

MEN'S DIVORCE GUIDE



(239) 829-0166

or

(866) 995-0166

matt@mensrightslawfirm.com

www.mensrightslawfirm.com

2799 Del Prado Blvd. S.

Cape Coral, FL 33904

Men's Rights Aggressively Defended



Matthew Irwin, Esq.
Attorney & Counselor At Law



2799 Del Prado Boulevard South
Cape Coral, Florida 33904

(239) 829-0166

or

(866) 995-0166

matt@mensrightslawfirm.com
www.mensrightslawfirm.com

*Primary office located in
Cape Coral; also available
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and Naples.*

Helping Men Who Face Uphill Battles

Though the law in Florida states that men and women should be treated equally in family court, the reality is that men face an uphill battle — especially when it comes to timesharing arrangements with their children. At Men's Rights Law Firm, Marital and Family Law Board Certified attorney Matthew Irwin leads a skilled team of family lawyers and paralegals who are dedicated to helping you get as much time with your children as is possible and appropriate. We ensure that you won't be treated like a "number" by the court system. Instead, you will be respected as we fight for your full legal rights, securing a fair, equitable divorce outcome.



Learn Your Rights and Separate Facts from Emotions

With the stress of a divorce, you may feel pressured to make uninformed decisions that pertain to shared parental responsibility, child custody, a time-sharing plan, or support payments. We realize that most times clients try to make these decisions based on emotions. You are an important individual and we are here to make sure you do not fall into that trap. Remember, while your marriage is ending, the family unit will continue for a lifetime — and your children will need you in their lives as a co-parent. Our family lawyers will help you separate the emotional issues from the factual ones, so you can make choices that help you continue playing an important, healthy role in your children's lives.

Focused on a Fair Settlement — but Ready to Aggressively Litigate

It's our goal to ensure that the court system fully respects your legal rights. Ideally, this can be accomplished through an out-of-court settlement, which is cost-effective, swift, and helps reduce stress on everyone — especially any children. A settlement also puts you in control of your future, instead of placing it in the hands of a judge who simply doesn't know you, your specific situation, or your children as well as you do. However, there are cases where the only approach to take is litigation. If this is necessary, be confident that we have the experience, perseverance, and reputation to powerfully and aggressively fight for your rights in a court of law.

A Responsive Team Approach with 24-Hour Emergency Availability

You'll benefit from the experience, responsiveness, and cost-effectiveness of a family lawyer and paralegal assigned to your case, plus the personal leadership and attention of Matthew Irwin. As a team, we respond promptly to emails and phone calls, plus, we have a 24-hour emergency line to ensure that we're here to answer your questions, and put your mind at ease. We know what you're going through, and we'll guide you through the legal maze with respect, honesty, trust, and compassion, every step of the way.



Men facing the challenge of divorce often struggle to find the answers, insights, and advice they need during this difficult and confusing time. In this special **Men's Divorce Guide**, you'll find relevant articles, book excerpts, and more that focus exclusively on men's divorce issues. Use the useful and practical information in here to help you safely and successfully make it through your divorce, and into your new life.



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The articles in this Guide are provided for general information and may not apply to your unique situation. These articles do not take the place of a lawyer, accountant, financial planner, therapist, etc.; since laws and procedures vary by region, for professional advice, you must seek counsel from the appropriate professional in your area. The views presented in the articles are the authors' own and do not necessarily represent the views of this firm or of Divorce Marketing Group. This Guide is published by and Copyright © Divorce Marketing Group. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Any use of materials from this Guide – including reproduction, modification, or distribution – without prior written consent of Divorce Marketing Group is prohibited.



Unwanted Divorce: When Your Whole World Crumbles

What happens when your spouse has one foot out the door and you don't know it? You weather the divorce storm and give recovery time to catch up to your feelings.

By John Prindle, Author and Musician

We house-hunted as a “happy couple” for about three months until we finally found our dream home: close enough to the city, yet far enough away that the yard was huge – and there were raised garden beds and even a glass greenhouse!

Our realtor, Troy, had been with us every step of the way. He was a gregarious guy who told funny stories, and he was a cancer survivor. When we met him at our new house to get the keys, we all hugged. It was a beautiful day.

Blindsided by an Unwanted Divorce

Little did I know that just four short weeks later, my wife would make me the recipient of an unwanted divorce. We'd gone on a short vacation just after closing on the house. Due to my job, I had to fly home a few days ahead of her. I guess she used those few days to really cement the idea of divorce in her head and come up with her plan – because when she returned, she was swift and sure about it. She texted on her way home from the airport. The dreaded, “we need to talk.”

“Sounds pretty serious,” I texted back in jest, never thinking my life was just about to unravel. She entered the house (our old one – at this point, we hadn't even moved into the new one), walked down the hall, and set her suitcase on the floor. Then she leaned against the wall and slid down it until she was seated on the floor. “I want a divorce,” she said.

I can't remember exactly what I said, but it was something along the line of, “wait – can we at least talk about it?”

But we couldn't. Her mind had been made up. I needed to get out of there, so I packed a few things and went off to a crappy hotel by the airport. I hadn't had a drink in five years. But that night I got myself a six-pack and hung out with the tv remote, wondering just what the hell I was going to do.

Divorce is much harder on the dumpee. I've read about the awful guilt that the dumper feels, and how it's not easy for them either – but I think we all know that it's worse if you're the one who gets rejected. Oftentimes, the dumpee is completely blindsided. I was.

Other Life Stressors AND an Unwanted Divorce

But sometimes an unwanted divorce hits right when there are other major life stressors, making it even worse. We had just purchased a new home. I had just started a new job a few months before. About two weeks after my wife said the dreaded “D” word, they found out the boss and owner of the small company I worked for had been embezzling. His business partner took it over. Everything changed. Work had been the safe spot I could go to, and now even that had become a major stressor. Longtime employees warned me that the company might go under, and we should be looking for new jobs. Not only was I getting divorced, but I might also soon be unemployed.

I lived in our old house and she lived in our new one. I worked with our same realtor, Troy, to sell the old house. He was shocked to hear that she was leaving me. “But you

just bought that house,” he said in disbelief. Apparently, it's not very common for one spouse to leave the other just one month after buying a house. Who would have thought?

To add insult to injury, she said the “D” word just two weeks before my birthday, and I met her – at her request – at a UPS store the day before my birthday to sign some paperwork and get it notarized. “You do realize that tomorrow's my birthday,” I said to her. She simply looked at me and shrugged.

She kept the new house. She made a lot more money than me. I couldn't afford that mortgage alone. In one fell swoop, I lost everything. My wife, my home, my sense of security, and even my will to live. And each day at work I had to wonder what I'd do if the company went under. Jump off a bridge maybe?

Two Years Post-Divorce: I Survived, and Things Do Get Better

I'm coming up on the two-year anniversary of my divorce, and I'm still not over it. Sure, I'm doing a lot better in some ways; worse in others. Sometimes divorce comes bundled up with a whole lot of other major life stressors, and you wonder how you'll ever get through it.

I have finally let go of the intense hatred I felt for my ex – but it wasn't easy. I wanted those wasted 14 years of my life back; I wanted my ex to suffer worse than she made me suffer; I wanted her next partner to treat her like crap and bail on her at the worst possible time; I wanted a piano to fall on her head, cartoon-style. I was steeped in negativity for quite a while.

The last two years have undoubtedly been the hardest of my life. But I survived. If you're going through a similar situation, hang in there. Divorce is bad enough. Divorce plus a few other major life stressors is an emotional hell that I wouldn't wish upon my worst enemy. But give it some time and things do get better.

Don't give up. ■



John Prindle is a writer, photographer, and musician who lives in Portland, Oregon. He is currently editing his second novel, which he regretfully abandoned during his divorce.
www.twitter.com/JohnPPrindle



Why Women File for Divorce More Often than Men

Statistics show that women initiate divorce in up to 80% of cases. As a former divorce lawyer, here are my insights into why women are more likely to file for divorce than men.

By Gray Robinson, Relationship Expert and Author

A number that has been growing for the last 70 years is the discrepancy between genders for filing for divorce.

According to “Who Wants the Breakup? Gender and Breakup in Heterosexual Couples” (published as a chapter in the book *Social Networks and the Life Course* [Springer, 2018]) by professor and social demographer at Stanford University Michael J. Rosenfeld, Ph.D., women are more likely to file for divorce than men in almost 70% of cases.

One would think that women, who are generally portrayed as being the heart of the family, would be

more reluctant to formally break up a marriage than men. Obviously, that’s not the case.

As a practicing divorce lawyer for more than 25 years, I have some insights into why women are more likely to file for divorce than men.

The observations of another family lawyer with a different practice in a different town and state may contradict my own – and, of course, your experience may be the opposite of the six reasons I’ve provided (below). As with any generalization, there will be people who fit these patterns to a T, and others who don’t fit them at all.

6 Reasons Women are More Likely to File for Divorce

Awareness of an issue is the first step to resolving it, so I hope this article provides some food for thought – whether you identify with the female or male experiences described below.

1 Most women no longer dream of being housewives; they want satisfying careers *and* marriages.

Since World War II, women are increasingly less satisfied with the institution of marriage and the stereotypes associated with them. In the 1950s, Madison Avenue portrayed wives vacuuming or doing other household chores in

cocktail dresses and high heels; women were expected to be housewives, the primary caregiver for the children, and still look fantastic (and have dinner ready to serve) when the men arrived home from work.

When wives had to become working women while their husbands were overseas during World War II, they found they *liked* earning money and having lives outside their homes. They were reluctant to return to being “just a housewife.” One needs only look to the 1960s and 1970s and the odyssey of the feminist movement to understand that women, like Baby, will not be put in the corner.

