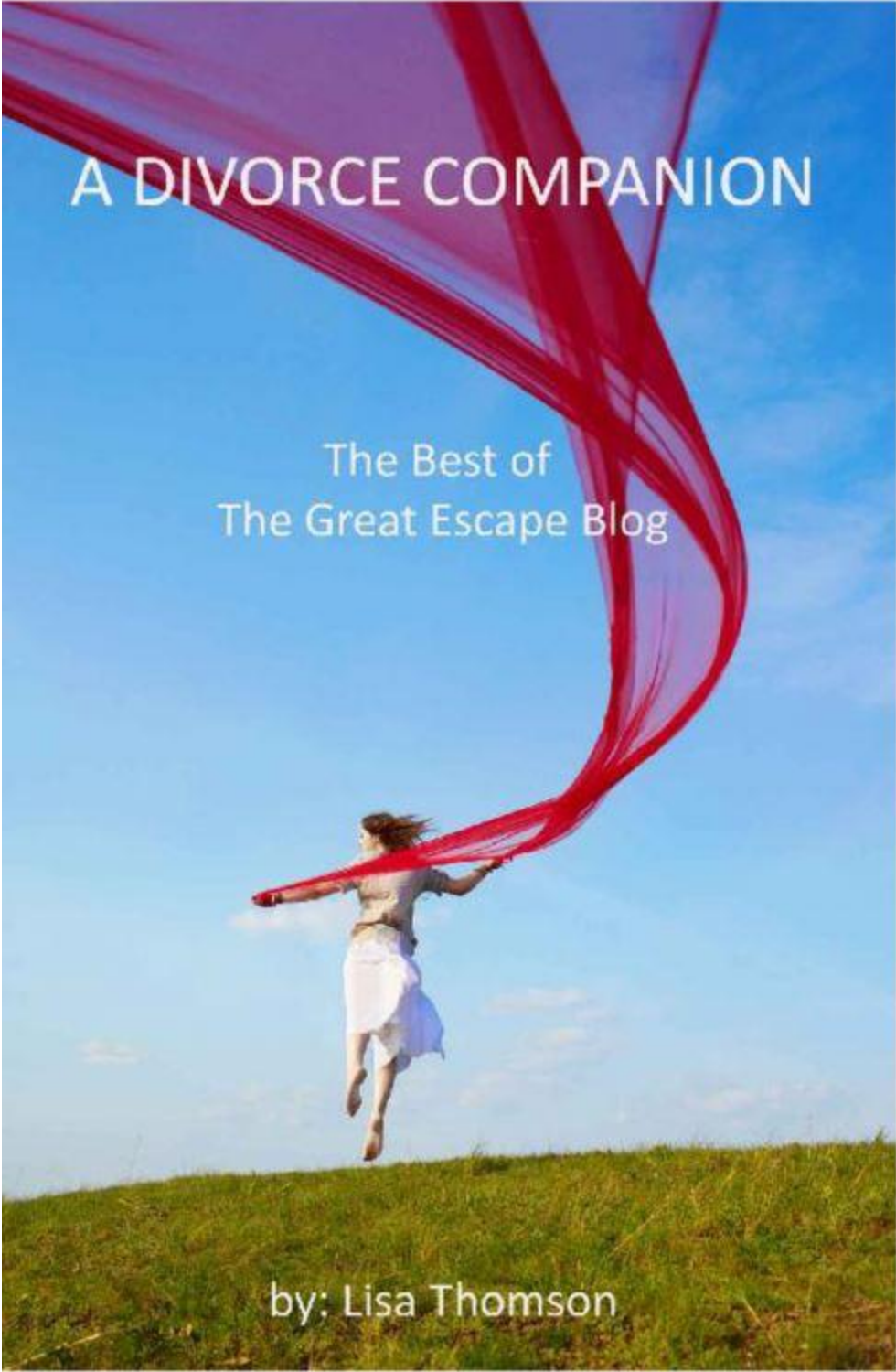


# A DIVORCE COMPANION

The Best of the Great Escape Blog

[LISATHOMSONLIVE.COM](http://LISATHOMSONLIVE.COM)

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Lisa Thomson



# A DIVORCE COMPANION

The Best of  
The Great Escape Blog

by: Lisa Thomson

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## Preface

After five years of blogging at The Great Escape, I realized there was enough value in the content to consolidate it and make a companion to the original book, *The Great Escape; A Girl's Guide To Leaving a Marriage*.

Enjoy the many tips, stories, resources and humor designed to help you through your own divorce or difficult time.

Lisa xo

## WELCOME

I made the most difficult decision of my life in 2005. I made a decision to end my marriage. It was not a decision I took lightly but when I made it nothing could change it back, that's how sure I was about it. Since then I have become stronger, wiser, more tolerant, less judgmental of others, happier, and more fulfilled. Although I have gone through the stumbling blocks, including anguish, tears, anger and fear I have made it to the other side. It is not easy to accomplish freedom, but it's worth every tear.

I was inspired to write ***The Great Escape; A Girl's Guide to Leaving a Marriage*** partially as a form of therapy, because writing is a terrific release. But mainly, I was horrified by some of the situations I faced, alone. Having no one to turn to for advice legal, or otherwise I was frustrated at the lack of support out there. Sure, I found resourceful books on divorce but they were all very doctorish, pschyo-speak, rather than friendly and realistic. I hope to fill a gap with my book in giving advice because I've been there myself not because I am a psychiatrist and assume to know what's best for you and your children. Only **you** know what's best for your family- not me and not a doctor.

You know in this day and age, the general attitude in society is still viewing the woman as the victim? If you think about most movies, chick flick or otherwise, on the subject of divorce you will notice that all of the strong female leads have been cheated on. For example, "Must Love Dogs", "First Wives Club", "Waiting to Exhale", "Stepmom", "Something to Talk About", "Living Out Loud" and I could go on. I guess Julia had it right in "The Runaway Bride". It was over before it began.

This take on marital break down annoyed me more than anything else because it perpetuates this notion that divorce only happens *after* something happens to you. Once you are cheated on, it's okay to leave. Well, starting here let's give ourselves more credit! Leaving your marriage could be for various reasons all very personal and not related at all to infidelity. Starting today, give yourself permission to think about leaving if you haven't already. Do not justify to yourself why you should stay...but ponder the reasons for the unrest in your heart. Remember you are not a victim, waiting for something devastating to happen before taking action.

Be strong and remember, this is not a dress rehearsal! Come along with me for a provocative ride as we tackle divorce topics from coping with ex-rage and co-parenting to legal and budgeting tips.

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## Courage

### A Shot of Courage

*“Courage is found in unlikely places.”-J.R.R Tolkien*

Two things you’ll need to make any major change in your life are a shot of courage and a slice of bravery. Actually, before you even begin to make the changes you’ll need to identify and admit to the necessity of that change. That’s where we especially need a shot of courage and that’s only the beginning. The rest is getting from here to where we want to be.

I often have women contact me and confess their darkest thoughts about their husband, marriage or life in general. Sometimes it’s a complete confession of abuse and disrespect that they can no longer tolerate. Besides the fact that I wrote my book with these women in mind, I am inspired to dedicate a blog post just to them. So, for those who are short on courage and aren’t we all most of the time? This one is for you.

According to Merriam Webster:

**Courage:** mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty

**Bravery:** feeling or showing no fear

So, you can be brave without courage. Bravery is the **show** of courage and it’s important for appearances but it’s the courage that we need to truly make the changes in our life.

First, admitting that we need to change our life takes guts. Actually, sitting down and having a conversation with yourself can be fear inducing and yet if we don’t take that first step we can’t possibly move forward to the life we deserve.

When I first admitted the truth about my marriage, it scared the hell out of me. I wrote about that in The Wine Diaries...here’s the excerpt:

“AFTER one of these crying jags it got peaceful and quiet. I sat in my bedroom in absolute silence. My heart spoke to me in this moment. “Your life is going to change”. I sat straight up. Did I just hear that? I realize now it was my own spirit giving me guidance. I now knew I had to change my life. The relief I felt in finally admitting this was enormous. I had finally wrapped my head around the idea that not only did I deserve a more fulfilling life but that I, **myself** was going to do something about it.” The Wine Diaries-Broken Dream Home



Let's face it, it's way easier to coast along in life. Just let it ride. Get up and do it all over again. Why? Because we're used to it. It's what we know and usually there are some good things there, things that make us comfortable. ***It's not all bad. She has it worse than me.*** That's what we tell ourselves to accept our life the way it is, even if we're deeply unhappy.

When we finally do get the courage to admit we have to change, then we must take action. What the hell are we going to do about it? For example, we all have that friend. You know the one who likes to complain about things in her life. Maybe she complains about her job, her husband or a friend but she does it constantly. If you make suggestions to help her she finds a reason why it won't work. These people haven't found their courage yet. They're stuck in the first phase. We don't want to be like that, right?

So, how do we avoid being ***that*** person? We gather up our courage and make an action plan. We try to fix it. This is the hardest part but it is necessary. It will take a brave face to do it because while we're taking action we may not feel confident. We'll have many people asking us what the hell we're doing. This is what I like to call the ***You've Gone Crazy Phase*** of change. Your closest relatives and friends will throw the 'crazy card' at you.

"Have you lost your mind?" they'll ask you.

"No. I'm finding it." you'll answer with a brave smile. Fake it 'til you make it—that's a piece of brave!

Your action creates a reaction. Remember, that reaction has more to do with their own insecurity and judgment than it does about anything you're doing. Usually people who are satisfied with their own lives don't judge so harshly. The ones who are unhappy but unwilling to acknowledge it, are the ones who feel insecure about your actions—they may never find the courage to even get to phase one of change.

People who judge may be brave but they have no courage. They have zero plan to change the things that might be wrong in their lives. ***That's cool but don't judge me for taking action in my own life. Definitely, don't call me the crazy one!***

We only have one 'go around' here on earth. It's not a dress rehearsal. Let's make it right. Let's make it the best we possibly can. That means we need some f\*\*\*\*n' courage.

