

# The end of a marriage

No one ever expects to be divorced or separated, and when it happens nothing can prepare you for the pain and devastation it causes.

Divorce is one of the most painful experiences you can go through because it impacts every aspect of your life. In addition to the rejection and sense of loss, there is the burden of shame and failure. Your past and your future seem to be wiped out in one blow, and functioning in the present demands every ounce of your energy and focus. So how do you cope?



## Shattered dreams

My marriage was filled with tension from the beginning. My husband was in the defence force which took him away for two or three weeks at a time and then he would come back to suburban life. It was quite difficult for him to adapt, I think. I was working and very involved in our local church. We hadn't managed to conceive which I found hard to cope with as the biological clock was ticking and he would not consider adoption. Eventually we effectively led two separate lives.

Then we moved to another area where he started a new job and we had a much happier time for a couple of years. I felt that things were coming right and was hoping that we were going to be able to start a family. But one night my husband came home and said he was moving out. Initially I was stunned, and then I started questioning him and asking what was wrong, what had happened.

I found out that he had become close to a married woman we were friends with at

church. She and my husband both enjoyed keeping fit and had been running together. I found out too that while I was at work they had been meeting in my house. My initial shock turned into anger then.

### Over so soon

The divorce proceedings were very quick. I felt very awkward telling a solicitor, a stranger, all about my private life and I didn't always feel that he was on my side. But it was all over within four months of my husband moving out. Three weeks after that he had married this woman, who had also divorced her husband, so it had all been planned by them.

A friend of mine said that at least I had everything happen all at once - I'd gone through the divorce and the remarriage of my partner and now I could move on. But it wasn't that simple.

### Learning to cope

I don't know how you really cope with

something like this especially as I viewed marriage as a lifetime commitment. You have to learn to cope just by getting through each day at a time. I kept working because I knew I had to support myself. And my friends were very good helping me with practical things and just letting me talk and talk, to rattle on as you do. But there was a long period of time when I was just completely and utterly stunned and couldn't feel anything. However my faith and the support of my friends kept me going. I tried to make sense of why everything had happened. What had I done? What hadn't I done?

I lost all my self-confidence and self-esteem and became depressed trying to cope with my loneliness. Consequently I ended up having some counselling. I really wrestled with being a single woman again and of being denied the opportunity to have children, as I so badly wanted to have a family of my own.

Liz

## Starting again

We had been married 13 years when I found that I just couldn't take any more of my wife's behaviour. I had been running my own business, trying to build a house, facing financial difficulties and undergoing cancer treatment, yet my wife only seemed to be concerned with going on jaunts overseas to see art exhibitions.

She was an artist and when she did well from commissions, she kept the money to herself instead of helping to pay our mortgage. Then we decided to sell our house and get something smaller. We made a good profit but instead of using it as a buffer for the future, my wife decided to once again travel alone.

This time while she was away I tried to call her to discuss a minor matter. The friends she was staying with said that she was unavailable and wouldn't give me a contact number for her. When she returned I said that I was moving out. She didn't seem too distressed. I found out later that a few weeks after I left, a man came from overseas and moved in with her.

### What next?

I had been living with such uncertainty, dishonesty and distrust for such a long time that the anger had been welling inside me. I

told my wife that she could keep the house if we would agree not to have anything more to do with each other. I felt at this point that getting away was a positive move, and I had a tremendous sense of relief. But I had nothing except my suitcase.

Many of our friends cut me off. I didn't want to badmouth my wife and they assumed that I had just abandoned her. My mother had been through a divorce herself but she didn't give me much emotional support and I had just a couple of friends who had been through divorce who helped me get back on my feet.

I spent a lot of time just working very, very hard. Eventually I found a new church where they had a men's group. Some of these guys had been through divorces and for the first time I could be completely open. I was able to start to trust people again as I talked through what had happened. But I think men generally find it very difficult to discuss these things; particularly British men who are told to have a stiff upper lip and guard their feelings. If they chat at all it is at the pub where things will be joked about and that undermines the deep emotions that are really being felt.