Decades after the Women’s Liberation movement, women *still* feel oppressed, marginalized, and undervalued – and as the recent Women’s Marches have shown, they are no longer willing to put up with the status quo.

2 Women look forward to true equality of the sexes, while men look backward to the “Golden Age” of marriage.

Men generally try to find and marry the woman of their dreams – and then expect that she’ll never change from the day they got married. Men are comfortable in their roles as the “head of the household,” while women are not particularly satisfied with being pigeon-holed as a wife who supports her husband’s career, the primary caregiver to their children, and the unpaid domestic help.

Women tend to look at their partner’s *potential*. They are more willing to marry someone who doesn’t check all of their boxes, hoping that they can guide their men into perfection. Women become frustrated with men who resist change. Society, religion, and other cultural “norms” have oppressed women around the world for thousands of years, and women are becoming less and less inclined to go along with these regimes.

3 Women are less willing to accept unhappy relationships than men.

Generations of men have been trained

to “man up” and stay in unhappy relationships – and perhaps to seek happiness outside their marriages to make their lives tolerable. Modern women, however, are more independent than most men think, and they’re unwilling to accept unhappy relationships month after month, year after year, with no hope of change.

Sometimes, men don’t even realize that they are in a failing relationship until their wives say, “I want a divorce!” I have often heard male divorce clients state, “I thought everything was fine – I was blindsided by this divorce!”

In business, “successful” men are trained to focus on intellectual pursuits, to use logic to solve all their problems and to ignore their emotions. Ironically, it is this disconnect that often causes a marriage to fail. Men think their marriage is “just fine” while their wives are talking to divorce lawyers. By the time the divorce is filed, women are done trying to work on the relationship.

4 Men often believe they have more to lose in a divorce than women.

Many men hold the misconception that they will do poorly in court – that the cards are stacked against them in terms of finances and child custody. Many men’s divorce groups are perpetuating this idea: taking one man’s terrible experience and making it seem like all men are treated poorly in court.

The stereotypes of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers have changed, but some men still believe that they have more to lose than women in a divorce. For that reason alone, men are reluctant to “go there.”

5 Women are faster to consult a lawyer than men.

Quite frankly, there is an advantage to being the plaintiff in court, in the sense that you get to go first and argue last. I would much rather represent a plaintiff than a defendant. While there are often “races to the courthouse,” most women are faster to consult a lawyer than men and are more empowered to pull the plug.

6 Women are much more aware of the emotional health of their marriages than men.

If the marriage is a “traditional” one – with a stay-at-home mom and a breadwinner dad – women are going to pick up on any problems with the marriage and the children before a man would. Women notice that their husbands regularly go out for drinks after work with their co-workers, or spend evenings and weekends entertaining clients for dinner or a round of golf.

Meanwhile, they may not have spent any quality time together as a couple – without the children (– think “date night”) in months or even years. If they are concerned for the wellbeing of their children, their maternal instincts will often take action before their male counterparts.

I believe the same reasons that cause a marriage to fail motivate women more than men to seek a divorce. Lack of communication, lack of empathy, lack of feeling supported by your spouse, and lack of emotional growth generally distress women more than men, making women more likely to file for divorce than men.

Men are usually more comfortable with the status quo than women, and women are more observant of red flags than men – so men are often shocked and surprised when their wives file for divorce. ■



Gray Robinson, a former divorce attorney, now coaches clients to break through trauma and unhealthy thinking to realize their greatest potential.

He believes that divorce can be the most empowering event of your life. Rather than getting revenge, it is much more important to find security and happiness.
www.jamesgrayrobinson.com

Six

Common Mistakes Men Make During Divorce

By C.W. Meyer, Master Certified Relationship Coach

The good news is that all common mistakes can be avoided. Here's how.

Divorce is a messy process whether you are a man or woman. Throw in anger, hurt feelings, and anxiety due to uncertainty and it makes sense that mistakes will be made. And, let's face it, some men do not do well when the rug has been pulled out from under them due to an unwanted divorce. In fact, there are many common mistakes that men make during divorce. The good news is that they can all be avoided.

Since more than 70% of divorces are filed by women, men are normally the ones thrown into a situation they never wanted to be in – one they are ill-prepared to deal with. This puts men at a disadvantage both legally and emotionally. I don't know why, but when some men are at a disadvantage, their ability to think logically and make good choices flies out the window. Then it's all downhill from there.



Avoid Making These Mistakes During Divorce

1 Not Hiring a Divorce Attorney Soon Enough

In most situations, women have the upper hand in divorce cases. The sooner you have an attorney explain your legal rights and how you should behave during your divorce the faster you will level the playing field.

If you have children and want to protect your relationship with them, it is important that you quickly find and retain an attorney who has experience with fathers' rights and custody. In my opinion, safeguarding your bond with your kids should be your top priority during divorce.

2 Engaging in Negative Retaliation

Once they learn their wife wants a divorce, some men become hell-bent on destroying her. I've talked to men who plainly still loved their wives, but felt justified in trying to punish her for leaving in response to the pain of the divorce.

Take the high road, guys! I know the pain you are in. I went through an unwanted divorce myself, and the desire to slap back when someone hurts you is human nature. That doesn't mean you should give into that side of your nature, however.

Don't bad-mouth your wife. Don't talk to everyone and anyone who will listen about her trying to take the house, the car, and the kids. That only makes you look bad and, when she gets wind of the belittling statements you are making about her, she'll be able to say, "See, see how vindictive and unreasonable he is? I really had no choice but to leave him."

Don't ever give her ammunition to use against you! Hold your head up and always, *always* take the high road.

3 Refusing to Negotiate

"I'm not giving her a damn thing she is asking for." This goes back to letting anger and hurt feelings drown out your ability to think logically. Which is better: negotiating with her or letting a judge (who doesn't know either of you) decide who will get what?

An unwillingness to mediate and negotiate increases the cost of your divorce and, in the end, she is going to get some of what she is asking for whether you like it or not. So, get civil and reasonable, and maybe she also will in return.

If she doesn't, and you two do wind up in front of a judge, she will look like the unreasonable one. You will look like the one putting forth effort, and that is going to gain you favor with the judge. Negotiation during divorce will get you further than retaliation!

4 Letting One Lawyer Handle the Divorce

You don't want to retaliate, you're willing to negotiate, you're going to take the high road and give her a divorce. But then you make the mistake of agreeing to use one lawyer. *Don't do this!* Even if your divorce is civil and both of you are working

cooperatively together to bring the marriage to an end, you should always have your own lawyer.

Why? Because you want your own lawyer to go over your settlement agreement *before* you sign and file it with the courts. Your legal divorce rights are important. I applaud you for being able to negotiate your own divorce settlement, but have your own lawyer read it over – explaining your rights and obligations and pointing out anything that could be problematic for you. Your lawyer will help to make sure you haven't given away the bank or put yourself in a one-down position as far as child custody or spousal support.

5 Moving out of the Marital Home

She wants the divorce, why do you have to move? I know, I know, your kids need somewhere to live so, you do the "right" thing and pack a bag and move out. Here is the thing, your kids have somewhere to live...in their home with you. And legally you have as much right to stay in the marital home as your wife does. If she wants a divorce, tell her to find somewhere to live and that the children will be with you, in the home.

6 Living Separately from Their Children

This one is connected to the mistake above. Until there is a court order ordering you to give up parental rights to your children you have the constitutional right to live in the same home your children live in. Don't move away from your children; and if she leaves the marital home, don't allow her to take the children with her.

If she attempts to take the children, contact your lawyer, ask him to file an ex-parte petition for custody and let her prove to the courts that the children should be uprooted from you and the family home just because she wants a divorce.

By staying with your children, you set a precedence that can be used in court to win 50/50 custody. If you can show a judge that you have remained fully engaged in your role as a father and didn't voluntarily give up time with your children, then divorce won't be a legal reason to break that bond.

As a man, if you don't get ahead of the game by letting go of the anger and negative emotions and getting your head screwed on straight, the divorce will be extremely lopsided for you. Avoid the six mistakes men make during divorce mentioned in this article, and the process will go much easier. ■



C.W. Meyer is a Master Certified Relationship Coach and Certified Marriage Educator. She is also the Managing Editor of DivorcedMoms.com – the leading resource for divorced moms to connect, communicate, share experiences, and find expert information – and a divorced mother of two. www.DivorcedMoms.com

6 Tips for a Peaceful Divorce

With the right attitude and the right support, a peaceful divorce is possible.

By Josh D. Simon

At first glance, the idea of a “peaceful divorce” may be impossible to imagine. However, as destructive as divorce can be for some couples and families – in terms of psychological turmoil, financial wreckage, and lasting emotional damage to children and extended family – the fact remains that it’s both possible and feasible to have a peaceful divorce. That’s because, more than anything, the decision to take the peaceful path starts with something within your grasp: your attitude.

Your attitude will profoundly influence whether you respond wisely or react unwisely to your spouse. It will also determine your ability to look past or through the painful emotional fog that surrounds you, so that you can make clear-headed decisions that are best for you, your children, and your future.

Here, we present six tips for achieving a peaceful divorce, so that you can eventually look back upon this time with your dignity, self-respect, and mental health intact.

Tip #1: If You Can't Forgive, then Try to Accept

It's hard for most people to forgive their spouse for the hurtful things they have done and said, or for all of the other major and minor issues that come together and "cause" a divorce. The plain truth is that divorce is often a crushing, unwanted outcome to what both spouses hoped and dreamed would be a lasting union. However, forgiving someone frees you from dragging around the heavy "baggage" of negative thoughts and energy.