Believe me, Escapees. I write this post for myself just as much as for the women who reach out to me. Just because I have made it through an eight-year divorce doesn't mean I'm 'through'. I need my courage today to face challenges that I never expected. Challenges I never ***dreamed*** could happen. Yet, here I am getting ready for more changes. The thing I've learned is, if we sit still and let things happen, we may have greater regret than if we had gathered up the courage to face the challenge and take a risk.

I gave you the dictionary definition of courage now, here's mine:

**Courage is:**

facing your truth

doing what no one else is doing

not caring so much about what people think

ignoring judgments

listening to your inner voice

opening your heart

loving someone

speaking up when your opinion is different

telling your truth

calling out lies and misrepresentations

showing up

dropping your kids off at your ex's after he's threatened you

standing up to bullies (divorce or other)

sharing your ideas

trying something new and failing

*"Having courage does not mean we are unafraid."—Maya Angelou*

**10 Things we can Learn from Erin Brockovich**

Last week, I found myself watching Erin Brockovich for the hundredth time. If you have never seen the movie (have you been living under a rock?) then I highly recommend. It was released in 2000 so I guess, like us, it's considered a classic by now. It was airing on TCM channel, which was my first hint that I've likely seen this movie more times than I can count on one hand. I always get drawn in though.

Julia Robert's fetching portrayal of a feisty and tenacious legal clerk earned her an academy award. Also, her employer/lawyer Ed Masry, played by Albert Finney was superb.

The story itself is compelling besides. David and Goliath. David wins. Sick people are compensated...all around a tremendous and TRUE story.

The thing is this story never would have come to light without this young woman, Erin Brockovich, a legal clerk who split a big case wide open. Where the lawyers were happy to settle it for a pittance, bury it in the back room, ignore the contents of the file—Erin dove in head first, on principle.

See what I mean?

So, here are 10 things we can learn from Erin Brockovich;

### **Apologize sparingly**

You are who you are. Erin is who she is. She made no apology for her outspoken manner but that didn't mean she didn't expect an apology to come her way

Erin: "Do they teach you how to apologize in law school? Cause you suck at it."

Ed: Speechless. Mouth open.

### **Embrace your personal style**

Be comfortable in your clothes and you can be comfortable in your own skin. Don't dress the way people expect you to, dress the way you want.

Ed: "Erin, some of the women here...well, they're not comfortable with how you dress."  
(points to her chest)

Erin: "I don't care. Until I grow a second ass, I'll wear what I like." (head down, back to work)

### **Lawyers are not infallible**

If anyone could pick up a weakness in a person, it was Erin. No matter if they were an educated professional, they had nothing on her. Lawyers, accountants and doctors for that matter, are human beings first and foremost. They're capable of making mistakes or missing the point, and Erin was aware of this and fully prepared to 'help' them along. Just because we are a layperson, doesn't mean we don't have something to contribute to the professionals. A great and important lesson, as we need to value our own ideas and share them no matter who we're working with.

### **Don't be afraid to speak up**

Erin was afraid of missing out on her kids' milestones but you know what she wasn't afraid of? Telling it like it is...she didn't like to listen to B.S. and she was the first one to say it. She's the one to call out the phonies and say what everyone else is afraid to...

## Tenacity

When you feel like you can't get out of bed...just put one foot down then the other. Get the coffee on and go again. Why? Because you never know when you're on the brink of something great. There isn't a sign posted on your bedroom door announcing "**Today's the day you're going to make a difference**". Erin could have given up on the case weeks in but instead she persevered against all odds, until she got one break. Then when she got another tiny break, she kept moving forward...until BAM the case was smashed open. If she hadn't been tenacious, this story wouldn't have ever seen the light of day and we wouldn't have a clue about the polluted water in Hinkley, California.

### 'Show', don't 'tell'

Take action. Get your evidence. You can talk all day but until you show me something, it's just your word. Not that your word isn't important but let's face it, until we **see** and you **show**, not much is going to happen. Erin went to great lengths to collect information and evidence for her case. She showed up every day in spite of obstacles facing her.

### Don't let the big guys scare you

Stand up when you know something is wrong. Speak up even if it's the big guy who is the wrong-doer. Don't be intimidated by position, power, size—because you're pretty powerful when you put your mind to something.

### In case of emergency, use your boobs

I'm not talking about a flotation device so much as a decorative distraction.

Ed: "How did you get all these documents, Erin? These are confidential..."

Erin: "They're called boobs, Ed."

### Try

How can you get anything accomplished if you give up before even starting? This is related to tenacity however, if you don't try you don't even give yourself the opportunity to test your tenacity. Always try.

### Listen

People love to tell their stories. If we value them, listen carefully enough, there may be some answers for us. Erin took great care in listening to the people of Hinkley. She treated each one like the special, unique individual that they were and not just a case number.

Final scene...

Ed: "Do they teach you how to apologize in beauty school? Cause you suck at it."

Erin: Standing, speechless with check in hand.

## Building Confidence for Divorce Legal Proceedings

One of the most challenging experiences for me during my divorce, was simply dealing with lawyers, attending meetings, discoveries, examinations and finally trial.

It can be intimidating to say the least. It's one thing to sit with your own lawyer in their office but very different to sit across from your ex and his lawyer in a conference room. Add a court reporter, recording devices, multiple piles of documents and know that you're going to be grilled by a lawyer any moment, and you start to sweat.

Everything you say is being recorded and turned into TRANSCRIPTS- which can be used against you—no pressure.

We're intimidated because we've never dealt with legal issues before our divorce. Ever. As scary as it is though, you **can** remain calm, cool and collected. Remember, your lawyer is right there beside you and will intervene (object) if there are questions that are irrelevant. Although they can't answer any questions for you, they are there to protect your rights and ensure nothing damaging is being asked or answered.

So, what can we do to build our confidence for legal proceedings during our divorce?

### 5 TIPS to get you started;

**1. Pick a power outfit.** If you think what you wear is unimportant, think again. Consider a woman in a hot pink, low cut top and matching stilettos. Now picture that woman in a navy-blue crew neck and oxfords. See the different impression each outfit gives off?

Wear something that makes you feel *and* appear confident. For me, I can't go wrong in black jeans and a white blouse. I might throw on a black jacket. This works well with blue jeans or a pencil skirt depending on your own personal style. Above all, dress comfortably. You don't want to overdress and then feel like you're in someone else's body. This is less about showing off fashion savvy or color coordination and more about simplicity. Pick something that says—"I am confident".

**2. Have a mantra;** a mantra is a form of prayer or meditation made up of a few words. It's a phrase or a single word that when repeated has the power to make you feel stronger. You could write your mantra down on your pad of paper in your meeting, as a visual cue. Here's a few I like:

"I am capable and strong"

"I trust myself."

"I trust the Universe to give me what I need"

"Inhale. Exhale."

"I am healthy and happy."

-the goal is to stay calm and focused which will contribute to greater confidence.

**3. Wear a piece of jewelry or a charm as your own personal talisman.** Maybe it's something your grandmother gave you? It could be a ring, a bracelet, necklace. I have a necklace and on the pendant, is engraved a line from a Walt Whitman poem: "From this hour I ordain myself loosed of limits and imaginary lines". (that's not a typo that's how they spelled back then) I like to wear it to remind myself not to create limits on myself. Live with freedom. Don't be a prisoner to that little voice...

**4. Do a little homework** prior to legal briefings or proceedings. If you have already submitted Affidavit(s) then review them. You don't want to contradict your own sworn statement. Understand legal terms so you don't feel intimidated by the lawyers when they discuss things like "undertakings", "under advisement", "pre-conference trial", "affidavit", "court order", "consent order" etc. Having this introductory knowledge will build your confidence.

**5. Body language speaks volumes;** exude strong body language including eye contact, sitting up straight, shoulders back just like they taught you in school. Any seated posture where you are taking up space in the room shows you have confidence. No neck touching (sign of distress) or making yourself small (legs crossed, arms hugging your body). A great thing to do before attending any event where you will be evaluated is to practice what Amy Cuddy refers to as a power pose for 2 minutes. Think Wonder Woman stance.

In Amy's Ted Talk, she insists and proves through scientific studies, that if we practice power poses (confident body language) that our mind will start to believe in our own power.

**BONUS TIP;** you don't have to know all the answers. "I don't know" is a perfectly acceptable answer and better than trying to remember something that isn't clear in our mind or making something up on the spot because we feel 'dumb'. Never feel dumb in a legal proceeding. No one has all the answers. Lawyers and Judges don't always have all the answers either.

Building our self-confidence prior to legal proceedings during our divorce or any other occasion where we will be evaluated, can make a big difference in how we come across. Are we powerful or powerless? Try the tips and you will indeed *be* and *feel* more confident. Whether it's wearing a special piece of jewelry, repeating a mantra, picking the right clothing or practicing a power pose...use whatever you can to build yourself up. Fake it until you *become* it. You got this.

### Destiny or Decision?

I was recently told "You are very much a daughter of destiny."

It's an interesting statement. It begs the question; Are our experiences and life-events *destined* or are they a result of our own *decisions*?

It's a little of both, do you agree? When we are faced with a 'big' decision in life, typically we mull it over for a long while before finally pulling the trigger. We don't normally make a hasty decision that we understand to have long lasting consequences. On the other hand, we are sometimes forced to make a quick decision that may have great impact. For example, let's say your spouse has a job offer in another city, clear across the country. Now, you're forced to make an important decision within a short time. Either way, our decisions large, small, hasty OR deliberate have a bearing on our future (unless we're talking about which flavor ice cream to choose).

You probably know where I'm going with this. Divorce. It's one of the biggest decisions a person can make with lifelong ramifications; some good and some not so good. Maybe it wasn't your decision. If it wasn't yours to make does this experience fall under the *destiny* category?

**des-ti-ny**

'destinē

*noun*

the events that will necessarily happen to a particular person or thing in the future.

"she was unable to control her own destiny"

the hidden power believed to control what will happen in the future; fate.

"he believes in destiny"

a predetermined course of events often held to be an irresistible power or agency'

Have you ever heard someone refer to someone else's problems as their own 'fault'?

