready to date. It can also feel like pressure if you simply choose not to date because you are not over your ex, or you have other things in your life that are more interesting.

It is not wrong or bad to want to be alone right now. You can take time to learn about yourself and explore your interests and passions.

In this worksheet, you will reflect on your current social life, explore your goals, and then learn some tips and strategies for not falling into a dating relationship if you are not ready to do so.

What to Do

What is your current relationship status? _____

Are you happy with your current relationship status? If you could change anything, what would you change?

What is your relationship history? Describe.

How do you feel about dating if you are separated or divorced?

Are there people in your life who are pressuring you or making you feel bad about your relationship status?

If you choose not to date, what do you like about it? What are you unhappy about?

How do you like to spend your free time? What are your favorite activities?

What are your short-term and long-term goals for dating and romance? Be honest.

Here are some tips and strategies for avoiding the pressure to date if that is what you prefer.

- Learn to speak up to people who pressure you, judge you, or make fun of you for choosing not to date.
- Tell them how you feel.
- Tell them you are focused on other things.
- Avoid getting defensive.
- Do not feel bad if people tease you or judge you for being uninterested in dating. You know yourself best and you need to do what you think is right for you.
- Write in a journal and explore your goals and dreams.
- Find clubs or groups with like-minded people.
- Seek support from loved ones or a counselor to talk about your concerns.
- Invest time and energy into building rewarding friendships.
- Limit your social media time if you compare your life to that of others.
- Avoid being pressured into doing things you do not want to do. It is OK to say 'no.'
- Be kind to yourself. Practice self-compassion.

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn about yourself and your goals in relationships?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Preparing to Date

Objective

To prepare yourself for dating following the end of a relationship.

What to Know

After the end of a marriage or long-term relationship, putting yourself out there can make you feel uncomfortable, awkward, or vulnerable. This might be especially true now that online dating is so popular.

Following a breakup, everyone has their timeline for when they might want to begin dating. After a relationship ends, you can start to prepare yourself for dating through self-reflection – both processing your emotions and identifying what you can do better in future relationships. When you decide to begin dating depends on your resilience and ability to let go of the past. If you have children, dating might be further complicated.

Here are issues to consider when you re-enter the dating scene:

- **End one relationship before starting another.** No matter how your last relationship ended, pausing between relationships gives you time, so you avoid dating out of desperation.
- **Identify what you have learned from the past.** You will probably repeat unhelpful patterns if you fail to identify what did not work well in previous relationships. Consider how you want to grow as a person and as a partner in your next relationship. The more you take responsibility for your part in previous relationships, the more likely you will have a successful relationship in the future.
- **Forgive, let go, and move forward.** If you find yourself angry, bitter, or resentful about previous relationships, you might have more work to do to prepare yourself for dating.
- **Admit if you need help.** Seek help from a therapist or support group to work through any lingering issues.
- **Get a life.** Build a strong network of nurturing friendships and enjoyable activities to sustain you through the ups and downs of dating.

This worksheet will help you prepare yourself for dating following the end of a relationship.

What to Do

Below are a series of questions and checklists. Be as honest as you can as you answer these questions.

Are you ready to date after ending your relationship? If you are not emotionally stable and prepared to connect with dating partners, you might feel confused and unhappy or sabotage potentially positive connections. So, what are the signs you might not be ready? Check off the statements that apply to you:

____ You consider contacting your ex whenever you have a problem.

- Your ex still has some of your possessions.
- You think about your ex daily.
- You are not comfortable running into them in public.
- You closely watch them on social media.
- You are interested in who they are dating.
- You want to date only to stop thinking about them.
- You agonize over what went wrong in your last relationship.
- You are resentful, bitter, or angry.
- You have not examined how you contributed to the successes and failures of past relationships.

If you checked off five or more statements, you might not be ready to date. So, it might be wise to give yourself more time and identify what you need to move forward.

Describe whether you think you are ready to date.

Why do you want to start dating?

If your 'why' includes a desire to avoid painful feelings like hurt, anger, or loneliness, then it might be helpful to take some time to heal before dating.

Dating requires a certain vulnerability, tolerance of uncertainty, and willingness to feel a range of emotions. If you have taken the time to heal and you *want* to date (more than you *need* to date) you are more likely to experience successful dating.