If you aren't ready to forgive your spouse, then strive to accept the fact that the marriage is dissolving. And furthermore, reach deep inside and accept the role you played in this outcome. Without question, this is easier said than done, and may be too agonizing in the early stages of a divorce. However, the sooner you can accept the situation and your responsibility, the sooner you start to heal – which is a key to a peaceful divorce. You can only give what you have, and if you have inner peace, then you can share it.

Tip #2: Take the High Road – and Stay There

Your spouse, her family, friends, or even new significant other may try to drag your divorce through the mud. This may come in the form of comments said to your face and behind your back. As tempting as it may be to react in-kind, resolve to take the high road and decide that you're going to control the emotional integrity of your divorce – at least as far as you can. This not only helps preserve your self-esteem and dignity, but surprisingly, it can also have a positive influence on your spouse. By modeling how someone should act during divorce, you show her "how it's done." And, if you notice that your ex is taking the high road, acknowledge it as often as you can.

Tip #3: Don't Use Your Children as Pawns

What harms children greatly during divorce is how their parents act during divorce. In other words, your children are watching you and paying attention to your attitudes, actions and behaviors. And that means if you use them as pawns to "attack" your spouse – or worse, poison them with sordid tales about how evil and uncaring their mother is, you're not harming your spouse, you're harming your children. And in the same light, when it comes to custody negotiations with your ex, don't treat your children like "assets" that you can try and trade or withhold, depending on your mood. Unless the courts agree that your spouse is an unfit parent, then he or she has a right to co-parent with you. Remember, it's not about you or your ex: it's about your children, and what they need to grow into healthy, happy adults with fond memories of both parents.

Tip #4: Choose a Divorce Lawyer Who Views Going to Court as a Last Resort

Most divorce lawyers are skilled, compassionate professionals who sincerely want to help you make it through this challenging time in your life quickly and as painlessly as possible. However, there are a few divorce lawyers who will pour gasoline on your emotional fire, and march into litigation without striving to resolve your divorce through other means – such as negotiation, mediation, or other out-of-court settlement options. Therefore, it's critical that you choose a divorce lawyer who has the intent, experience, knowledge, and attitude it takes to help you settle without going to court.

Tip #5: Choose the Issues to Dispute Wisely

Separating the emotional issues from the practical ones during divorce can seem impossible; sometimes it can

seem like a battlefield with a hundred different skirmishes to fight. However, the road to a peaceful divorce isn't a battle – it's a dialogue. And that means your job is to reflect and, with a calm and level head, decide which key issues are worth disputing, and which ones you can just let go. For example, you may place high sentimental value on a piece of furniture or the family car, but fighting for these assets will not only cost you more in legal fees, but also add needless conflict and stress to your divorce.

Tip #6: Consider Therapy or Coaching

The idea of needing therapy during divorce can be, in itself, a source of stress; as if you're somehow broken and need some professional to "put you back together." This perception is simply untrue. Therapy or life coaching is not for weak people: it's for people who realize, clearly and objectively, that they need professional assistance during a traumatic time. Professional athletes are not weak for needing a coach: they recognize that good coaching makes the difference between success and failure. An experienced therapist or life coach will provide you with valuable tools and strategies to help achieve a peaceful divorce. If you aren't sure of how to get in touch with a therapist or coach, ask your divorce lawyer for a referral.

Remember, This Too Shall Pass

When you marched down the wedding aisle, the idea that you might one day divorce was the furthest thing from your mind. Now that you're facing divorce, the idea that one day you'll laugh and, yes, even love again, may be even further from your mind. Use this thought, and the tips offered above, to keep you committed to the peaceful divorce that you want, need, and deserve. ■

Josh D. Simon is a former Divorce Magazine staff writer.

14 Common Causes of Infidelity

There are many causes of infidelity in a marriage, but in our society, where instant gratification is the norm, these are the most common.

By Henry Gornbein, Family Lawyer and Author

I have been practicing family law for more than 45 years, and I have seen and heard almost everything: all the causes of infidelity in a marriage and all the reasons for divorce. More and more, I am seeing situations where people meet online but never truly and authentically get to know one another.

Good or bad, we live in an age where people want instant gratification and where they are not willing to really communicate and work on their problems without turning for answers in the arms of another man or woman.

Reasons for Infidelity in a Marriage

Is infidelity the chicken or the egg? Is it caused by a loveless marriage or rather by a marriage partner who is unwilling to commit and work through problems? The following are some of my thoughts on the causes of infidelity in a marriage.

1. The Internet

The Internet is a major facilitator of infidelity. It is much easier to find forbidden fruit online than it is in person. There are

so many websites where people can meet with no questions asked. Think of Ashley Madison's tagline – "Life is Short. Have an Affair.®"

2. Running away from Problems

Running away from problems is a major contributor to infidelity. Making excuses rather than facing the music with your spouse opens the door to infidelity, especially emotional affairs. I have heard many examples where a spouse would tell me that he or she has found a coworker with a shoulder to lean on. It should be no surprise that sympathetic coworkers regularly become participants in illicit affairs.

3. Pornography

Pornography is rampant on the Internet – but does this lead to affairs? Does it lead to emotional affairs and the death of love and trust? Absolutely! Internet and "porn addiction" are significant factors causing the breakdown of marriages today. And you might be surprised to know that this problem is not discriminatory toward men: today, there are more and more



women suffering from Internet and porn addiction.

4. Escort Services

Escort services and the like, including “online massages,” are much more attainable in our age of social media than they ever were before. Scrutinizing credit card charges is but one of the contributing factors as to why divorces are expensive.

5. Facebook

A study in the UK found that Facebook is now a contributing factor to about a third of all divorces. A couple of years ago, that number was 25%. You can meet anyone online. I have had cases where someone reconnected with a high school sweetheart and ran off during the divorce even though the sweetheart lived more than 3,000 miles away. The online fantasy that the “grass is greener on the other side” is a significant cause in the breakdown of marriages today.

6. Boredom

Boredom can also lead to an affair. Many people fall into routines, including tired routines in the bedroom. What do you do to keep your marriage fresh? Many divorces could possibly be avoided if people took the time and commitment to communicate verbally and physically and keep things exciting. Some people look for excitement to escape boredom. It can be by experimenting with other relationships, trying drugs, driving fast cars, or hanging out with different people. I once had a case where a husband wanted a ménage à trois for his milestone birthday. His wife agreed to the gift. Over time, the couple experimented with wife-swapping and ultimately his wife left him for someone else.

7. Growing Apart from Your Partner

People grow apart. Do you and your spouse still have the same goals? Do you want to ride off into the sunset together after the children are grown? Is your spouse your best friend?

8. Addiction

Alcohol and drugs often go hand in hand with affairs. I have seen many cases where a spouse will trade one addiction for another. A person’s addiction to drugs or alcohol is chemically no different than an addiction to the Internet, porn, food, or any other unhealthy excess.

9. Not Married for the Right Reasons

Did you marry for the right reason? Or better yet, did you become the “right” person for your spouse? Do you both have enough in common? If not, you will often look for that commonality in the arms of someone else.

10. Lack of Respect at Home

Does your spouse treat you well? Do you treat your spouse well in return? Over the years I have seen many doctors, for example, run off with their nurse or other medical support staff. It’s really not surprising that doctors, in general, are often worshipped by their staff at work, but in contrast at home, they are treated with a lack of respect. Does ego-stroking lead to affairs? Absolutely. Everyone enjoys a compliment; it would go a long way if spouses found ways to compliment each other regularly.

11. Feeling Unappreciated

Some people fall into having an affair simply because they feel that they are not appreciated at home or that they are “doing all of the work” in keeping a marriage and home together. Again, the questions to ask are these: Am I appreciative of my spouse? Am I being the “right person” for my spouse? If more people harbored a “servant’s” mindset for their spouse, more and more affairs and divorces could be avoided.

12. Issues Involving Body Image and Aging

Issues involving body image and weight gain as well as aging can, unfortunately, lead to an affair and or divorce. Some people will “trade in” an aging spouse for a “younger model.” Of course, the

point of this paragraph has nothing to do with unavoidable medical issues. But let’s face it. Many spouses tend to let themselves go over time. During the romance period of the relationship, both spouses typically try to present themselves in the best possible light to win the affections and marriage commitment of the other. Once the prize (marriage) is won, many people think that “the chase is over.” Not so. Marriage is only the beginning. If people continued to consciously keep “chasing” their spouse, affairs and divorces could be avoided.

13. Insecurity

At the same time, too much insecurity can also be a cause of infidelity in a marriage. The need for constant reaffirmation can lead to an affair, especially if one spouse becomes “too needy” or “too clingy.” It’s a delicate balance to find, but marriage requires nothing less than true and dedicated commitment.

14. Living Apart for Extended Periods of Time

Travel for work and living apart for extended periods of time invariably lead to affairs. Think of the movie *Up in the Air* with George Clooney. There, the female character carried on an affair with George Clooney’s character. George fell in love with her only to discover later that she was married and cheating on her husband with him.

Excitement, boredom, forbidden fruit, opportunity, enticement, retaliation – as you can see, there are seemingly endless reasons why people have affairs. ■



Henry Gornbein practices in all areas of divorce and family law in Michigan. Certified as a mediator as well as a collaborative law practitioner he

is frequently appointed to mediate and arbitrate domestic relations matters. He is also the co-author of the book Child Custody: A Complete Guide for Parents (Momentum Books).

www.gracefullygreying.com



Rageaholics!

Abstain From These Behaviors

An effective action plan for what you can do to control your anger.