"She chose to \_\_\_\_\_, so she deserves what she had coming." OR "Well, I guess she should have thought of that before \_\_\_\_\_."

I consider that sort of talk as kind of gossipy, victim blaming. Who are we to judge someone else's problems? Furthermore, I don't believe our problems are 100% due to our own decisions. There are too many factors involved in our life events to isolate one decision and make IT the sole cause.

I'm not saying we shouldn't take responsibility for our challenges, mistakes or decisions. We definitely need to take responsibility and mitigate damages or losses where we can. However, there are many situations that don't turn out the way we envisioned when we

made that decision in good faith. Sometimes we don't even understand why things are happening. We question God or a higher power and ask *why*?

This is where destiny comes into the picture.

We cannot possibly understand our unfortunate events or difficulties until we've passed through them. In hindsight, everything is 20/20 as they say. Once you reach that point, you couldn't imagine your life without that experience or piece of the puzzle, no matter how difficult it was. *Why* something happened becomes clear one day and we finally have the answer.

When shit happens or destiny calls (a nicer way to put it) we can only take control of our own reactions and do our best to make decisions we think are right for us and our future. How things turn out consists of many variables and therefore are not completely within our creations.

Have you felt the hand of destiny in your life or are you in full control of the outcome so far?

In my book, I write about an extraordinary interaction that I encountered on the beach. It was an example of the Universe giving me direction through a stranger. A conversation was exchanged that helped me make a decision I was struggling with. The conversation was about love.

This confirms my belief that life experiences and outcomes are about BOTH our decisions and destiny.

WE make it happen BUT things happen to us. We act and others REact. We suffer and then we UNDERSTAND. It's all about balance, faith, choices, action and fate...

"A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it." Jean de La Fontaine

### When to Leave a Marriage

Based on this title, it sounds as though I'm going to tell you exactly when you should leave your marriage. *When to leave a marriage* is the number one key word search that brings people to my site. Yet, I haven't written one blog post to tell you when to leave your marriage because that would be presumptuous.

Everyone faces unique circumstances. My book however, touches on this very question in the first chapter. The quiz at the end of the chapter also prompts some hard thinking and even gives you a score to indicate the status of your marriage today. Is it an epic fail or is it simply in need of a little TLC? I had one woman take the quiz with her friend by her side at the woman's show where I was selling my book. She finished the quiz and in a glib manner told me "I passed, so I don't need your book." If I was trying to convince her to end it or at least sell her my book, she just one upped me by passing the quiz.



Seriously, I do not presume to have that power or knowledge. No one knows better than you, when it's over. No one knows better than you, what goes on behind closed doors.

Nevertheless, since you asked;

### **Here are 5 very clear signs it may be time to leave your marriage...**

1. Your spouse is verbally, emotionally or physically abusive (in even the slightest of ways)
2. You've tried marital counseling and nothing changed (or it only changed for a short time)
3. You are last on his list
4. Your sex life is non-existent
5. He does not consult you nor value your opinion in family, career and parenting issues

I think the most difficult part of knowing when to leave a marriage is admitting the truth. The truth of your situation can easily be glossed over. The truth can easily be justified with excuses. The truth can be replaced with false hope— hope for an improved tomorrow that never comes. That is human nature and our way of coping with less than ideal situations. We make excuses for our unhappiness instead of simply admitting that we *are* unhappy and that there is little chance for improvement. *'It is what it is'* might be the simple answer but the question is, *can we accept it?* Can we continue as *'it is'* and live to our full potential? Everyone deserves to be happy and fulfilled and if our marriages are the opposite, should it be acceptable to continue living that way? *It is what it is...*yes, but let's take a hard and honest look at what it *really is...*and we will undoubtedly find our answer to the question; 'when to leave a marriage'. Even better, you will likely find your truth in the process.

### **Stop Being Too Nice**

Being too nice during your divorce can cost you...money, assets and even the kids. I've heard many stories of regret and loss due to taking the 'high road' and being 'nice'. This is especially true for us women as we are raised to be caring and nurturing. It's part of our feminine quality. It's double true for women who make the decision to leave. They, more than anyone are troubled with guilt which leads to being too nice and trying to keep everyone happy.

One of the reasons women have a more difficult time being cut throat in business, is because of this genetic or learned quality; *being too nice!* 'Too nice syndrome', not just during divorce but in all areas of life will cost you. I still work on this...my new mantra? *Be more selfish...*I know it sounds terrible but it works...My son even told me 'Mom, stop caring so much'.

There's a fine line between your front door and turning into the mat lying outside it.

Know the difference before you're walked all over. Case in point, saying 'no' sometimes is okay. It's not terrible when the kids get mad at you, it just means you're doing your job. It's not terrible to incite anger in other people, in fact sometimes it's necessary for change.

It's okay to tell your lawyer what you expect. It's okay to be strong.

It's okay to say 'no' to your ex when he asks for the kids on your weekend, *again!*

It's okay to tell the people in your life what you need or expect... how will they know otherwise?

How do we stop being too nice without being a complete bitch? Well, that's not really a valid question. If we *care* that we are labeled a bitch, then we are missing the point. I know this because I missed this point plenty of times. It wasn't until I was feeling completely threatened in every way, that *I stopped caring and started doing*. I started building confidence in my instincts, my decisions and my parenting. This confidence spilled into many areas of my life. It was a process though and didn't happen overnight. If I was called a bitch, it didn't matter. Why? Because what other people say about me is none of my business. Always consider the source of name calling before you concern yourself with such primal immaturity.

Does any of this sound familiar?

### **You're too nice if...**

you find yourself giving in to someone else daily or weekly

you say 'yes' even when you want to say 'no'

you feel cheated

you feel unloved

you feel guilty (often due to being blamed by your ex...during the marriage and during the divorce)

you can't remember the last time you did something selfish

most of each day is spent doing something for someone else

you feel 'sorry' for people

### **How to stop being too nice;**

set boundaries immediately with your ex, family and children

enforce your boundaries

learn to say 'no'

expect and accept anger

know the difference between pity and empathy (pity is used by some people to get you to do something for them but empathy is feeling someone's pain as your own without any demand on their part)

stop caring so much (this will allow you to let go of guilt)

learn about divorce law basics to boost confidence

understand you deserve half of the marital assets no matter who decided to end the marriage

Begin by making a list of what *you* want to change. Don't rule out embracing your inner bad girl. Although the list may seem overwhelming... if you view it as a *process* it will seem achievable. We can't change overnight but we can make small changes every day. Taking control of your own life means letting go of old patterns of behavior that make us unhappy like being too nice.

It will cost you too much if you continue being too nice. It may cost you money. It may cost you assets. It may cost you your children. In extreme cases, it can cost you your life. Yes, your life. How many divorced women said yes that one last time because they felt sorry for him and they didn't make it back alive? Vashti Seacat, went back home because her husband was upset and sad about the pending divorce...her niceness, goodness and big heart went to the wrong person...

I'm being dramatic, but there are plenty of cases like Vashti's, let's not become one of them.

For how long will we be too nice? Being too nice during divorce can put us in poverty. It can kill us.

Say 'no' and mean it. Strengthen your boundaries and your resolve. Know that when people get angry with you it's their issue to deal with, not yours. It belongs to them. Build strength and confidence and you will surely end the self-destructive 'too nice' syndrome.

### 5 Tips For Handling The Divorce Bully

We hear about bullies on the playground. We worry our child will get bullied at school or even worse, we worry our child will **be** the bully. But bullying is something that goes on throughout our lives. It doesn't end on the playground. We can experience it in the workplace, in a relationship, in a friendship and most likely in a divorce. Yes, there are such things as divorce bullies.

What is a Divorce Bully?

You'll know when you're being bullied by your ex. It may be as subtle as fabricating or embellishing stories about you or it may be as obvious as making threats. A bully finds out your weaknesses or fears and plays on them. Who knows you better than an ex spouse? Typically, bullies prey on the weakest one or the soft hearted. Their aim is to bully you out of your fair share in the marital asset division. Their aim may be strictly avenging the hurt you've caused them through rejection. Their aim may go beyond the assets. They may attempt to take away the ones you love. It's more drastic than what goes on at the playground. There's more to lose. Sometimes the bully ex will hire a 'bully lawyer' to intimidate you.

### 5 Tips For Handling The Divorce Bully;

1. **Show your strength**-you have everything to lose by remaining passive so, stand up to the bully and show them you're not 'taking their crap'.
2. **Use the bully's own tactics** against them-notice how and what they're doing to get you scared and strategically use some of these tactics in reverse. It might sound counter intuitive but it will only take one or two times and BAM, the bully thinks twice before attacking you again.
3. **Know when to ignore the bully**-some of the things a bully does do not deserve a reaction. Evaluate what is at stake and ask yourself *will this matter in a year from now?* Pick your battles wisely.
4. **The bully is an insecure person**-Inside that mouthy, sometimes large person is a small child unsure of themselves. Remember this and you won't see them as 'scary' or intimidating.
5. **Focus on Love instead of fear**-focus on love in your life when you are fearful of the bully. Your reactions will improve and your judgment and perspective will remain healthy. Switch on the love light and feel the fear dissipate.
6. **BONUS TIP**; always keep a record of the bully's threats or disturbing behaviors in case of having to make a police report or for court documents and ultimately for your safety.

It goes against our nature to stand up and bully back especially if we are the soft hearted and sensitive type of person. However, the sooner we learn to stand up for ourselves the sooner the bully will go away. Sometimes that means giving back some of what they dish out. If that's the position you need to take it's probably for a good reason. Either you are protecting your assets, your children or your own personal safety. These are all important reasons to stand up to the divorce bully.

When you stand up for yourself, he'll back down.

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## TRANSITION

### Finding Your Thinking Place

**In times of change, we need to go inside ourselves and think. We need a quiet place where we can listen to our heart.** When we arrive at a crossroads, we need to take time for

ourselves to be quiet, to unplug. In our lives, full of constant communication, we need more than ever to learn to listen to our own voice.

We all need a place to think and be alone whether it's outside or indoors really doesn't matter. Maybe you have a little peaceful, private space you can call your own at home. You won't have to venture far in order to disconnect. Just meditate, contemplate and relax. Your heart's desires and gut instincts will come through.