*David*

## Dealing with emotions

### Anger

- Acknowledge and accept your anger.
  - Identify the reason - am I feeling hurt, frustrated or threatened?
  - Take steps to deal with the cause or get help to talk about it.
  - Decide on a strategy to stay in control for when your anger is triggered.
  - Do not seek ways of taking revenge: it will not bring healing for you and will cause more damage.
  - Don't suppress your anger. Internalised anger is not resolved anger. It must be faced and managed; otherwise it will manifest in health problems like headaches and will cause depression.
  - Find a safe outlet for your anger such as kneading bread, beating a punchbag or pillow, or throwing glass bottles into the bottle bank and hearing them smash
  - Talk to a trusted friend or a counsellor.
  - Try writing down your feelings. Using words to express how you feel is better than allowing your anger to be acted out. You might like to write a letter to someone you are angry with - but don't send it. Instead burn it, and allow your feelings to go up in smoke.
  - Channel any anger towards your own healing, growth and learning; become determined to be a happier and stronger person.
  - Find projects you can take up which will help you vent your anger healthily - joining a health club, DIY jobs, take up a new hobby.
  - When you are ready, forgive the people who hurt you.
- Look at the way you live - does it encourage loneliness? If so, change. Don't blame others for your loneliness.
  - Visit others who are in need: elderly, sick or handicapped
  - Join a group of volunteers.
  - Take up a hobby or join a class.
  - Don't stifle the issue with drugs, alcohol, overeating or oversleeping.
  - Increase your contacts, by writing, phoning or talking to new people.
  - Appreciate yourself.
  - Have an encouraging book or music near your bed for lonely times at night.
  - Plan your time alone. Avoid feeling down on a Friday night or Bank Holiday by planning in a treat for yourself - rent a film and watch it with your favourite snacks, visit friends or make a trip to a gallery or museum.
  - Celebrate your achievements each day, no matter how trivial.
  - Live one day at a time.

### Loneliness

- Get involved in someone else's life - invite friends round, share meals.



## Making decisions

I'll always remember the day he told me. It was Easter Sunday and I was six months pregnant. He said that he was seeing someone from work. He didn't want me to tell anyone because he knew everyone would give him a hard time. He left and didn't come back till the Tuesday.

I don't know what I did in those intervening days. I was very, very shocked and felt humiliated with the deceit and not having seen it coming. But I immediately started thinking practically. There was no going back after what he had said. The shutters went down. He had made his decision so I had to look to the future and my baby.

### Is this for real?

We had been together for about 14 years, since I was 17. I did ask myself how this was happening to me, but only briefly and in the sense of going over the past few months and making links in my head. I tortured myself with that a bit. I hadn't been suspicious of him at all. I had even overheard a telephone conversation and joked about it with him because it didn't occur to me to think along those lines.

I agreed to his suggestion that we wouldn't tell anyone until the baby was born. I think I agreed to most things at the time. I didn't want people fussing over me but he had things easy. He would stay with the girlfriend in the week

and come back at the weekend and I was left to cover for him when people rang for him and wondered where he was. If I had my time again I don't think I would do his washing for him, as I did, and certainly not the ironing!

I think being pregnant actually made it easier in some ways. I had the baby to focus on and the most important thing was that the baby was all right. It was scary making decisions by myself. Being with one person for so long, I had got to the stage where I couldn't choose a dessert without asking his opinion. But once I found I could do it, I got a lot stronger.

So, in the long run, the divorce gave me back myself. I found I didn't have to rely on anyone for anything.

Once my baby was born, there was no time to celebrate. Within a week we had told everyone that my husband was leaving. And I had to go straight back to work because I had to support myself. I think that is my one regret - that I didn't take more time to be with my baby.

I accepted my ex-husband's decision to end our marriage almost immediately. I think it took me a lot, lot longer to trust again, and not feel bad about myself.

*Abigail*

## It couldn't be that bad

I didn't think it was over. He told me he was leaving and that he didn't love me anymore, but I thought he'd got it all wrong and he would realise eventually and come back. There was disbelief that there could be anything that wrong that couldn't be put right. We had been married for 28 years. I thought he must be having a breakdown. It was a gentle departure. I helped him pack and sent him off with flowers and food. I gave him a hug. I thought he would live on his own, miss me and come back.