By Newton Hightower

The first question to ask yourself is, “Why am I reading this article?” The fact that you even have this article means that either you realize you have a problem, your wife is leaving you, the children aren’t talking to you, or you may just feel guilty at how your anger is affecting your family and your life. Apart from the damage your anger is doing to your marriage, we know that conflict between parents is traumatic for children.

“What Can I Do to Never Blow Up Again?”

You may have made resolutions such as:

- “I will never do that again.”
- “I will never scream like that again.”
- “I will never put my hands on her again.”

Making resolutions like “I will never rage again” doesn’t work. If it did, you would not be reading this article.

While our intentions are often good, we rageaholics just can’t make our resolutions work. Simple self-talk and global affirmations about our “inherent goodness” don’t work. Although we should be aware of our internal voices, we must also learn to develop new voices to replace the “soldier talk” and the heroic rescue fantasies discussed in this article. More than anything else, we must have a plan of action. What follows is an effective action plan for what we can do to abstain from expressing anger.

When Angry, Stop the Following 15 Behaviors:

1. **Stop Speaking.**

Stop telling yourself:

“I’m not going to just sit here and let her talk to me that way.”

“She’s the one who needs to shut up for once.”

The all-time, fail-proof, safest action when we feel rage well up

Although we should be aware of our internal voices, we must also learn to develop new voices to replace the “soldier talk” and the heroic rescue fantasies.

inside is silence. We must abstain from speaking, keep the lid on our pressure cooker, keep the valve shut and turn off the fire by stopping the thoughts that build up the steam. We either have to change our internal dialogue or learn to shut it off.

Silence is the number one behavior to learn. Being silent doesn't mean that we have stopped listening. Instead, it means that we are in control of our anger.

2. Stop Staying.

Stop telling yourself:

“But she hates it when I walk out on her.”

“It's my house; I'm not going anywhere.”

What does “stop staying” mean? It means leave the scene quickly and quietly. Imagine an anger scale of 0 to 10. Zero equals no anger and ten equals rage. Once you have gone to 5 or higher, get out. It's probably too late if you wait until you get to 8 or above. In fact, once you get that angry, you won't be able to restrain yourself from speaking and you probably won't be able to leave. When you feel your anger start to go up the scale or if it just jumps up to 5, don't stay. Leave quietly.

How do you know when you've reached a five on the anger scale? Well, you should begin to monitor your anger signs to become aware of your internal states. Each person has different physical responses when he gets angry. Some people will sweat profusely; others will feel their muscles tightening. Some will get clammy hands, and still others will feel their blood pressure rising. Learn your anger signs.

3. Stop Staring.

Stop telling yourself:

“I was just looking at her.”

“I'm not staring. She wants me to look at her when she talks, so I was looking.”

Couples who stare intensely at each other when they are angry are actually glaring. Looking someone in the eye in a hostile way is taunting and provocative. On the streets this kind of behavior has led to more than a few severe beatings and even deaths. Glaring is a primitive

fight or flight response and is often a precursor to physical violence. Many ragers use staring and the “evil eye” to intimidate those around them.

4. Stop Interrupting.

Stop telling yourself:

“I have to interrupt because what she's saying is wrong.”

“What do you mean don't interrupt her? She was the one who interrupted me.”

It is sometimes impossible to tell who is interrupting whom when anger begins to rise. It is important not to interrupt and to allow others to interrupt you, but this is the one thing that most of us ragers feel we can't stand.

Why is it that we ragers always think we are on the verge of making some profound and interesting point when someone interrupts us? We say, “Wait a minute. That's the one thing I can't stand. I'm just about to get to the point here.” We need to train ourselves not to interrupt others. If someone interrupts us, we must allow it. If interrupted, we need to go back to #1: “Stop Speaking.” If we are getting madder, then we shouldn't stay. Our wives will notice the silence and they will notice us leaving quietly. They will also notice that we are allowing them to interrupt us without interrupting them.

5. Stop Cursing.

Stop telling yourself:

“Hey, you don't know where I work. Over there, everybody curses all the time.”

*“You mean I'm supposed to say ‘ouch’ instead of *&.%@#\$+ when I stub my toe?”*

One of the most important behaviors to abstain from immediately is profanity. The reason is not from a moral or religious point of view, but from a psychological and behavioral perspective. If we don't curse, we don't inflame our rage. If we abstain from all profanity, no matter what, it will immediately reduce the amount of anger we must manage. In other words, cursing adds steam to our pressure cooker and inflames our anger.

If you were to have a temper tantrum without profanity, where you stomp your foot and say, “Gee whiz, I'm really upset by that. Golly gee, that really frustrated me,” then took a blood sample, you would likely find no biochemical change. If you were to pretend having a temper tantrum with profanity, even though you were not angry, then took a blood sample, you would find a biochemical change. These changes would occur because the use of profanity starts the flow of adrenaline for rageaholics.

Some men in anger groups have worked on stopping profanity for an entire year before they went through a full day without cursing. Other men have been able to do it almost instantly.

6. Stop Name-Calling.

Stop telling yourself:

“But she was calling me names. She’s the one with the problem.”

“I didn’t mean it when I called her those names. She understands that I was just angry.”

Name-calling is another way to produce steam. It is also a behavior that we rageaholics need to abstain from immediately. We need to stop using not only the vile, crude names, but also names like “stupid” and “crazy.” Using those names inflames an argument. When we name-call, even in jest, our spouse doesn’t know we are “just kidding” and doesn’t think it is funny. Name-calling hurts others and it raises our anger level.

Name-calling is a destructive element in a relationship. If you call your wife a bad name, there’s no going back. It could take months for her to recover. You may think, “I’m over my anger. Why can’t she let it go?” Ragers don’t understand the level of destruction caused when they call their partner a name. (To the recipient it could be like President Truman saying to the emperor of Japan, “It was just a couple of bombs. What’s the big deal?”)

7. Stop Threatening.

Stop telling yourself:

“Sometimes I just want to warn her she’s about to go too far.”

“You’re not going to talk to me that way. No one is going to talk to me that way. I don’t take that kind of talk from anyone.”

Even subtle threats wreak havoc in terms of your partner’s fear of abandonment. The object is to make a women feel more secure through the use of reassurance rather than argument, accusations or threats, which would only increase her anger and fear of abandonment.

8. Stop Pointing.

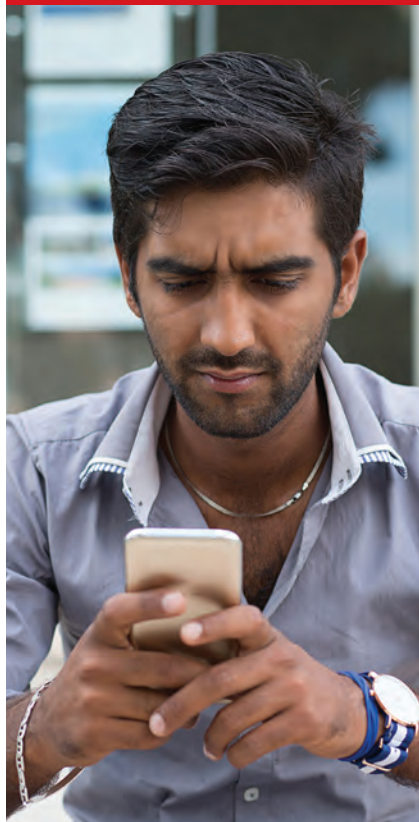
Stop telling yourself:

“I was just trying to get her attention.”

“I’m not aware of my pointing – it’s a natural thing to do.”

Pointing a finger at someone is frequently an unconscious

Some men in anger groups have worked on stopping profanity for an entire year before they went through a full day without cursing.



behavior. We ragers might need to ask our spouse and friends to tell us when we are doing this. In my therapy groups, members make each other aware of finger-pointing. Instead of pointing at the other person, you need to look at yourself.

9. Stop Yelling, Raising Your Voice, or Using a Mean Tone.

Stop telling yourself:

“Yelling is the only way to get her attention and let her know I’m serious.”

“I’m not yelling. She’s not listening. If she would just listen, I wouldn’t have to yell.”

Like other self-destructive behaviors, raising our voices and yelling only fuels our anger. Like finger-pointing, we are sometimes unaware of how loud we are talking. First, we must gain some awareness of these behaviors. On a scale of 0-10 (0 equals silence), when you raise your voice to a 2 or 3, it needs to be brought to your attention. (How do you know if it’s a 2 or a 3? Ask other people to let you know.) It is important for spouses, family members, friends, and therapists to intervene early when we begin to raise our voices. They can say something like, “You are beginning to raise your voice. Please lower it.” As a rager, our appropriate response should be, “You are right. Thanks for pointing it out.” Having others point out to us when we are raising our voice and yelling will help us monitor our behavior.

Furthermore, stop telling yourself: “Hey, what’s she talking about? I wasn’t yelling, cursing, or anything.”

“This is how I normally talk. If she wanted some mushy-mouth guy, she should have married one. That ain’t me.”

The “mean tone” is an important but hard issue for rageaholics to understand. Even though we are abstaining from the more obvious behaviors of rage like touching or slamming doors, our wives may feel that we despise or hate them, just by the tone of our voice.

10. Stop Being Sarcastic. Stop Mocking.

Stop telling yourself:

"She doesn't understand that I'm just joking."

"She has no sense of humor. That's the real problem."

Sarcastic one-liners are fine for television sitcoms, but they don't work for maintaining a real family life. When the actors leave the stage after delivering their sarcastic remark, they go back to their dressing rooms. After we drop a sarcastic one-liner, we have to stick around for the consequences. Often ragers don't realize how much pain and hurt our sarcastic remarks cause. We misjudge the impact of our sarcasm. We need to stop making wisecracks about our wife and family members.