Do you fear commitment? Many people who experience a breakup develop fears, including the fear of betrayal or commitment. Mark off any of the following signs you are afraid of commitment:

- You dislike becoming attached to people.
- You think a new relationship might hold you back.

___ You dislike monogamy or want to date multiple people.

___ You are not over your ex.

___ When you start developing feelings, you flee.

___ You want sex more than a relationship.

If you checked off three or more statements, you are probably afraid to commit. It is normal to fear commitment following the end of a relationship. If you are afraid to connect, avoid leading anyone to believe otherwise. Be clear about your intentions, and if they agree, go for a no-strings-attached connection.

Discuss how you feel about commitment. Be specific.

What are your intentions? Knowing and understanding your intentions means knowing yourself and getting a grasp on your dating goals. Answer the following questions.

Do you know what you want from a new partner? Have you figured out your relationship “must-haves” and “deal-breakers”? Describe below.

Must-Haves:

Deal Breakers:

What are the values you are most looking for? Write down what you are looking for in a partner.

Are you self-confident? Why or why not?

Are you independent? Why or why not?

Are you looking for someone to take care of you? Explain.

Do you easily express yourself and what you want? If not, what can you do to express yourself in a clear and direct way? Describe.

What are the first words you think of when you hear the word **dating**?

If you answered awful or painful, try reframing your definition of dating. Imagine that dating is an *experience* or an *adventure* – something new and exciting. And remember, not every date should be about finding “the one.”

Are you making an effort? If you feel ready to date, it is time to put yourself out there to meet new people. Check off activities you are willing to do.

___ Join your colleagues at after-work activities.

___ Attend Facebook or Meet Up events.

___ Say “yes” to invitations to unexpected social events.

___ Use public transportation and chat with people you see regularly.

___ Volunteer for an organization.

___ Be open to conversations with strangers, for example, at the park or in the grocery store.

___ Start a new activity like joining a hiking club or taking dance lessons.

___ Try a dating app like Match.com, OKCupid, or eHarmony. *If you consider online dating, research which ones offer the experience you are looking for: some are suited to people looking for long-term partners, others are for casual flings. Make sure you are aware of the scams that target online daters.*

Now, please choose at least one of the activities you checked off to try it within the next week.

What will you do? _____

After you have done the activity, describe what happened.

Are you willing to do at least one activity each week to meet new people? Why or why not?

Do you have expectations? Here are some signs you might have expectations:

- Have a rigid set of ideas about your ideal partner, from appearance to financial status.
- Expect your partner to spend all their free time with you.
- Have prejudices or beliefs you are unwilling to reconsider.
- Expect your partner to agree with everything you say.
- Compare your relationship with other people’s relationships.

Are you willing to release some of your expectations? Why or why not?

It might take some time and multiple dates with several people before meeting someone suitable for a relationship. Are you willing to go on numerous dates? _____ Why or why not?

Now that you have answered the questions and completed the checklists, you are now more aware of what you can do to prepare for dating! You are probably clear about what you want, and you have learned from past mistakes.

Now, consider what else you can do to make the transition into dating easier? Is there anything else you can do to prepare yourself? Be specific.

What are the obstacles to dating you have identified?

How (and when) will you tell your kids you are dating? (*If applicable*) Therapists suggest spending at least six months getting to know someone before you introduce them to your children. Introducing someone too soon can be confusing for children, and it is a good idea to talk with your kids about their feelings – letting them know it is okay to be angry, nervous, or sad. Encourage them to ask questions and express their concerns. You might tell your children you made a “new friend” that you would like to get to know. Describe below how/when/what you will tell your children you are dating:

Reflections on This Exercise

Now that you have completed this exercise, do you feel prepared to date? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Avoiding Rebound Relationships

Objective

To identify the signs of a rebound relationship and avoid this situation following your divorce.

What to Know

If you are freshly divorced and entering the dating scene, you might be tempted to rush into a relationship. But getting involved too quickly after the end of your relationship may not be best for your emotional wellbeing.

A rebound relationship refers to a situation where someone who recently ended a serious romantic relationship gets involved with someone else despite not being emotionally healed from the breakup. The person's reactions might be based on how they conducted themselves in the previous relationship, and they are still working through issues raised by that breakup. They might compare dating partners to their ex, fear commitment, or feel insecure about being single. Rebound relationships often involve the following problems.

