



Factsheet: Coping with Separation and Divorce

Going through a separation or divorce can be very difficult, no matter the reason for it. It can turn your world upside down and make it hard to get through the work day and stay productive. But there are things you can do to get through this difficult adjustment.

Recognize that it's OK to have different feelings. It's normal to feel sad, angry, exhausted, frustrated and confused—and these feelings can be intense. You also may feel anxious about the future. Accept that reactions like these will lessen over time. Even if the marriage was unhealthy, venturing into the unknown is frightening.

Give yourself a break. Give yourself permission to feel and to function at a less than optimal level for a period of time. You may not be able to be quite as productive on the job or care for others in exactly the way you're accustomed to for a little while. No one is superman or superwoman; take time to heal, regroup and re-energize.

Don't go through this alone. Sharing your feelings with friends and family can help you get through this period. Consider joining a support group where you can talk to others in similar situations. Isolating yourself can raise your stress levels, reduce your concentration, and get in the way of your work, relationships and overall health. Don't be afraid to get outside help if you need it.

Take care of yourself emotionally and physically. Be good to yourself and to your body. Take time out to exercise, eat well and relax. Keep to your normal routines as much as possible. Try to avoid making major decisions or changes in life plans. Don't use alcohol, drugs or cigarettes as a way to cope; they only lead to more problems.

Avoid power struggles and arguments with your spouse or former spouse. If a discussion begins to turn into a fight, calmly suggest that you both try talking again later and either walk away or hang up the phone.

Take time to explore your interests. Reconnect with things you enjoy doing apart from your spouse. Have you always wanted to take up painting or play on an intramural softball team? Sign up for a class, invest time in your hobbies, volunteer, and take time to enjoy life and make new friends.

Think positively. Easier said than done, right? Things may not be the same, but finding new activities and friends, and moving forward with reasonable expectations will make this transition easier. Be flexible. If you have children, family traditions will still be important but some of them may need to be adjusted. Help create new family activities.

Life will get back to normal, although "normal" may be different from what you had originally hoped.

Tips for talking to kids ...

If you have children, here's a short list of tips that can help your young children and teens cope.

Reassure and listen. Make sure your kids know that your divorce is not their fault. Listen to and ease their concerns, and be compassionate but

direct in your responses.

Maintain stability and routines. Try to keep your kids' daily and weekly routines as familiar and stable as possible.

Offer consistent discipline. Now that your kids may share time with both parents separately, make sure to agree in advance on bedtimes, curfews and other everyday decisions, as well as any punishments.

Let your children know they can rely on you. Make and keep realistic promises. And don't overly confide in them about your feelings about the divorce.

Don't involve your children in the conflict. Avoid arguing with or talking negatively about the other parent in front of your kids. Don't use them as spies or messengers, or make them take sides.

For More Information:

For more information, contact your local Mental Health America affiliate or the national Mental Health America office.

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