In addition, stop telling yourself:

"I was just trying to show her what it sounds like when she snivels about work all the time."

"That's just the way I let her know when she's nagging me too much."

11. Stop Throwing Things, Slamming Doors, or Banging Walls.

Stop telling yourself:

"It's just a way to let off steam. I'm not hurting anyone."

"At least I don't break things like I used to. Now I usually just throw pillows."

We need to stop throwing things like pillows, keys, and other objects. All objects including shirts, jackets, and underwear should also not be thrown. Throwing is an aggressive act that is perceived as threatening and intimidating by those around us. Throwing things – regardless of how harmless the objects are – fuels our anger.

Also stop telling yourself:

"Slamming doors is just my way of letting her know I really want to be left alone."

"I don't see what it hurts to release my anger a little."

Slamming a door shut is the ultimate "last word." We ragers were trained in the "two slam exit method." We first curse out whoever is in the room, then slam the door. We wait a few seconds, then open the door again, say a few more vile things, and slam it shut. This results in several things. First, it fuels our anger. Second, it is a provocative act that reeks of intimidation. Third, it says that we won't stick around to work things out. Slamming doors is also a good way to infuriate the other person.

12. Stop all Non-Affectionate Touching.

Stop telling yourself:

"She was out of control. I was just holding her on the bed so she could get control of herself."

"I was just defending myself when she tried to slap me."

It's unacceptable to touch in anger, including any kind of aggressive touching like pushing or holding. It's also a bad idea. If the police are called and your spouse or girlfriend has bruises, that is domestic violence. In that instance, you can be arrested and jailed.

13. Stop Telling "Hero Stories."

Stop telling yourself:

"I just wanted you to understand what really happened."

"I did pretty good considering I was provoked."

"Hero stories" are stories we tell about how we lost our temper or made a sarcastic remark. When we retell the story, it makes us look like a hero for standing up against someone. Seldom do we tell these stories with shame; mostly we tell them with pride. It's as if we are waiting for our audience to say, "What a man," or "Yeah, you really told her off." Often we find ourselves using profanity when telling and retelling the story. Telling hero stories is like getting two rushes for the price of one. We lose our temper and get a rush of adrenaline, then we call and tell a friend our hero story and get another rush.

Hero stories only fuel our anger by making us look bigger than we really are. They often hide pain, anguish, and fear.

14. Stop Sighing, Clucking, or Rolling your Eyes.

Stop telling yourself:

"Well, it's discouraging to hear her complain all the time."

"My sighs just mean I'm tired. It wasn't directed at her. She's too touchy."

Another behavior to abstain from is using various kinds of sighs. These sounds are often a way to express anger, disgust, or disapproval. The sighs can also heat up an argument, especially if people are overly sensitive to each other's moods.

Nonverbal explosive responses generate a lot of hostility in relationships. More and more researchers are finding that couples express most of the hostility to each other in nonverbal ways, so the how is as important as what we say.

15. Stop Criticizing and Lecturing.

Stop telling yourself:

"If I don't criticize her, how will she know when she does something wrong?"

"You mean I can't express any of my feelings?"

It is essential that we abstain from criticism. A lot of men with rage problems think it's our job to help our wives improve by pointing out their shortcomings. Stopping this behavior in ourselves calls for a dramatic shift in values. It is not our job in life to point out what others are doing wrong. ■

*This article has been edited and excerpted from the book **Anger Busting 101: New ABCs for Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them** by Newton Hightower (Bayou Publishing).*



Newton Hightower is a licensed psychotherapist, founder and director of the Center for Anger Resolution, Inc., in Houston, Texas. You can purchase the book at www.BayouPublishing.com.

Why You Should Be Glad You Married a Narcissist

Marrying – and divorcing – a narcissist can teach you valuable lessons so you can identify red flags and avoid making the same mistakes in future relationships.

By Jason Levoy, Divorce Coach

Yes, it's true: you should be glad you married a narcissist. Let me explain what I mean before you start sending me nasty emails.

As a former divorce attorney and now as a divorce coach, I have dealt with many narcissists in the divorce process and in the courts. I'll be the first to agree with you that it's not pretty. I'm on your side!

Divorcing a narcissist can take years. If attorneys are involved, you'd better hope your spouse's attorney is not a narcissist. There are plenty of them, trust me. While attorneys should be part of the solutions, the wrong attorney for your divorce can be part of the problem. Choose wisely.



If you don't take the time to properly heal after divorcing a narcissist, you are setting yourself up for failure.

Negotiating with a Narcissist is Not Easy

Unless the mediator has the experience and training to handle clients with personality disorders, you may be wasting your time and money if you try to mediate your divorce from a narcissist. I always say that it takes two to make mediation work. If your narcissistic spouse is not participating in good faith, it won't work.

Interestingly, there are many people who didn't even know what a narcissist was before they did some research into why their relationships weren't working the way they had hoped and why they feel lost and worthless in their marriage. Then, they had that "aha!" moment and knew they weren't crazy after all.

A Narcissist by Any Other Name...

The term "narcissist" is often overused by people to label their intimate partner, classify him/her, and put them in a box. Sometimes, the person they are describing actually *is* a diagnosable narcissist – but many times, they're not. I guess it makes us feel better to be able to articulate to others the type of person we're dealing with.

It doesn't matter what you call your ex (in your head or to your lawyer); label your ex as a narcissist, an egomaniac, someone with borderline personality disorder, or whatever seems to fit.

Both as a lawyer and as a coach, I deal with a person's behavior and conduct. That's the focus, and that's what you have to deal with in your divorce.

So You Married a Narcissist. What Now?

While the actual process of divorcing a narcissist is not pleasant, it can set you up for future success in your intimate relationships. When you understand what went wrong in your marriage and can identify the specific things your spouse did to manipulate you and make you feel like everything was your fault, you can use that information to make sure it never happens again.

Knowledge Truly Is Power

It may take some time, but if you put in the work and heal yourself after a toxic relationship, you will be better armed to see red flags and stay away from similar toxic conduct in future relationships. And don't you want to have healthy relationships? If not, you could have stayed in a dysfunctional marriage and not chosen to get divorced. Good for you for wanting better!

If you don't take the time to properly heal after divorcing a narcissist, you are setting yourself up for failure. Therapy can help you heal the quickest. Being married to a narcissist has taught you a wealth of information – not only about how narcissists act and the ways they manipulate their subjects, but also about yourself and how you react to certain people and situations.

In my private Facebook divorce

group, I can't tell you how often I read about people being concerned about repeating the same mistakes in new relationships after their divorce is over. They regularly question if their new mate is acting like a narcissist and if they should be concerned about his/her conduct early on in the new relationship. To me, that is a sign that they haven't put in the work yet to heal themselves and learn from what happened during their marriage.

Don't Rush the Healing Process

Healing takes time, and it shouldn't be rushed. I understand the wish to move on and get involved in another relationship, but resist until you're ready. Otherwise, you will find yourself in a similar situation. Narcissists are experts in finding their prey.

You deserve a future of peace and happiness. Whether that's alone, or in another relationship, is up to you. But if you had never been married to a narcissist, you probably wouldn't have this level of insight about yourself and be able to identify red flags of toxic relationships. ■



Jason Levoy is a former divorce lawyer turned coach who helps people going through a divorce. He teaches his clients the information they need to know to feel empowered and helps them achieve a future of peace and happiness. He also hosts "The Divorce Resource Guy Podcast," which features experts in all areas of divorce.
www.jasonlevoy.com



7 Ways Dads Can Empower Their Daughters After Divorce

Maintaining a close and positive relationship with your daughter is key to ensuring she grows up with high self-esteem and self-worth.

By Terry Gaspard, Licensed Therapist and Author

Many dads write to me asking for tips on raising a daughter with high self-esteem after their divorce. I always inform them that the father-daughter connection and relationship is very important.

Fostering a daughter's self-esteem following divorce is a top priority, as girls are very vulnerable to cultural influences. For example, there's evidence that daughters who feel connected to their fathers experience more satisfaction with their bodies and ultimately higher feelings of self-worth.

For the most part, a good relationship with an intimate partner is strongly

tied to a woman's relationship with her dad. The presence of a father (or lack of presence) in a daughter's life will affect how she will relate to all men who come after him and can impact her view of herself and psychological well-being.

My research for *Daughters of Divorce* spanned over five years and comprised over 300 interviews with young women who reflected upon their parents' divorce. The most common themes that emerged from these interviews were trust issues and a wound in the father-daughter relationship. My previous study published in the *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*

concluded that lack of access to both parents and an inability to deal with conflict in a constructive manner were associated with low self-esteem in young women raised in divorced homes.

Further, a large-scale study cited in a Huffington Post article, "Teen Depression in Girls Linked to Absent Fathers in Early Childhood", sheds new light on the importance of the father-daughter bond. Findings from the "Children of the 90s" study at the University of Bristol showed that girls whose fathers were absent during the first five years of life were more likely to develop depressive symptoms in

adolescence than girls whose fathers left when they were aged five to 10 years. These girls also demonstrated more depressive symptoms when compared to adolescent boys whose fathers left in both age groups. More research is needed on this key topic to explore reasons for these outcomes.

Why is the father-daughter relationship so vulnerable to disruption after a parent's divorce? In a divorced family, there are many ways a father-daughter bond may suffer. Based on her research, Dr. Linda Nielsen found that only 10-15% of fathers get to enjoy the benefits of shared parenting after divorce. Neilson posits that while most daughters are well-adjusted several years after their parents' divorce, many have damaged relationships with their fathers. Unfortunately, if the wound is severe, a girl can grow into adulthood with low self-esteem and trust issues.