- You are unable to see your situation clearly because you badly want to be in a new relationship.
- You confuse sexual chemistry with love.
- Fixating on someone new can be a way to deny or ignore your distress.
- You do not put in the time getting to know the other person or allow the relationship to grow in a healthy and organic way.
- You say things you do not mean, including "I love you," because you confuse infatuation with love.
- You make promises you cannot keep, like committing to be "together forever" before you even know them.
- Your expectations are not reality-based.
- You spend too much time with the person you are dating, ignoring other important relationships.
- You quickly get bored because you initially got caught up in the emotional thrill or lust.
- The need for stability and love can lead to ignoring or missing "red flags."

While most rebound relationships are harmless, they can postpone your recovery. In other words, escaping through a rebound relationship prevents you from gaining insight into the reasons your marriage ended and the lessons you need to learn.

Is it impossible to avoid rebound relationships after divorce? Rebound relationships are, by definition, almost always brief. If you are free from your past relationship (for example, the divorce is final), you have been working on your divorce recovery, and you feel ready, you might begin dating while being mindful of the following tips that can help you avoid a rebound relationship.

- 1. Avoid dating newly-divorced people – especially if they have not recovered from their divorce.** You can certainly date people who are divorced, but if they seem bitter about the divorce or fixated on their ex, then they might not be ready to date.
- 2. Avoid recreating your past.** Since you are divorced, some aspect of your marriage did not work. You might not want to pursue new partners because they remind you of your ex, but remember – your new partner cannot replace your ex.
- 3. Put yourself and your needs first.** Avoid compromising your needs because you feel vulnerable. If you find yourself repeatedly compromising your wants, needs, feelings, or finances to keep your new partner happy, you might be involved in a rebound relationship.
- 4. Play the field.** You may not know what you want after your divorce, so the best way to avoid a rebound relationship is to explore. Before you settle down or make a commitment, go on a few dates, and identify what you like (and what you do not like!).
- 5. Focus on divorce recovery.** Find a new hobby, join a gym, and enjoy the company of loved ones. Coaching or counseling can help you through the healing process. It takes time to recover and gain a healthy perspective on why your marriage ended.
- 6. Stop focusing on your ex.** Venting about your ex to a new partner is a sign you are not over your ex. If you find yourself doing this, you might want to consider the new person a friend rather than a romantic partner.
- 7. Gain insight into why your marriage ended.** Exploring why your marriage ended can help you establish healthy romantic relationships in the future.
- 8. Become comfortable with being alone.** Feel at ease being alone and enjoying your own company.
- 9. Give yourself time.** Most people need time to recover after a divorce. If you enter a new relationship too soon, you might have more difficulty establishing trust and a strong emotional bond with your new partner.

If you find yourself in a rebound relationship, consider ending it. Your divorce was both painful and a learning experience, and this breakup will be a learning experience as well. Spend time learning about you, your life, your values, who you want to be, and what you want.

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

Have you actively processed the divorce in a healthy manner? Why or why not?

Have you learned from the experience? What did you learn? Be specific.

Do you feel ready to date? Why or why not?

Are you uncomfortable being alone? Are you lonely? Explain.

Are you insecure about being single? Describe what you are experiencing.

Do you rely on others to validate your worth?

If you are newly divorced and involved in a relationship, do you think you are rebounding? Why or why not?

Are you are involved with someone you suspect is on the rebound? Why?

Are your needs being met in this relationship?

Does the relationship make you feel like your best self?

Does this person have the capacity for the kind of connection you want? What kind of connection *do* you want?

Do you feel lonely in this relationship?

If you decide to start dating within the first year after your divorce, have an honest direct conversation with your new partner. Some questions you might ask of yourself are:

- What are my intentions?
- Are my expectations realistic?
- Is there a chance this might be a rebound?

What are some questions you want to ask your new partner?

If you are having difficulty answering these questions, or find you are uncomfortable discussing this with your new partner, ask a loved one or relationship coach to walk you through the conversation.

Who can help you? _____

Next, write down the thoughts, ideas, questions, and so forth you want to include in this conversation.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful).

What did you learn from this exercise?