**I don't know about you, but I feel more connected to my soul while surrounded by nature.** Even as a child I would go outdoors and spend hours alone in the thin forest or at the beach close to my house. I would study berries, bugs, tree branches and leaves, shells, rocks, and small sea creatures—rain or shine. I could seriously spend hours there and if I was unsupervised by my big brother, it was even better. I could prove my independence when I returned with dirty jeans and hands.

**I recently re-visited my thinking place from my youth.** There used to be blackberry bushes and plum trees along the road and the smell and taste of these fruits and berries still remind me of “back to school” and my true love's return to hockey training (away from our hometown). My heart used to ache when he left and I returned alone to this special place. I would look over the ocean to the Islands and feel closer to him. Before he left in late summer, we would ride our bikes here and pick the fruit and laugh and hug and kiss in this very spot. Our love and innocence is always co-mingled with the taste of blackberries. Now there is an evergreen hedge here, it seems all so neat and organized compared to the wild bushes bearing fruit for our hungry hearts.

I would sit there for what seemed like hours but was probably only minutes at a time. **I'm sure all of you have special memories of a place you used to go to think and be alone, a place where you found your inner voice.** Was it in a field, on the beach, on a cliff side, or in a bustling city park?

Although you may not be able to return to a special thinking place from your past, **try to remember what the young girl wanted and needed in her life. What were her dreams?** She is still alive inside of you and only needs to be re-awakened to her possibilities.

Find a new quiet place to re-discover enough peace to listen to your heart. What do you need to do now? What will your next move be? It's all up to you. No one can tell you what you “should” do. Begin by finding a place away from everyone and everything. Think only of yourself while you're in this place. Acknowledge what you need and forget for a moment what everyone expects and wants from you. Scary, isn't it?

This will be your sacred place for a while or maybe forever. A place you can return to whenever you need to. If you are in the middle of a divorce, it is especially important to find a place away from your daily stress. If you are facing your crossroads you'll need to find the silence to think about your future, and how you want to shape it. You'll need a

place to better find your truth, away from computers, cell phones, in-laws, friends and even family sometimes.

Give yourself permission to have a hiding place, sacred place, thinking spot, or whatever you want to call it. Now you will be able to get back to your heart and spirit, where the young girl inside you resides.

### 10 Things I Wish I Knew Before My Divorce

Isn't it true that we have to go through something to really understand it? We can plan and have opinions about something but until it happens to us we don't grasp the full concept. Divorce is no different. I guess it's a little like the death of a loved one. Again, it's something we have to go through, get to the other side before we understand it.

So, with that reality in mind, I was thinking that there were a few things I wish I had known before I began my divorce (or while I was going through it). I hope these help you bearing in mind that every divorce is different. Here goes;

#### **10 things I wish I knew before my divorce;**

**This will end one day. It's a process and not a state of being.**

Time seemed to stand still when I was facing the hardest challenges of my divorce. I remember thinking to myself 'I wonder what I'll be doing five years from now' and wishing I could push a fast forward button. In retrospect, I'm glad I couldn't push the fast forward button because I wouldn't have learned as much nor would I be who I am today.

**Friends will disappear, so be your own best friend.**

This was really hard. There were a handful of women who were **my** friends, not my husband's and not ours. Mine. They were the ones I met on my own and maintained like a well-tended garden. I tried not to let the flowers go too dry or over water. I tried to keep the weeds out and turn the soil. My divorce distracted me though and some of the perennials didn't return.

For example, one friend was happily married and at the start of my divorce was quite supportive. Her son went to school with my daughter since Kindergarten. As time went on, she made a decision to end the friendship. You know how it's done. Subtly. The phone calls don't get returned. You get the hint eventually.

Some friends simply can't understand the journey of divorce. They may fear it's contagious even. We are rejected for no other reason than we are a single woman in a world of 'happily marrieds'. Learning to rely on myself was a really good lesson in the end. Realizing that the losses were not personal and that it was better to accept them than grieve, helped me move on.

**Your Kids will get angry. At you. That's normal.**

I wasn't ready for the changes I would see in my children. Some of those changes were due to adolescence and some were undoubtedly due to the stress of divorce. Our divorce had a huge impact on the children. As much as I tried all the communication techniques and open conversation, they still got angry. That's okay. Best thing we can do for our children is tell them it's okay to be angry, sad **or** happy. Let go of our expectation of their emotions and just let them express it freely!

**Not everyone will 'get it'.**

You won't find support where you expect it. That said, you will find support when and where you least expect it. So, don't write off anyone or thing as being a waste of time. Find resources and positive people where ever you can.

**Learn to recognize what you can change (and accept what you cannot).**

I know this sounds obvious and it probably is if you're a recovered alcoholic or a child of one. Still, it takes practice and intuition to accomplish this seemingly simple life strategy. Knowing the difference between what you can take control of and what you may need to let go of in your divorce will provide a world of comfort.

**When in doubt ask yourself "Will this matter five years from now?"**

If the answer is yes, then give it some well-deserved consideration and careful thought before reacting or taking action. If the answer is no, then know when to accept it rather than fight it and make a big deal about it. You can substitute five years for one year. Sometimes a one year gauge makes more sense.

**Your divorce won't turn out the way you imagined.**

Exactly. The divorce image is rarely the outcome. First, let go of the ideal that you'll be friends with your ex. Stop watching Reba unless you're well aware that it is a fantasy. During a divorce, couples fight—they don't care about each other and that's why one left or maybe they both left. After the divorce is all over it might be a different story but for the love of all the peaches in summer, don't expect your ex to be your friend. Expect the unexpected in general. In other words, if you're expecting a thunder storm, be prepared for a tornado.

**Your income will decrease (for a while).**

It's rare that anyone going through a divorce sees their income increase. So, might as well get ready to learn to budget, take care of finances, and know where you can cut back on expenses. You'll be empowered by taking control of your finances. It's one of the valuable lessons of divorce.

**Therapy may not help.**

Talking about our divorce issues with a therapist is not a guarantee to resolve those issues. Not to mention the expense (see above). You'll have to be more careful about where your money is going so therapy might not be in the financial cards. Quite frankly, therapy isn't for everyone.

In my experience divorce problems often require immediate action, without thinking too much about our past. If therapy isn't working for you, I recommend writing in a journal. Writing of any kind can help ease the emotions of the divorce while freeing up your budget for other expenses.

### **It's going to hurt like hell (for a while).**

It's going to really hurt but guess what? It will get better. The pain will subside and some really great things are waiting for you.

### **Finding a New Normal**

During the initial stages of separation and divorce, we find that we have lost our normal. This is unsettling for us humans since we thrive on routine. Our simple routine of daily tasks and some of our traditions are thrown out. It's called **change** or **transition** and it's not an easy part of the process. How can we adapt? Take the point of view that you are finding a new normal for yourself. Maybe it's only temporary, or maybe you are in fact, starting over with a new home, new neighborhood, new school, new city.

Recently, I have been put out of my home since there was a serious fire in our apartment building. The aftermath of the fire incident has been trying. Being told you cannot return to your home is not a nice feeling. Read *The Wine Diaries, Fire!* Although I realize I'm very fortunate, I feel as though I'm floating around with a bunch of missing pieces. All of my belongings including clothing, paper work and the little things that bring us comfort (i.e. my own pillow!) I am living without. It takes away what you know, familiar objects and routine. I would even go so far as to say it takes away your sense of self. Also, setting up a temporary home base and not knowing where your future home will be is a real reminder of what we've lost, if only temporarily.

It got me thinking when was the last time I felt so unsettled? It was definitely the initial stage of my divorce. Moving into a new home, trying to find a new normal in a new neighborhood was a task that had to be taken one day at a time. My biggest concern at that time was not necessarily my own comfort but my children's. I remember the priority being to ensure they had equal comfort as to what they had in the marital home. In conclusion, then, it is **change** and the **unknown future** that is scary and these are definitely a part of divorce or in the case of fire, or some other unforeseen circumstance. **How do we adapt during this transition?** Here are a few of my suggestions and some I'm trying to utilize right now;

1. Take one day at a time instead of worrying about six months from now



2 Ask *what can I do today to get one step closer to normal?*

3. Know that wherever you are it may be temporary

4. Know that things will get better in time and things always work out in the end no matter how dim they seem to be

5. Making new traditions, finding new places and people for comfort will create a new normal

6. OR just open a bottle of wine and hope for the best...

In the meantime, until you make your new normal take this as your personal motto, for strength; "Let go of those who bring you down and surround yourself with those who bring out the best in you."

### The Letter I Wrote And Never Sent To My Ex

After about six months of separation between us, I sat down and penned an angry letter to my husband. All the anger and resentment I had inside me came out as blue ink on lined paper. All the silence and smiles of 18 years bubbled to the surface in a fury unrecognizable in me.

#### **State of Affairs...**

My ex told me I was a lying bitch. He told me I was selfish. He called me one evening while away with his buddies on a golf trip. I could hear all the male voices in the background blurring into a static of bitter mocking. I had become a joke. Even though I was friends with some of these men during my marriage, now I was merely another ex-wife, code: *Bitch*.

Also, I was told by my sister, I had broken my promise to remain friends with my husband. In her eyes, it was my fault that we were no longer friends. My daughter also made her opinion known on the matter in stating that I had 'broken my promise to be friends with dad'. The fact is, the friendship ended with the marriage, regardless of the children we shared. No one was more disappointed than I was about this failure.

#### **Was it my fault?**

"You've changed" They Said...

'I don't know you anymore' my sister said. 'You've changed' she said.

'Mom, you're different' my children stated.

When I asked them how, they said 'You talk more'. After giving it much thought, I realized that because their father was so dominant in the household, I had become meek and that was how my children knew me. I explained to them, sometimes when you're with

a dominant personality, you fade into the background. You don't get heard because you're constantly being drowned out by the louder personality in a relationship.