What a girl needs is a loving, predictable father figure – whether married to her mother, single, or divorced. Joshua Coleman, Ph.D., a recognized expert on parenting, explains that one of the predictors of a father's relationship with his children after divorce is the mother's facilitation or obstruction of the relationship.

In his book *When Parents Hurt*, Dr. Coleman writes, "Mothers who feel wronged in the marriage or divorce, who believe that mothers are more important than fathers, or who have psychological problems may directly or indirectly interfere with the father's desire to have an ongoing relationship with his children." Moms can do a lot to support a daughter's close relationship with her dad by avoiding bad-mouthing them and encouraging regular, ongoing communication and in-person contact.

7 Ways Dads Can Foster Their Daughter's High Self-Esteem

1. Encourage her to be assertive

This includes voicing her opinion even when it's not popular to do so – and be sure to listen and validate

her feelings.

2. Direct your praise away from her body and appearance

Instead, comment on her talents and strengths, saying things such as, "You are making such healthy choices" or "Good for you for going for a walk", with encouragement for her to be active and healthy.

3. Don't bad-mouth your ex

This promotes loyalty conflicts and may make it more difficult for her to heal from the losses associated with divorce. Don't let your cynicism or anger get in the way of your daughter's future. Don't pass on your negative views of relationships on to her.

4. Protect her from negative cultural influences

This includes those that encourage her to be overly competitive with other girls or young women. Point out what she has to offer the world and help her shine.

5. Encourage her to develop interests and practice her talents

Recognizing her efforts as well as strengths will boost your daughter's confidence in the years to come.

6. Spend time with her doing things she enjoys

Encourage her to find healthy outlets such as exercise, joining a club at her school, or participating in a community activity.

7. Encourage her to spend close to equal time with both parents

Be flexible about "parenting time" – especially as she reaches adolescence and may need more time for friends, school, jobs, and extracurricular activities.

Since many daughters perceive limited contact with their fathers as a personal rejection, this can lead to lowered self-esteem and trouble trusting romantic partners during adolescence and adulthood. Psychologist Kevin Leman posits that fathers are the key to their daughter's future. A child development expert, he writes, "That evidence

The father-daughter connection, even several years after a family dissolves, is heavily influenced by consistency in contact and the quality of the relationship.

shows that a father's relationship with his daughter is one of the key determinants in a woman's ability to enjoy a successful life and marriage."

In *Always Dad: Being a Great Father During & After Divorce* (Nolo), author Paul Mandelstein advises divorced dads to find ways to play a crucial role in their daughter's life. He suggests that divorced parents call a truce with their ex-spouse: to put an end to active fighting and to collaborate for their daughter's sake.

How Do You Want Your Daughter to Remember You?

The father-daughter connection, even several years after a family dissolves, is heavily influenced by consistency in contact and the quality of the relationship. Think about how you want your daughter to remember the time you spend with her in the years to come. If you want those memories to be positive, try to carve out special activities to enjoy with her during her childhood and adolescence. ■



Terry Gaspard (MSW, LICSW) is a licensed therapist, college instructor, and non-fiction author specializing in divorce, women's issues, children, and relationships.

www.movingpastdivorce.com

7 Tips for Not Becoming an Absentee Father After Divorce

You can make the choice to step up and be the best parent you can be to your children or you can take the easy way out and fade away.

By C.W. Meyer, Master Certified Relationship Coach



A few years ago, the Pew Research Center did an analysis of the National Survey of Family Growth. According to the research, 27% of divorced fathers have no contact with their children. That is a lot of absentee fathers! And, a lot of sad and confused children.

Your role as a parent will change after your divorce, especially if you are a non-custodial father. It takes extra effort to parent and work around visitation schedules. Add to that, the possibility of an adversarial relationship with your ex and it is understandable why checking out of your children's lives may seem like the answer to your problems. It isn't, though.

I've heard some fathers say they no longer see their children because not doing so cuts down on the conflict in their children's lives. They think they are doing their children a favor by staying away when, in reality, they are adding confusion and feelings of abandonment to everything else their children have to deal with after their parents' divorce.

If you are feeling overwhelmed by divorce and the new challenges you face in your role as a father, there are steps you can take to ensure that you won't become an absentee father. If you are pondering whether or not it's best for all if you back away from parenting, try the tips below before giving up on your relationship with your children.

Tip #1: Create a Realistic Parenting Plan During the Divorce Process

It's easy to become sidetracked during the divorce process by issues like dividing marital property, alimony, or who will pay what debts. Those things are important, but your children will be around long after those issues have been settled.

It will be easier to stay bonded with your children after your divorce is final if you insist that your attorney negotiate a reasonable parenting plan during the divorce process. Make sure your parenting plan clearly states how many nights a month your children will spend with you, how holidays will be handled, and how much summer vacation you will have with your children.

Having a schedule clearly outlined in your final divorce decree keeps down any conflict with your ex after the divorce. If there is conflict, however, that legal document should empower you if you need to go back to court due to parental interference by your ex.

Tip #2: Keep up Regular Communication with Your Children

If your visitation schedule is maybe every other weekend and one night a week for dinner, it doesn't mean you can't talk to your children on the days they are not with you. Hearing your voice and knowing you love them enough to have an interest in what they've been up to goes a long way in keeping your children emotionally engaged with you as a father.

Even if it is nothing more than a three-minute phone call to say, "I love you" or "What have you been up to," make the effort on a regular basis. Have your right to speak with them daily by phone written into your parenting plan.

Tip #3: Be Consistent with Visitation and Communication

Before your divorce, giving your children consistency in their daily routine was simple. It was also easier because you weren't parenting alone. When you were married, you had a partner to pick up the slack when you couldn't get the job done.

Those days are over; you are on your own, and it's imperative, especially now that they are living in two homes, that your children continue to have consistency in their daily lives. Regardless of whether you are still married to their mother, you are aware of what their daily schedule was before the divorce. When they are in your home, they will have a sense of security if you put effort into getting them fed on schedule, getting them to bed when they are used to going to bed, and following other rules they have become accustomed to.

On top of that, you now have to be consistent with the new routine of visitation and communication. If it's your weekend to spend with your children, show up, pick up, and consistently parent your children if it is your scheduled visitation time. And, if you are to make a phone call daily or every other day at 7:30 in the evening, don't miss a call. Be a father your children can depend on!

Tip #4: Be There for Them 24/7

You may be divorced, you may have a parenting schedule but, like all parents, you will need to be on call 24/7. When your children are in your ex's custody that doesn't mean you stop being a father. Don't plan trips out of town without notifying your children and leaving them contact information in case they need to get in touch with you.

Your new girlfriend may be important to you, but she won't ever be more important than your children and meeting their needs. Be willing to cancel or change plans with her if your children need you. If she is a keeper, she will understand; if she doesn't understand, she isn't a keeper.

You may only see your children on certain days of the month after divorce, but divorce doesn't nullify your all day, everyday responsibilities as a father.

Tip #5: Be Involved on All Levels

There is more to fathering after divorce than sticking to a

regular visitation and communication schedule. When you are with them, be involved with them. Don't be a "Disney Dad" who only plans fun activities or buys them the latest video game. Engage with them when they are in your custody in ways that help promote an emotional bond. Get to know them, their likes and dislikes, what they do at school, and who their friends are. Show them you have a genuine interest in them as little people.

Tip #6: If You're Angry, Don't Take it out on Your Kids

If you're pissed at your ex, the family court system, or having to pay child support, get over it! Put some effort into separating your relationship with your children from all that crap you're so angry about. Man up, get into therapy, do whatever you need to do. Do whatever you need to do to keep your anger from hurting your children. You aren't a victim: you're a grown-ass man, and it's your responsibility to *always* put your children's feelings before your own.

Tip #7: Don't Fear Their Emotions

Divorce is a hard adjustment for adults to process; imagine how much more difficult it is for young children. They will have questions to ask, emotions to express, and maybe even some resentment to work through. Don't shut them down because you doubt your ability to soothe their pain and help them feel more secure.

You may feel you only have a little time with them and you don't want that time wasted on negative energy but, if you want there to be better times, you're going to have to help them work through their negative emotions. If you need outside help, be a great father and go to therapy with your children to help them and you better understand how to work through and overcome the instability they are feeling due to the divorce.

Here is the reality: life goes on after divorce and so does your role as a father. You can make the choice to step up and be the best parent you can be to your children, or you can fade away and take the easy way out. Being a father means loving your children more than you love yourself. It means putting their pain, discomfort, and needs before your own and continuing to be part of their lives, regardless of how overwhelming the responsibility.

Good men don't abandon their children; they don't become absentee fathers. Be a good man! ■



C.W. Meyer is a Master Certified Relationship Coach and Certified Marriage Educator. She is also the Managing Editor of DivorcedMoms.com – the leading resource for divorced moms to connect, communicate, share experiences, and find expert information – and a divorced mother of two. www.DivorcedMoms.com



Bodies in Motion and at Rest

Taking care of your body during and after divorce is essential to your emotional, mental, and physical health.

By Diana Shepherd,
Divorce Magazine Co-Founder

Your teenager has “borrowed” your car – again – without permission, so now you can’t drive your daughter to Brownies, and she’s throwing a huge hissy fit in the middle of the kitchen. There’s a message on your answering machine from your ex saying you have to take the kids for an extra week because she got a fabulous deal on airfare to Florida and is leaving tomorrow for 10 days of sun and sand with her new boyfriend. Your savings account is down to (low) double-digits, but your son says he “just has to have” that new pair of \$150 running shoes or he’ll be branded as a “loser” at school.