### But time passed...

After six months a friend told me that my husband had been seeing another woman. I was devastated. That's when I knew it was the end. I was stunned and shocked, humiliated and very angry. I went past his house and saw the car. I wanted to crash into it but I realised just in time that I would be the one in trouble, and it wasn't worth it. I didn't stop shaking for four months. The shock of it all was terrible,

as was the sense of loneliness and fear of the future. I couldn't stop talking. I had lots of good friends and I would just go over and over the same thing to whoever would listen. It made me feel better if someone else knew. I wasn't expecting them to resolve it. Some things I knew I shouldn't say to people locally so I called my sister. Looking back I realised that I chose to say certain things to certain people - that no one person was burdened with everything.

### Hindsight is a wonderful thing

I know now that there were things I could have handled differently in our marriage, mostly communication. But I don't think that there should have been a separation because of it. I can forgive him for not realising he had a problem with us and not dealing with it in a better way. But I find it hard coping with the fact that he broke up our family.

*Jenny*



## How to help those going through divorce

- Be prepared to accept them where they are, whether angry, upset or even relieved. Show them love and support. - Don't judge them.
- Don't give your opinion on the other partner - the couple may still be reconciled and then your condemnation of the individual will affect your friendship.
- Be inclusive in conversation - talking about your own partner may exclude them. - Listen and follow their leading. They may or may not want to talk about the situation. Don't pry.
- Don't make glib statements about how they can get over the situation. Clichés like 'Plenty more fish in the sea', or 'time is a great healer' are not appropriate in a time of grief and loss.
- Offer practical help. Don't wait to be asked but suggest ways in which you can help with childcare, preparing meals, finding a reliable plumber, mechanic, cleaner or someone to do the ironing.
- Bank holidays are particularly difficult, as are anniversaries, so try to find activities to involve the individual at those times.
- They will need help long after the first few months. Be prepared to stay for the long haul.



## Extra help

### Support groups

#### Divorce Recovery Workshop

A course of six weekly evening sessions, or a weekend residential course, this self-help group is based around a series of videos which provide the opening for a discussion in small groups. The leaders are volunteers who have been through divorce themselves and they seek to provide a safe environment for people to share their response and experience and gain an understanding of their feelings.

Website: [www.drw.org.uk](http://www.drw.org.uk)

Email: [drw@drw.org.uk](mailto:drw@drw.org.uk)

Tel: 07000 781889

#### DivorceCare

An international initiative which has a strong Christian emphasis in its seminars and support groups where leaders are people who understand the impact of divorce. Each session is based around one of 13 video presentations. There is also DivorceCare for Kids to help children come to terms with what is happening to their family. Visit their website ([www.divorcecare.com](http://www.divorcecare.com)) for information on contacts within the UK.

#### Parentline Plus

A support group to help parents in separation. There is a free guide to 'helping you put your children first' and a 24 hour helpline. 'Parents Together' groups and workshops encourage parents to share their experiences with others and get new ideas on how to bring up their children in a difficult time.

Tel: 0808 800 2222

Website: [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

#### Care for the Family

If you have been divorced and are now parenting alone, then *Single Parent Family* is an email newsletter from Care for the Family. The organisation also offers counselling referrals, activity breaks for single parent families and other initiatives.

For more information contact Care for the Family, Garth House, FREEPOST, (CF4636), Cardiff CF15 7GZ, or phone (029) 2081 0800.

Information is also available online at [www.careforthefamily.org.uk/spf](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/spf)

### Bookshelf

*Missing being Mrs* by Jennifer Croly. Monarch Books, ISBN 0825460522.

*Divorce* by Frank Retief. Christian Focus, ISBN 1857924215

*Growing Through Divorce* by Jim Smoke. Harvest House Publishers, ISBN 1565073223

*How to have a Healthy Divorce* by Paula Hall (2008) Vermillion ISBN: 9780091924003

*Help Your Child Cope With Your Divorce* by Paula Hall (2007) Vermillion ISBN: 9780091912833

*Stop Arguing – Start Talking* by Susan Quilliam (2001) Vermillion ISBN: 9780091856694