Case in point, an acquaintance of mine had two dogs (that were littermates) as family pets. For years one dog dominated the other even trying to take his treats after he had eaten his own. When the dominant dog died, it was only a matter of days before the quiet one came right out of his shell. He was more vocal and affectionate. While he was once nearly invisible, now his personality was able to shine through without being overshadowed. I was astounded to see the change. Now, it would seem people were astounded to see the changes in *me*. I just compared myself to a dog...I know, I'm not too proud.

The fact is I had to be stronger. I had to set boundaries. I had to maintain my household on my own terms with as much discipline, love and responsibility as I could muster. So, they were right. Divorce changed me.

I wasn't taking anyone's shit anymore.

### **The Letter...**

Everyone's unfavorable reaction to the divorce combined with the years of marital dissatisfaction had finally imploded in me. Where I had expected support, I was challenged and judged. Where I had expected mutual consideration, I was being treated as a doormat.

So, I wrote a letter I would never send. My intention was to release this unrecognizable fury. Who had I become? *Was I a bitch? Was I as horrible as they all said?*

The truth is my anger was directed at my husband. I was furious for everything I thought he failed at, beginning with the blasé marriage proposal. The casual way in which he said 'Maybe we should get married' smacked of insincerity now that the marriage had indeed failed. I never had a romantic proposal story to tell friends or my children. I felt robbed. That was only the beginning. I can't rehash here what my grievances were. Suffice it to say that I felt cheated and used.

### **The Epiphany...**

Putting this all down on paper helped me not only vent but to pinpoint the issues. It also helped me to realize things were NOT all my fault. The finger pointing, blaming and judging were only ways for people to excuse their own behavior. I learned that my anger was not solely for my husband but directed at some of the people outside the marriage but very much *inside* our lives. I admitted, the lack of support and judgment really hurt me. Being blamed and judged by people you thought you could count on, is a true wake up call.

I felt an incredible sense of relief once the letter was finished and signed 'Your Loving Ex Wife'. A few years later I found it, reread it and realized how far I had come. My anger although still brewing some days, had mostly dissipated. I had an epiphany of sorts. I realized that some of that anger was at my own self...

I was actually angry at myself for accepting the status quo and continuing to accept situations that were making me unhappy both during the marriage and after.

Now it was time to burn the letter. I crumpled it up in a ball, went out the back door to the cement patio. I lit the sucker on fire and threw it to the ground with a smile. *Good bye* I said to myself. ***It's over.***

### **The Take Away...**

Anger is an essential part of the grieving process which is all inclusive with divorce. Learning how to deal with our anger in a healthy way can really help us get through the process with our sanity intact. There is no need to suppress it but at the same time we don't want to explode on those we love. Writing a letter or in a journal allows us to set it free without risking those relationships (such as they are). Write a letter you'll never send and you might be surprised at what and who you're angry at.

### **Should You Keep His Name?**

#### **What's in a name?**

Quite a bit actually...

One of the first things I did upon separation was to take my maiden name back. I was trying to take back a piece of myself I had left long ago. In hindsight I realize it may have been too soon. I may have pissed off a few people and failed to get my divorce off on the right foot, if that's even possible.

I had a right to take back my name but it appeared as though I was cold hearted, uncaring and letting go too quickly, symbolically speaking. I am happy that I did it but my timing could have been better. What I learned in the process is the power of a name change.

#### **Why go back?**

So, should you go back to your maiden name? It's your right. It's who you are. It may even be crucial to your true identity.

Should you do it the minute you (or he) walk out the door, maybe not. It's a personal decision though, so what I or anyone else says ultimately doesn't matter. What *does* matter is what feels right for you, including timing.

An important consideration is your children. If they're old enough, talk to them about it before you change your name back because they could take it the wrong way. Explain

that it is a piece of yourself that you want to claim back and it doesn't change anything between you and them. You're still a family.

That's what I should have done because years after the fact, my son confessed to me that at the time he didn't understand why I changed my name. I felt terrible. At least when I explained it to him at that point, the light bulb went off and he said "Oh, I get it now."

Logistically, it isn't a problem having a different name than your children. Schools, institutions, insurance companies etc. see it all the time and don't question it. Some children have different names than their mothers at birth, after all.

### **Why did we take his name to begin with?**

Historically, the woman takes the man's name and they become a family unit in preparation for breeding. No one wants to cause confusion when it comes to naming their child. It's the equivalent of saying, *we are a family and we want the world to know it*. It makes sense.

In biblical times and medieval times where the marital unit was mostly a practical arrangement, the woman was deemed the man's 'chattel' (an item of tangible, movable or immovable property). I know, it sounds terrible but at that time, it was the primary reason behind taking his name. She becomes 'his'.

Is it still relevant today then, to take your husband's name? No and certainly not by Medieval standards, yet many women still do. Yet, because it's not necessary, plenty of women opt to keep their own names upon marriage.

When we take our husband's name we feel closer to his family. We become a part of a new family. It makes sense then, upon divorce we would want to negate that, depending on the situation. We may want to put some distance between our own identity and his family. Not everyone would agree with me for example, I have a friend who divorced 17 years ago, and still has her ex-husband's name. She remarried and even then, kept her first husband's name. I know part of the reason for her was continuing to have the same name as her two children. They're grown now but at the time it was important to her that her role as their mother not be viewed differently by anyone.

I know other women who have divorced but kept their married names simply because they don't like their maiden name. In one case, a nasty childhood kept her from going back to that earlier self, if only in name. Some women will keep her ex's name even though they are not on speaking terms.

On the flip side, after a bitter divorce some men wish their ex-wives would give back their name. If he re-marries, often the *new* wife would like her to give her husband's name back X3. Maybe that's enough to keep a woman from going back to her maiden name? Perhaps a little spite mixed with identity crisis... but I digress...

On the other hand, I have spoken with many women that say taking their maiden name back felt like a relief. It just seemed like the right thing to do. Many of them felt empowered and more independent. It was the final step to freedom.

### **What's in a name?**

You can rankle, anger and hurt people by taking back, keeping or not returning a name. There is emotion tied up in a name. There is power in a name. There are symbolic ties in a name long after a union has ended.

Juliet would beg to differ. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet"- Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

There are many reasons for a divorced woman to take back her maiden name. There are also reasons she may want to keep her married name. Bottom line is it's a personal decision. Regardless, you are still *you*, no matter what your name change.

Will you take back your maiden name and reclaim a piece of you, your birth right OR will you retain your married name because it's a part of you now and represents your motherhood? In the end, it's your decision. What matters is what's in a name for *you* personally.

### **What The F Am I Gonna Do Now?**

When we find out we're expecting we are overwhelmed and delighted by the prospect of entering a new phase in our life; Motherhood. We want to do what's best for our babies. Thus, begins the long path of putting our children's needs before our own. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying this is a bad thing however, as we learn years later, the decision we thought was the best at one point, ends up hurting us.

If you are like me and stayed home to raise your children, you have given up the prospects of furthering your career during all of those years.

The rewards and benefits of staying home are invaluable to our children but there is a price to pay in the event of divorce. We stay at home moms are very vulnerable during divorce since we find ourselves with outdated skills and let's be honest, at a loss. "What the F am I gonna do now?" we ask. I've been there and I'm here to tell you it's not as bad as it seems. There is hope for a new beginning.

### **Ask yourself these 5 questions;**

- 1) How can my skills before I stayed home to raise the children, benefit me today?
- 2) What are my interests, hobbies, passions?
- 3) What do I have to do to update past skills?

4) What are the cost vs. benefit and time commitment to start a new education program or career?

5) What type of work/career will be sustainable into older age?

Careful analysis of these questions can lead you to some answers. The bottom line is you want to do something you are at least interested in, hopefully passionate about. If you are upgrading past skills what will it cost, and in the end, will you be able to do that line of work into older age if you wanted? In other words, what are the physical demands of your previous work?

Perhaps it would be better to start over with a new career enabling longer term employment. For example, I was in the career of phys. Ed and recreation. My previous work experiences were highly physically demanding and I knew there was no way I could sustain that type of work into my 50's. Also, after being out of the field for several years my interests and passions had changed. So, I asked, *should I invest in upgrading in a career I had little interest in?* No. I decided to pursue a new program in Interior Design. This made sense for hours and sustainability of work. I could do this type of work well into my 60's if I wanted or had to. Also, there were programs available that allowed for part time study so I would still have time to care for my children while studying. This seemed ideal looking at the 'big picture'.

What will happen during divorce is, your ex's lawyer will pressure you to get a job. If you are earning an income of any kind, your ex will pay less in spousal/alimony support. So, the lawyer is trying to get your ex the best deal by encouraging you to get a job. Yes, you will have to work but know that the purpose of alimony and spousal support is to TRANSITION you from the marital role to independence and this includes allowing you time to upgrade and/or take up a new education. If that is the case, then why should you rush out and get a minimum wage job and have no time for your children who likely still need you?

**Look at this as a time of growth and new opportunities.** It isn't the easiest transition but you will come out of it with new skills and increased self-esteem. Your kids will be proud of your accomplishments too. So, it's a little scary, but once you figure out what the F you're gonna do, you'll be okay.

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## Legal/Lawyers

### Legal Speak-5 Tips for An Efficient Divorce

Are you ready for some Legal Speak? One of the hardest lessons during divorce besides the emotional ones, are the legal ones. If you've never had to hire a lawyer or deal with any legal issues it can be an eye opener. I was a real newbie in the legal arena. I had no clue the costs involved, the time involved nor any handle on the legal vocabulary.

Initially, finding the right lawyer was a lesson in itself. My naivety allowed me to believe that the first lawyer was suitable regardless of any variables. I didn't realize the importance of personality in matching a lawyer with me and my situation. So, first step is to ensure you are finding a lawyer to best suit your needs and that will ensure a terrific start to the process. Also, make sure you have a lawyer that specializes in Family Law. I know that sounds obvious but if someone recommends a lawyer because he's a brother of a friend be forewarned, if he doesn't practice family law he won't be as efficient for your case.

Here are my **5 Tips to an Efficient Divorce**;

**1. Be Patient** and realize that you are not your lawyer's only client so it may take days for them to return a phone call. If it's weeks before hearing back, that is wrong but knowing this ahead of time will save you some frustration.