Suddenly, you don’t feel so good: your stomach is upset, your chest feels tight, and you can feel a wicked migraine/backache/cold coming on. “This is so unfair!” you think. “My life is so difficult, and now I have to deal with illness on top of everything else!”

The stress in your life has risen beyond your ability to cope with it, and your body will respond with a “break-down” wherever it’s weakest: if you tend to catch a cold easily, you’ll come down with a cold or flu; if you have a

Find a rewarding reason – one that really inspires you – to make positive lifestyle changes, and you’re just about assured of success.

“bad back,” it will get worse; otherwise mild allergies will become moderate to severe – you get the picture.

According to the noted Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), except for the death of a spouse or child, divorce produces more stress than any other life event. If you ignore or deny your feelings of stress, you’ll end up sick or injured (clumsiness often goes along with stress) – and then you’ll feel even more stressed at having to cope with your disability in addition to all the other challenges you’re facing. Divorce-related stress is unavoidable, but you can learn to manage your stress so that it doesn’t seriously damage your body and spirit.

The only thing that’s required of you is a genuine willingness to change – everything else will grow out of your commitment to health and happiness. Without that commitment, however, any steps you take towards better health will be severely limited in scope and efficacy. Purchase a health-club membership or a piece of exercise equipment, and you’ll stop using it after a month because you “just can’t find the time”; or start purchasing wholesome, fresh ingredients to prepare nutritious meals and you’ll be back to fast food in a matter of days; try to quit smoking or drinking and you’ll fall off the wagon as soon as the going gets tough.

What’s Your Motivation?

The secret to long-term success seems to boil down to two main elements: motivation and support. Fear can sometimes be very motivating – for instance, your uncle dies of lung cancer and you quit smoking – but it often isn’t enough to effect permanent change. According to Dr. Andrew Weil, a world-renowned

leader and pioneer in the field of integrative medicine, you first have to identify the pay-offs as well as the costs of a specific behavior in order to change it.

For instance, let’s say you love rich, high-fat foods. You know that your father – who ate the same way you do now – died of a heart attack at 50, and that you have high blood pressure and bad knees from the 40 extra pounds you’re carrying. Obviously, you should change your eating habits. But still you can’t quite resist a double helping of fettuccine alfredo and that fourth beer. “I’ve had a rough day,” you think. “This will help me relax.” So the satisfaction of eating the foods you love outweighs the fear of dying of a heart attack like your father. As long as the rewards are greater than the costs, you won’t be able to change your eating habits.

Now, let’s look at another scenario. You’re offered the opportunity to spend a year living rent-free in a gorgeous beach-house in Hawaii. All you have to do in return is to take tourists on snorkeling and SCUBA dive trips – which requires a high level of physical fitness. Now, it’s always been your dream to spend a year in Hawaii, and you’ve always loved being in the ocean – suddenly, you’re excited about starting a diet and exercise regimen. Why? Because the cost of remaining fat and sedentary has now risen to include missing out on your dream year abroad – and just like that, the rewards of overindulging in rich foods are no longer greater than the costs.

“Even though I recognize the efficacy of fear in facilitating behavioral change, I feel that seeking positive reinforcement (a reward you can enjoy) is better than pursuing negative reinforcement (avoidance of something you do not want to experience),

because research shows that positive reinforcement is better at maintaining new behavior,” writes Dr. Weil in *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* (Ballantine Books, 2007). “If fear is your motivator, when fear subsides, so does motivation. Fear can also paralyze you, preventing you from moving at all,” he continues.

So find a “rewarding” reason – one that really inspires you – to make positive lifestyle changes, and you’re just about assured of success. And if you can enroll people in supporting you to meet your goals – your friends, family, or a support group designed for your specific needs – you’re home-free.

Managing Stress

If you’re facing the challenges of divorce right now, it’s probably safe to say that stress is your constant companion. Researchers at Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, D.C., have found that emotions can cause chemical reactions in our cells. This means that negative emotions (such as fear, anger, or even fretting) can have a detrimental impact on every part of your body – including the organs that support your immune system. If stressful thoughts and feelings can actually damage your physical health, you can see why managing stress properly – and taking better care of your body – is so vital at this stage of your life.

So how do you relax and de-stress? If you’re like most people, what leaps immediately to mind are “treat” behaviors: smoking, drinking, taking drugs (prescription or “recreational”), eating a carton of chocolate ice-cream – whatever gives you feelings of pleasure and well-being, no matter how transitory. Unfortunately, all of these are band-aid solutions – they temporarily ameliorate

some of the symptoms without addressing the root of the problem – and none of them contribute to health and vitality.

Scanning for Tension

A good place to start an effective stress-reduction program is to find out where you hold stress in your body. The first time you try the following exercise, you should probably be lying down with your eyes closed. Take the phone off the hook, and tell your kids or housemates that you don't want to be disturbed for at least half an hour. In this exercise, you'll be scanning your body from the tips of your toes to the top of your head, looking for places where you hold tension then consciously letting that tension go.

Focus your attention exclusively on one part of your body at a time, starting with your feet. Wiggle your toes. Rotate your ankles, and flex your feet so your toes are pointing up towards the ceiling, then down and away from you. Is there any tension in your feet or lower legs? If so, intentionally increase the tension for a few seconds, then exhale deeply and relax that part of your body, imagining the tension flowing out of you with your breath. Move your attention upwards to your thighs, buttocks, and hips. Flex each muscle in turn, checking for tension and discomfort, then let it go with a deep exhalation. Repeat for your stomach, chest, and shoulders. Pull your shoulders up towards your ears, hold them there tightly for a few seconds, then drop them down as far



as they will comfortably go while you exhale. Now examine your throat, mouth, cheeks, eyes, forehead, and scalp. Notice any tension, exaggerate then release it.

The benefits of this exercise are twofold: first, you'll discover where you hold stress in your body; and two, you'll give your body a break by releasing tense areas.

Food for Thought

At its most basic level, food is fuel for the body. Whether you're in training for the Boston Marathon, someone who goes for daily brisk walks, a skinny couch potato, or a chubby couch potato, the food you eat has a lot to do with your mood, energy levels, stamina, and ability to fend off disease. Your

diet has a lot to do with the way you live your life – and how long that life is going to last. Even if you look slender on the outside, your diet could be setting you up for a whole host of medical problems: from indigestion to clogged arteries to cancer. Your food choices can put you on the road to wellness and vitality, or chronic fatigue and disease.

The first thing you need to do for yourself is get a little education about nutrition in general, and your nutritional needs in particular. Visit your family doctor; ask for a referral to a nutritionist; go to a health spa; read a great book on the subject. Discuss possible nutritional plans with your doctor to make sure they won't exacerbate existing health problems, and exercise some common-sense when choosing a new diet regimen: steer clear of anything that promises miraculous results in days, or advises you to eat from only a single food group (e.g., grapefruit three times a day or only protein and no carbs).

And then – and this is key – listen to what your body is telling you about the food you're putting in your mouth. How you feel after eating certain foods: happy and energetic, or grumpy and tired? How do you feel after eating a double cheeseburger, large fries, and a milkshake? An apple? A piece of cheesecake? A spinach salad?

Recognize that every body is different – what suits your best friend's body might be anathema to yours, so finding the ideal diet for you will be a case of trial and error.

If you invest the time, energy, and commitment into caring for your body properly, it will repay you generously.

Suggestions on using food to improve your mood:

- **Cut back on caffeine**, including tea, coffee, cola, and chocolate. Women take note: caffeine has been found to play a huge role in PMS, from breast pain to mood swings. For some people, one cup a day is too much; you'll need to experiment to determine your threshold.
- **Drink pure water**. Ideally, you should be drinking about two liters of filtered water every day. This is one of the simplest, and yet most vital, steps you can take to improve your health.
- **Go low-fat**. Aside from improving your general health, some studies suggest that a low-fat diet may help stabilize your mood. Some easy ways to reduce your fat intake include avoiding fried foods, choosing leaner cuts of meat, and removing the skin from poultry before cooking it. Increase your consumption of fresh fruits, vegetables, and products made from whole grains (your body will thank you for the extra fiber, too).
- **Take your vitamins**. A deficiency in B vitamins – particularly thiamin, riboflavin, folate (the naturally occurring form of folic acid), and B6 – can exacerbate depression. Taking vitamin C is probably a good idea, too. It boosts your immune system, which probably isn't in tip-top shape right now.
- **Butt out**. Aside from increasing your risk of lung cancer and heart disease, smoking triggers the release of stress hormones in the body.
- **Avoid sugar**. It'll give you a short-term boost but a long-term crash.

Exercise Your Options

Adopting a nutritional program that suits your individual metabolism and caloric requirements can clear up a lot

of physical ailments. But if you really want to look and feel great – and help minimize the negative effects of divorce-related stress on your body – you need to do more than just eat right. You need to exercise.

What's the best form of exercise? The one you'll do. The best exercise equipment in the world won't do you a bit of good if you can't bring yourself to use it more than once a month.

If you've been sedentary for the last few years, you must see your physician before you start to exercise. If you haven't had a full physical examination in the last year, now's a great time to have one. Please be aware that pushing your body too hard too fast is a recipe for disaster – at the very least, you'll probably sprain or tear a muscle; at worst, you'll have a heart attack.

Unless your doctor vetoes the idea, a good place to start is by taking daily walks, slowly increasing the speed, distance, and duration. If you can't stand the idea of walking "aimlessly," give yourself errands to accomplish on your walks: instead of driving, walk to the bank/post office/milk store. Arrange to go for walks in scenic areas with friends so you can enjoy their company as well as the surroundings while you walk.