**2. Prepare questions** for your lawyer prior to your meetings or telephone conversations. Every minute costs you money so use your time wisely. Take notes or record meetings (with their permission) so you don't forget any points. Their advice is expensive so why not have it recorded word for word so you can always check back when in doubt?

**3. Know that the lawyer follows *your* instructions and with that comes responsibility.** After advising you of your best course of action to take it is ultimately up to you to decide how to proceed. Make sure you consider all the facts and have given serious thought to your decisions.

**4. Before signing any legal documents** such as an Affidavit or a Consent Order **ensure all statements are absolutely true and that you fully agree.** You don't want to sign a legal document with incorrect facts or consent to a legal arrangement you don't understand.

**5. Keep a Legal Binder** for organizing paid bills, unpaid bills, receipts, memos, emails, affidavits, orders. You can claim any costs you have incurred in pursuing child support or spousal (alimony) as a tax deduction on your income. All you require is a brief letter from the lawyer's office attesting to the amount of money spent. All law offices provide these to their clients upon request.

These tips will help you proceed efficiently and maintain some control over the legal process. In my book, I devote a whole chapter to legal issues including a comprehensive glossary of legal terms. I recommend my book if only for that chapter which I titled "Legally Blind" because that's what I was when I started. This will be a difficult legal experience and the more you know, the easier it becomes.

### [Plan Your Divorce Strategy](#)

This post is written and sponsored by [Canterbury Law Group](#) out of Scottsdale Arizona.

Their tips are spot on and this is a must read for anyone thinking of ending their marriage...

We all know divorce has become common over the last several decades. Although there may be certain factors associated with divorce that are negative, at least women (and men) today can divorce a spouse and move on to achieve a healthy, happy and thriving future. Women today don't need to be in a marriage to live a full life; we can prosper on our own.

If you are thinking about divorce, the best approach often coincides with strategy. Of course, this depends on your unique situation. If you are in an abusive relationship or fear for your safety in any way, a swift exit may be your best option. Personal safety is your number one concern. Once safety is attained through new living arrangements, the next stage can begin: Strategy.

Planning for a divorce makes you proactive. I have divorce planning tips from the Scottsdale divorce lawyers at Canterbury Law Group. Their litigation team handles all types of divorce cases and they offer sound advice for those contemplating ending a marriage.

### **Plan your divorce strategy tips;**

**Be ready for the economic battle** ahead; many divorces become war-like. You want to know the pros and cons of your case and the results which can or cannot be achieved, and then prepare accordingly.

**Do your research first.** Consult with several attorneys in your area. Many lawyers offer one-time complimentary consultations where you can evaluate if you fit with your lawyer and many communities have programs that offer free or reduced-price legal aid. The Scottsdale divorce lawyers at Canterbury also offer a complimentary consultation for new clients.

**Consider timing.** If your spouse is expecting a bonus or pay raise, wait before filing to avoid any claim that it is/was not shared property. If you have been in long-term marriage, sticking it out to the 10-year mark assists in procuring your share of your spouse's social security income at retirement age.

**Become a vital financial partner now.** Be sure your name is on all financial documents such as bank accounts, investment accounts and deeds. Be sure that a joint signature is needed for any change. Also, meet with your accountant to understand tax consequences and other issues related to real property, stocks, retirement plans, etc.

**Discover and /or identify all family assets.** Although both spouses must disclose all assets during litigation, individuals are often less than forthcoming. The Scottsdale divorce



lawyers at Canterbury Law Group are particularly well suited to finding hidden accounts, both domestic and offshore, either before or after filing the case.

**Protect yourself and your future.** You will need your own personal credit to start over and you'll likely open a new credit card. Also, start saving your money well before you file, ideally cash.

Although divorcing your spouse can be an extremely difficult and emotional process, it can also be the first step in improving your life and opening up the door for future happiness. For more legal information, visit [www.canterburylawgroup.com](http://www.canterburylawgroup.com) (link in resource section).

domestic violence hotline U.S. 1-800-799-SAFE

domestic violence hotline Canada 1-800-363-9010

### Why Lawyers Are Not Our Therapists

I guess it's pick on lawyers day. This is important, though and something I've experienced. It made me wonder at the effects of lawyers preaching self-help when they should be practicing law...

There's a reason why Lawyers should stick to their expertise and provide legal advice and not personal advice. I know a lawyer who attended a self-help weekend retreat. The premise of these retreats is for people to LET GO. They tell their story and then claim they can let them go, like a helium filled balloon—floating away never to be seen again.

Everyone has a story and some of them are sad. Some of them are about loss, abuse and they're dark. In this program, you are brainwashed to let these stories go. They no longer define you. They no longer are a part of you... IT never happened.

It sounds all rosy and happy.

I think it's bull shit. WHY would we let our stories go because a stranger stands on a stage and tells us it's time? This guru knows nothing about us as an individual, yet he claims to know what's best for us. He is minimizing our story.

I'm more for RESOLUTION and less for absolution. FIX not deny. RESOLVE not dissolve. We are all human and have feelings. We don't turn them off after a few days of self-help programming.

But to act as though it never happened is to deny reality. ***Denial only leads to more pain in the future.***

Getting back to LAWYERS who advocate these programs; I question a lawyer who views conflict as something that should be 're-told' or as a negative 'side effect' of our

'stories'. After all, we retain lawyers to *reso/ve* our legal conflicts. If the lawyer wants to minimize our conflict and advise us to let it go, then what exactly is his role? If our legal dilemma is simply an extension of our 'story' then why not stop telling it now and dismiss our lawyer immediately. We won't need their services if we're going to pretend the conflict doesn't exist or worse, is something that's in our head. Imagine if Erin Brockovich had told the law firm's clients, a whole town of hurting people that their story didn't define them?

Perhaps these programs really do help people including lawyers, with their personal issues. The problem arises when the lawyer applies these principles to his practice.

A lawyer who has been broken by a self-help, brainwashing program risks compromising his clients. An anti-conflict (that's what this program preaches) lawyer might as well be a mediator.

I don't know about you but I would prefer a lawyer who has a little fire because a lawyer doesn't get you the best deal by being docile and a push over. The lawyer must be able to see your conflict and acknowledge that it exists in the first place (the opposite of minimizing your story).

Most importantly, the lawyer should not advise his client on their personal issues by telling them to validate people who have wronged them. By telling you to forgive, forget and move on is to do the opposite of validation. In other words, while you validate the people you're having a conflict with to improve the situation you (and your story) remain *un-validated*. You've been SILENCED in the name of conflict resolution.

Instead, the lawyer's role is to advise you on the best course of legal action you can take to resolve your legal dilemma. If it's your DIVORCE, he should advise you on what steps you must take to retain your fair share of the assets and monetary support. He looks at the facts of your case and then recommends what to expect legally and then how to go about getting that. He lays out your legal choices. He does NOT tell you to get over your story. He doesn't tell you what to do personally. Of course, he is only human but ultimately, if you save your emotional issues for your therapist you'll save lots of \$.

Don't ever let anyone tell you your story does not define you. *Your story today is but one in a life time of stories that will make you who you are.* If someone advises you to 'tell a different story' to avoid repeating the old one, tell them you're still trying to figure this one out. Your story is a part of you and no matter how dark or sad, it should be told. You should never have to shush it. Don't give away what makes you an individual. The stories that have colored your life make you UNIQUE.

Should we move forward? YES. Should we forgive and forget? YES, but only when we're ready and only when a satisfactory resolution has been reached legally or otherwise. It's

important to move forward. Part of that process is letting go of certain things and people that hold us back AND resolving our legal issues including divorce.

Lawyers, if you must attend self-help retreats please refrain from applying those principles to your practice. Your practice has nothing to do with preaching.

RESOLUTION not absolution

FIX not deny

RESOLVE not dissolve

### Divorce & Social Media 10 Tips

Hello Escapees, how many of you are on Facebook? How many of you are on twitter or Instagram? Me too! I just love checking my social media feeds to see what my friends are up to.

It's a simple fact that social media is now a big part of our life. It's almost impossible to avoid. People actually wonder why you're **not** on Facebook, for example, rather than wondering why you are. There was a time (in the last decade) where being on Facebook was the exception rather than the norm. There was no twitter. Hard to imagine our world without twitter!

Here's the thing though, if you're going through your divorce process right now, then you'll want to be careful about what you're sharing on any of these social media platforms. Why? Because once lawyers are involved, they can scour your social media looking for any incriminating evidence. For example, you're negotiating spousal support but you're posting photos of your new Christian Louboutin shoes on your Facebook and Instagram profiles. Without realizing it you're sending conflicting messages when it comes to your divorce. You might as well come right out and say *I require spousal support/alimony but I also have enough disposable income to blow on my shoe collection*. No, Louboutins are not a necessity.

That's just the tip of the iceberg though. Say, you're heading down the dark and winding road of a custody battle and you're really frustrated with your ex and his B.S., you begin venting on your face book page because your friends understand and you need some support. Don't do it. Keep your frustration and anger, which are totally normal emotions during a divorce, for your therapist or best friend that you see IN PERSON. Or there's always the old-fashioned option of writing in a journal.

You're probably thinking *Wow, who are you to tell me this? Don't you blog and write about your divorce? So, doesn't that make you a hypocrite?*

Well, not exactly. Hear me out. My divorce was almost finalized before I published my book and began my blog. In fact, it was seven years after my initial separation. As well, although I share personal stories here, they're always with the objective to help others. So, rather than sit here on my platform and bitch about my ex, I hope I'm sharing with the aim to help others rise. That means learning from my mistakes which of course, I've made many.

Getting back to your social media; The main purpose for most non-bloggers and non-writers is to have a personal online social interaction. That means you're not writing status updates for any reason other than the pure entertainment and social interaction it provides. That's where you can get into some murky water during divorce.

Keep the following tips in mind to prevent a divorce legal disaster.

### **10 tips for maintaining innocent social media accounts during divorce;**

1. Ensure your privacy controls are always updated and turned on
2. Keep your ex out of your status updates
3. Keep your children out of your status updates (seriously)
4. Find a private divorce support group on Facebook. Check out [Divorced Moms On A Mission](#). By the way, these groups ensure privacy however, that's not to say it could be breached at some time, therefore still temper your comments and updates.
5. Save your deepest, darkest divorce challenges for the therapist
6. Try self-therapy make your own videos with your webcam and talk to the camera as though it were a good friend. Let it all out. This is not for anyone to see but you. You can play back and watch anytime and you'll be surprised at not only your progress but some of the valuable information you're recording. The best part? It remains completely private. It's just you and the camera.
7. Avoid Facebook creeping on your ex's new life-that won't help anyone, least of all you.
8. Check out divorce support forums on sites like [Woman's Divorce](#) or the [Divorce Support Forum](#)
9. Spend more time with people in the flesh and less time with virtual Facebook friends
10. If you're unsure about an update you're about to post, ask yourself, why am I posting this?
11. If you're going to start a blog at the beginning of your divorce legal action, remain anonymous.

If you follow these guidelines while in the divorce process, you will remain untouchable when it comes to your ex's lawyer. The last thing you want is some random photo or status update to jeopardize your alimony or child custody dispute. Those are far too serious matters, so keep them out of your personal social media feed.

Once your divorce is final, then forget about the rules. Write and say whatever the heck you want. It's your life. Get those Louboutins...

### Staying Organized During Divorce-10 Tips

If you're in the middle of your divorce you probably feel like you're chasing paper. You may have legal papers and bills spread out on your living room table. You have important letters from your lawyer mixed up in your mail. You haven't opened the last envelope from your lawyer because you're worried it's a huge bill. These lawyer's fees add up pretty quickly, while nothing seems to be getting done at all. Sound familiar?

During my divorce, I was NOT very organized. My lawyer bills were usually paid on time but the invoice would sit in a pile of papers to be filed. I did actually get to a point where my whole body repelled the envelope with his name on it. I was sickened at the cost of it all. Unfortunately, that feeling doesn't help you get or stay organized. All of that fear freezes you and while you're frozen, it weighs on your shoulders like an ice berg.

The point is although it's normal to react this way, it's not productive. Here's what you're going to do instead. You're going to open the mail as soon as you get it. You're going to review every bill and make sure there are no errors. You're going to pay it by the end of the month. It's going to have to be done and you're the only one who can. So just 'do it'. Think of it as 'kicking a\*\*' and taking control...

#### Tips for staying organized during divorce;

##### 1. Get a large binder and some dividers

-organize a legal binder to contain ALL legal documents including, affidavits, emails from your lawyer, legal bills, proof of payments, and letters

-you'll want to know exactly where these documents are at all times for easy reference

-if you're organized you'll have a better grip on what's happening and what is coming up

2. **Keep copies** of signed, FILED AND STAMPED affidavits, court orders and notice of motions but DESTROY all drafts.

-keeping drafts will confuse you plus they have no legal relevance and can't be used for anything

3. **Keep copies of transcripts** from your examination or discoveries

-transcripts are the records of discovery questions and answers (yours and your ex's) word for word

-they cost you money but are worth every penny as they are 'gold' as far as evidence for any future actions in your divorce.

#### 4. **Print out bills and emails from your lawyer immediately**

-waiting to print out documents means we forget about them because they're not on our actual desk or in the binder

-having hard copies of these important documents means quick access and not spending hours trying to find them in with our tons of files on the computer

-if your computer crashes you'll have everything in print (my computer just crashed the other day and it's disconcerting to think your important information is inaccessible, even for a few days!)

#### 5. **Copy all bills and emails from your lawyer on to a USB stick.**

-keep only your legal stuff on the one USB stick for quick reference to your files from any computer

#### 6. **BONUS TIP:**

Keep all of your bills because a percentage of your legal expenses can be re-claimed IF it was to claim child or alimony support plus your legal fees will be tax deductible against your annual income.

Ask your legal firm to write a letter with the total amount spent and include it in your tax return.

It's never too late to get organized but if you leave it too long, it will become overwhelming. Organizing will help you feel more in control too. As for reviewing bills, make sure you do. I found lots of errors over the few years my lawyer represented me. It wasn't his fault. They have legal assistants who prepare the bills (which the client pays for—yes, you pay for the legal firm to write up **your** bill) and they're only human and sometimes mix up your file with another client's. Also, there will be times you'll disagree with your lawyer and know it's not a crime. It's better to speak up then stay silent. It's **your** life, after all.

You can be more Erin Brockovich and less overwhelmed.

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## Co-Parenting Tips and Challenges

Undoubtedly, one of the biggest challenges during divorce and in the initial stages of separation, is *parenting*. Parenting is a labor of love even in intact homes. However, add divorce and it is riddled with guilt, logistical obstacles, loneliness and tug of war. If you're experiencing any of this know you're not alone.

The guilt seems insurmountable at times. You feel terrible as a parent that you have caused your child's life to change. They didn't ask for this after all. But remember, they are learning tough lessons if you stayed in an unhappy, or volatile marriage. An intact family does not necessarily mean happy children.

The divorce will bring change but change means growth for everyone including the children. They become more empathetic people as a result of this change. Also, remain true to your parenting ethics. Try not to let guilt interfere with your house rules and parenting style.

Next, logistical obstacles are bound to occur with scheduling time between two homes. Start a yearly schedule to show which parent they will be with and when. Although you can discuss custody arrangements with your children, be cognizant that ultimately it should be the parents' decision. Mom and Dad know what's best, not a ten-year-old.

Communication with the other parent is paramount to reducing logistical nightmares. Some questions to consider discussing with your ex; *What special events do the children have? When are they going to camp? Who is paying for registration for their activities? Who will volunteer and when?* All of these types of issues can be well organized and understood with a detailed plan and calendar of events.

Loneliness is an emotion we all feel when we separate. It doesn't help that we inevitably lose time with our children since we are now "sharing" parenting time with our ex.

Accept that you will be alone more and try *not* to compensate for this by trying to see the children when they are with their other parent. As tempting as this is, it is much more effective to be respectful of the other parent's time with the kids. This should be a mutual arrangement. Instead, anticipate your "alone" time. Get in touch with old friends, find or rekindle an old passion or hobby. Be social. It is difficult but trust me, it gets easier in time. Soon the parenting arrangement feels normal and runs quite smoothly.

Lastly, tug of wars are bound to occur between you and your ex. He wants them during your week or he attends activities and events he was previously absent from. He doesn't tell you about a trip he has planned for the kids next week. His sister calls the kids and requests them for lunch when you've already made plans for them that day. She failed to ask you first. All of these situations lead to tug of war or a mini struggle.

Your children are precious to you. Suddenly your time with them goes as fast as the sand in an hourglass. Although flexibility is important, the obtrusive demand for the children when they should be with you is destructive and undermining. If there is a special occasion, and lots of warning it would certainly be reasonable to allow access and again, this must be mutual. Planning and scheduling along with mutual respect, will definitely cut down on the tug of war syndrome of shared parenting.

Here are my **top 5 tips** to meet **Parenting Challenges**;

- 1) Allow a few months to pass before legally committing to a parenting “custody agreement”**, this will give you some time to assess the climate of the divorce, your ex and the needs of the children
- 2) Stay true to your parenting style; maintain routines, and house rules including setting boundaries** (i.e. is there one day of the week devoted to you and your children only; no outsiders?)
- 3) Set up a yearly parenting schedule on a calendar** including who has them when, and listing any holidays, school events or special occasions to alleviate logistical confusion
- 4) Make plans for your own social and work life so you do not rely on your children for emotional support**
- 5) Try to keep communication open** (with children as well as your ex) and **maintain mutual respect** to limit tug of war syndrome

Maintaining a healthy family post separation, will be your greatest challenge. It can be done. Remember, you know what is best for your family so stay strong. There will be pain but without pain, there is no growth. You and your children are a new family unit moving toward the future together. To meet your parenting challenges, believe in yourself, trust your instincts and it will fall into place in time.

### Behind Parental Alienation

There are many parents and children suffering out there from Parental Alienation. It's tragic. I know this because my you tube video on the subject has too many responses...too many people are relating to this issue. Today, let's take a look at what's going on behind the scenes. What motivates the alienator to abuse their children by disapproving of their relationship with the target parent? Hint: Narcissism and PA are often found in the same scenario...but not always.

PA is one of the narcissist's favorite strategies to take control of the children during divorce. Many of the narcissist's actions are based on fear, insecurity and past trauma. Parental Alienation is no different. Unfortunately, the person they are attempting to pay back is not technically the one who ends up damaged. Hurt? Yes, it hurts like hell to be



on the receiving end of such bitter and unnecessary disregard. Damaged? No, we aren't the ones who end up damaged.

The real victims are the children.

Often, they aren't mature enough to manage the behaviors and emotions that result from PA.

You can imagine the confusion your child experiences. ***Why is dad angry and disappointed with me if I have nothing negative to say about mom?*** They soon learn that to share with their father, their pleasure and (normal) relationship with their mother is a big no-no. They learn to agree with father and tell negatives to earn his approval. They soon become guarded and lose their innocent candor.

Your children learn that in order to get love from their father (or mother, if she's the alienator), they must *agree* with their constant complaints of their other parent. While the alienating parent is washing out the brain of the child's good memories of the target parent, he is replacing them with negatives, including lies. It doesn't take long for the child to believe these lies and misrepresented facts as the new truth. It's their new reality.

That said, I've explained the basic premise of PA in [an earlier post](#), but now I will try to explore the actual *reasons* for it. I use the father as an example here, but of course, mothers can play this game equally well.

Before I get into that I want to share a personal story:

Early in my separation, my ex and I had agreed on shared parenting. One evening, I made a routine phone call to my children. It was a call I would normally make once a week to double check their return time (to my house etc). What happened was strange. My son was a little bit distant on the telephone. My daughter was even more so (she is two years older than my son who was 11 at the time). In any event, the call would be ominous.

They were due to return to my house in a few days but my son asked if it was okay to stay with his dad because dad wanted to take them on a ski trip. These requests for them to stay with their dad longer than the shared parenting schedule we had set, was becoming annoyingly typical.