If your lifestyle can accommodate it, consider getting a dog: you're guaranteed daily exercise, and it's nice to come home to a happy, enthusiastic welcome instead of an empty house. (Also, you've probably heard of the therapeutic side-effects of pet ownership: that stroking an animal lowers your blood pressure and decreases tension.) If owning a dog is out of the question, you could always "borrow" one: your neighbor would probably be thrilled if you offered to take her dog for a daily walk in the park.

Walking can also help you sleep better at night – good news for those suffering from divorce-related

insomnia. In a study involving more than 700 men and women, researchers discovered that people who walked at least six blocks a day at a normal pace experienced fewer sleep-related problems such as nightmares, or trouble getting to or staying asleep; in fact, they were one-third less likely to have trouble sleeping until their wake-up time than people who didn't walk at all. And those who walked the same distance at an aerobic pace were 50% less likely to suffer sleep problems than non-walkers.

Seeing Results

If you invest the time, energy, and commitment into caring for your body properly, it will repay you generously. But as an impatient North American, you're probably wondering when the rewards will start to show up.

"Both from observing the effects of natural therapies and from watching people try to make lasting changes in how they live, I have concluded that two months ... is the critical time for you see effects of therapeutic regimens as well as to replace old habits with new," says Dr. Weil. "If you can follow a program of healthy living for two months, you will have made the commitment of time and energy necessary for it to work." ■

The information in this article is for information-purposes only. Do not begin any diet or exercise regimen without checking with your doctor first.



Diana Shepherd is the co-founder and Editorial Director of Divorce Magazine. She is an award-winning author & editor, and has been writing

about divorce, separation, stepfamily, and remarriage issues since 1995.

www.DivorceMag.com

7 Reasons *to* Wait to Date During Divorce

While a new relationship may feel like the perfect antidote to divorce stress and sadness, it might have several negative consequences. Here's why you should hit the brakes on a new romance until your divorce is final.

By Stuart Watson, Family and Divorce Mediator



Relationship during the divorce process can be a gift from the heavens. After many months of disconnection, hurt, and drama, the connection and intimacy may seem exactly what you need. In fact, your body is making the joy of this relationship instantly clear.

Being wanted, appreciated, and respected can be a balm for your wounded heart and spirit. In a new relationship is helping you cope with the stress of divorce by providing positive support and structure.

What if this goodness of dating during the divorce can go wrong? Isn't the point of the divorce that you each can lead happier lives?

The problem with the new relationship is not the relationship, it is the timing and manner of it. Jumping into this wonderful new relationship while you are in the midst of a divorce could have significant negative impacts.

Why You Should Wait to Date

There are seven compelling reasons to put a temporary hold on dating (or at least to take it super slow) until after your divorce is finalized.

1 It Can Escalate Conflict With Your Ex.

If you initiated the divorce, your ex will probably jump to the conclusion that your new relationship is the result of your betrayal in an extra-marital affair. This is to be expected. Your ex's wounded heart and pride are looking for ways to understand the end of the

marriage. By blaming you, your ex can numb their pain and avoid their own responsibility for your relationship's demise.

Even if your ex initiated the divorce, has had affairs, and seems to despise you, your new relationship may result in greater conflict with them. The reasons for this are many, even if they are illogical.

The elevated conflict will result in heightened stress, more difficulty in reaching a divorce settlement, and a prolonged divorce process. Instead of the normal three to eight months of discomfort and uncertainty during divorce, think two years of hell. A high-conflict divorce also damages the co-parenting relationship for years to come.

2 It May Increase Financial Costs

With increased conflict, your legal bills during divorce will quickly expand. If your ex suspects you are using marital resources to date, go on trips, or otherwise support your new relationship, then expect a hard fight over money.

This is especially true regarding spousal support. If you will be receiving spousal support, your ex will feel justified in paying as little as possible. As a Family Mediator, I have often witnessed the agony of a spouse who feels adamant about not paying support. They claim, "Why should I support them in being with somebody else? Their new partner is probably helping them financially anyway."

If you will be paying spousal support, your ex may demand more from being hurt and wanting to punish you. They may interpret your reluctance to pay a higher amount as your attempt to save money to spend on your new relationship.

3 It Could Limit Divorce Settlement Options

Ex-spouses who are civil and accept the divorce as a necessary restructuring of their lives tend to be more creative with the settlements. For example, people may agree for one spouse to

receive a larger share of the assets in exchange for lower or no spousal support. Negotiations such as these will be strained with any anger, mistrust, or resentment about your new relationship.

There are also a few states where the divorce courts can consider "fault" when allocating support, property, and even child custody. In these states, your relationship could be cast as "adultery" – which could preclude you from receiving spousal support, require you to pay a higher amount of spousal support, or skew property division in favor of your ex.

4 It Could Threaten Your Parenting Time

You will be negotiating your parenting schedule directly with one another, with a mediator, or between attorneys. In either case, your ex may argue that you have less capacity for parenting because you are consumed with your new relationship.

Another result of your new relationship enthusiasm is that your ex may develop the following, more insidious narratives about your divorce. "You made your choice. You chose to abandon your family. Don't act now

like you care about the kids." Your ex's entrenched position foretells a struggle over parenting time and custody.

The comfort and love from your new relationship can also distort your clarity about the amount of parenting time you desire in the divorce. I have spoken to parents who, during divorce, committed to a parenting schedule based on a desire of spending significant time with a new partner. They gravely regretted this decision when the new relationship fizzled out a few months later.

If custody or parenting time is a hotly contested issue in your divorce, your new relationship will likely be twisted and used against you in the legal process.

5 It Can Impair Your Children's Healing

Are you wondering how to protect your children from the effects of divorce? All the research confirms the largest factor for children's well-being and ability to be resilient through a divorce is the amount of parental conflict. Referring back to #1 in this article, your new relationship during the divorce is highly likely to increase parental conflict.



People who jump into a new relationship during divorce can mistakenly isolate themselves by seeking emotional support primarily from the new partner. But the more diverse your base of support, the more resilient you will be with the unforeseen hardships of life.

Children have their own ways of dealing with the loss, confusion, and anxiety of a divorce. They need extra stability, attention, and reassurance during a time that is more challenging for you to provide it. Don't kid yourself, your new relationship will be a distraction.

You might be thinking you can hide your new relationship. This is unlikely. Your children see and hear everything, and their senses are extra acute during the divorce. You might be furtively texting during dinner, or having phone conversations after you think the kids are asleep. At the very least, your kids are aware of your divided attention.

Children in divorcing families have certain questions that (often unconsciously) haunt them. "Was it my fault?" "Was I too much a burden?" "Are they going to stop loving me as they did each other?" If they interpret that your love for your spouse was so quickly replaceable, they will fear that is the same for themselves.

6 Dating While You Are Still Married May Strain Friendships and Community Relationships

Your pending divorce may feel to you like long-awaited freedom and resolution. However, vast life changes and uncertainties are difficult for even the most adaptable people. Your friendships and community relationships are like a healing and stabilizing salve during these turbulent times.

If you rush headlong into a new relationship amidst your divorce process, some of your friends or members of your community may lack respect for you. Few to none of them will express it to you directly. Additionally, if they were friends with both you and your ex, they may feel awkward or loyal towards your ex upon learning of your new relationship.

Should you make your life decisions out of fear of judgment or discomfort from others? Absolutely not. And with effort, you can always make new friends. But consider that underneath

their hushed recriminations lies a genuine concern about what is the healthiest transition for you and your family.

People who jump into a new relationship during a divorce can mistakenly isolate themselves by seeking emotional support primarily from the new partner. As with any ecosystem, the more diverse your base of support, the more resilient you will be with the unforeseen hardships of life. If friends and family are not available, find a divorce support group that is right for you.

7 Your Children Will Probably Ruin Your New Relationship

While the divorce rate is 50% for first marriages, it is 65-75% for second marriages. The children's systematic rejection of the new partner is a substantial reason for the higher failure rate. Your effort to integrate a new partner into their lives too soon has predictable consequences. Your children will never like, love, or accept your new partner.

Most kids feel the need to take sides and blame one of you for the divorce, which has had real impacts on them. They will typically rally behind the parent who appears to be "left" or not moving on because they worry about losing that parent to depression and parental resignation.

You may wonder, "How soon is too soon?" Kids operate on emotional time, not calendar time. Many experts recommend parents wait 1-2 years after a divorce before introducing them to a new partner. However, if your kids know that you began dating during or freshly after the divorce, they may also, like your spouse, assume your new relationship is the cause of the divorce.

One renowned child psychologist, Donald Saposnek, Ph.D., explains the fate of the new relationship begun during the divorce process: "The children will spray an emotional contaminant on the new partner that will never wash off."

The bottom line is, if you want your new relationship to have any chance of survival, the most strategic thing you can do is to keep the relationship on the

backburner and out of the children's lives for a substantial amount of time.

Are You Saying I Shouldn't Date at All?

I don't suggest any hard-and-fast rules in the territory of dating and new relationships during divorce. Your divorce might even have been motivated by a long-withheld desire for a new relationship. The waiting you have already done might feel agonizing, particularly if you have been dealing with a spouse in denial about the divorce. However, if you leap into the relationship before, or shortly after your divorce is finalized, you are likely to experience some of the negative consequences I identified above.

If you believe this person is your true "soulmate," then slowing it way down and waiting to explore it in depth should not alter that outcome. Waiting to date until after the dust clears has lots of additional personal benefits. The extra space and time you invest in reflecting upon and learning from your ended marriage will pay off with more clarity and satisfaction in your next relationship. ■



Stuart Watson is a family mediator who has been assisting couples and families through the divorce and separation process for nearly 20 years. He is also the creator of "Breaking Through: The Relationship Repair Game": a 78-card deck that can transform conflict in any relationship. www.relationshiphelp.com