I said "...no, I'm really sorry but I'm really looking forward to seeing you and I don't want to change plans at the last minute. It's really important to me that you and your sister come to my house on the scheduled time." I finished with something like "Maybe your dad can take you on the next weekend, during your time with him?" I was playing the bad guy, yet again, in not allowing them to stay with their dad for whatever special event he had planned for them. If I agreed to everything though, I wouldn't see my kids at all.

We were on a land line. Do you remember those? Well, this is where the funny thing happened. After we said our goodbyes, my phone rang a few seconds later. I picked up but no one was there. It was only background noise. In a split-second I realized that it was the noise of my ex and my kids. I guess my son hadn't disconnected the call completely, hence why my phone rang me back. Then I heard my ex-husband—talking about me. Not in a nice way either. He was telling the kids that they didn't 'need' to go to my house and that it was 'okay' to stay with him. He also told them that their mom 'didn't care' if they stayed with him longer'. I was listening like a fly on the wall, holding my breath...

My son in his boyish, not yet broken, 11-year-old voice was begging and pleading with his dad to let them go to mom's. He explained to his dad that mom was looking forward to seeing them. Mom would be sad if they didn't go to her house. His dad interrupted him and told him that his mom 'didn't know what she wanted' and that she 'changed her mind all the time'. I could hear my son's voice peaking in pitch with his growing anxiety. I am quoting these because I wrote it all down the minute I hung up the phone. I still have that note.

It was the saddest thing I had ever heard. Not for me. For my son. The pain in his voice and the confusion were palpable. My daughter in the meantime was agreeing readily with her father. Did I feel betrayed? You bet your ass I did. I also was keenly aware of the power my ex had over our children. I reminded myself that my daughter was a child. She may have been 13 at the time but that's nowhere near an age to stand up to her father, even if she wanted to.

This accidental telephone call, was a gift because it confirmed what I had begun to suspect. He was trying to *keep* the children and possess as much of their time as possible even when they were supposed to be with me.

Why am I talking about this story from many years ago? Well, I hope you can learn something valuable from it. For example, PA can be very subtle. Recognize the signs EARLY and don't dismiss them.

Why does it happen?

Well there are many theories as to the cause of PA. One certain fact though, is the alienator is in FEAR of losing his children no matter how illogical. FEAR is the opposite of love, so very little of good comes from it. The other certain factor is the alienator is trying to regain CONTROL over a situation he feels he has lost. He may further attempt to RETALIATE against the target parent as a consequence for their abandonment. He may feel that if she has chosen to walk out why should she get the kids? In their mind, there should be a consequence.

Unfortunately, the alienating parent didn't get the memo that children are the one marital gift you can't take back.

Basically, this adds up to punishing the children. So, **how can we help our children cope with our absence, their parent's anger and misrepresentations?**

1) Start TALKING-open communication and allowing the children to express what's on their mind—anything, will open up discussion and help ease the child's anxieties. Silence is not the answer.

2) RE-affirm your relationship with your children-either by reminiscing on old, fun or humorous memories, reminding them how much you believe in them, continuing to recognize birthdays, special occasions and continue or start new traditions.

3) EXPLAIN to them that their father's (mother's) anger toward you (the target parent) is not their fault. If daddy is angry, that's not something they can change. Their job is to be the kid.

4) REMIND them that no one is perfect- they aren't perfect. I remember telling one of my kids "Remember that math test you failed? I didn't judge your whole academic abilities on that one exam, right? So, is it fair to judge me based on that \_\_\_\_\_ mistake?" You're not perfect, their other parent is not perfect either. We have to accept that we make mistakes. Apologies are important and eventually we move forward as a family.

5) Re-WASH or RINSE their brains with the good memories and reality of what your relationship was like in the past and hopes for the future. Don't stop planning for the future with your kids whether that's tomorrow, next week, next month or next five years. This shows them that you believe in them and are there for them no matter the situation.

I hope this helps you understand Parental Alienation a little better. Mostly, I hope you are able to help your children cope with it. It is a form of child abuse. Also, don't forget to make sure you're not falsely accusing your ex of PA. Read my [first post](#) on the subject, watch the [video](#) and/or read my [book](#), where I outline questions to ask before diagnosing PA.

The bottom line? No parent should be deprived of a relationship with their child(ren). Furthermore, no child should be deprived of a relationship with their father or mother.

### Divorce and Birthdays, an Emotional Mix

There was nothing more painful than the kid's birthdays during divorce. *Will they be with mom or dad and what do they want to do?* If you're in the wrong week according to the custody schedule, you may not get to see them on their special day. It can feel 'all wrong' especially when you were the stay at home mom who planned all the previous parties.

Sure, you might have complained about the chore it could be (the mess, the noise, the goody bags, the one bratty guest, the cleanup) but still, you couldn't imagine anyone else doing it for you.

If Dad was away, the party was yours to plan and manage from the invites to the cake to keeping the kids under control. I remember many birthday parties when I relied on a girlfriend or another mom to assist me with the goings on, whether it was taking pictures, cutting the cake or organizing the guests. Let's face it, a kid's birthday party can get out of hand pretty quickly.

That all changed though when we separated. Suddenly, dad was the party planner. Seriously. He also bought school supplies that first year. Where were these hidden talents during our marriage? Oh, right they were *hidden*.

While I should have enjoyed the break from it, I couldn't help but feel out of sorts. The kids were celebrating their birthdays without me. It was as if I had lost a limb. I remember one year on my son's birthday picking him up and bringing him to my house for his birthday lunch and cake. He was staying with his Dad that week and without that lunch together I wouldn't have seen him at all that day.

I think birthdays are special for us moms probably because we give birth and we have that intense memory of the labor and delivery. In fact, I could tell you the whole day's events when I went into labor. It's all part of the birth story.

Then starting at baby's first birthday, we are typically the party planners. During divorce, all of that changes and it feels like it's been stolen and not willingly given over to the other parent. It becomes a hot button issue in the parenting schedule, too. "They were with you last year on their birthday, so this year it's my turn." Unfortunately, these are the kinds of conversations divorced parents have.

Some divorced parents are able to *both* attend the birthday party. How civilized is that? Very. That wasn't the case for us though. Inevitably one parent gets left out. All you can do is plan ahead and make the most of whatever time you *do* have with your child the day of their birthday. Knowing in advance if you're the party hostess or if they will be at the other parent's will help you plan and not be as disappointed. Don't forget to talk to your child and ask them what they want to do because in spite of this emotional issue, it's ultimately all about them.

The silver lining? Our divorce experience makes us appreciate these occasions even more.

Just know that there will be many more celebrations to come and you will continue to be a part of those. In the meantime, cherish the moments you have with your kids whether it's their birthday or any other day.

## For Non-Custodial Moms

Why do moms lose custody of their children? Furthermore, how does a mom cope when she loses custody of her children? Well, there are many reasons it can happen. Addiction, neglect or abuse would be list toppers. In those cases, it makes sense for the welfare of the children. I've read blogs written by mothers who have given up their children due to addiction. They maintain a relationship with them but they are not the custodial parent.

I don't really want to go into addiction and mothering on this post though.

There are other ways a mother can lose custody. One of them is because she is 'poor' as in she has no resources for the legal system.

I wrote about the helpless cycle a woman can get into when it comes to the legal system in the article [Divorce Law-Protect or Infect?](#) If a woman was economically dependent on her husband while married, if she was a full time mother and staying home to raise the children...these situations lend themselves to economic hardship upon separation and divorce. On top of that, she isn't likely to have much money for legal fees.

I realize that's what alimony and spousal support are designed for. They're designed to bridge the gap until the economically dependent spouse can get back on their feet financially. Whether that's to re-educate, re-certify, or simply find an entry level job, there is no doubt that alimony and spousal support can bridge the income gap experienced by the newly separated spouse.

I'll tell you what it is NOT designed for. Alimony and spousal support are not designed to pay for legal fees. No, sir. Legal bills hang over your head like an avalanche, just waiting to dispatch and drown you. You won't be able to breathe under the debt. Meanwhile, if your ex is earning a substantial income and is inclined to fight for custody, you are at a grave disadvantage.

They can appeal. They can Appeal again, until they 'win' the children in an epic battle from hell. In fact, Gossip Girl actress, [Kelly Rutherford's story](#) is the perfect example of an epic child custody battle. She lost and we've seen her pain publicly. She's been in the news with each new appeal. She has or *had* money but again, will there be any left when it's all said and done? Apparently, she is currently faced with bankruptcy.

Back to us regular moms, though. It can happen to anyone. A woman can easily fall victim to the legal system. When it's over she has lost control. Most importantly, she has lost custody of her children. Of course, this doesn't mean she has lost them altogether but it is *devastating*. She feels has lost her most important role: Motherhood.

Question is ***How does she deal with such a loss?***

Someone contacted me not long ago asking if I knew of any support groups (on-line) for non-custodial mothers. I was at a loss. I didn't know of a single group. I could think of

many general divorce support groups for women but not specifically non-custodial moms. It made me realize they are (hopefully) a minority in the divorce world but certainly in need of some specialized support. It's like the upside down, backwards result of divorce.

## 5 Tips to keep your sanity

### 1. Ignore the judgers, they know nothing of your struggle.

Being a non-custodial mom goes against societal norms and with that comes judgment. First thought may be *what did she do to lose her kids?* Meanwhile, she did nothing. She ran out of money. Forget the judgers. Don't feel the need to explain your situation because someone asks. It's none of their business. Choose who you want to share your story with carefully.

### 2. Be the best mom you can possibly be.

Take part in everything you can possibly be involved in with your children; School activities, sports, recitals, doctor/dental appointments—all that stuff. Take the exciting events with the mundane. Show up. Don't give up. The continuity of this will make a big difference in the long run.

### 3. Take back control.

How? Start with the little things (see above). One of the biggest things we lose as moms during divorce is 'control'. That may be control of money, decisions regarding the children, time with the children and lastly, what the children do when they're away from you. It's all out of our control.

Instead of focusing on this loss, take control of the things you **can**. For example, control things in your own life first. Your surroundings, your work, your hobbies...this will give you more power. The more powerful you feel, the more confident you will be and this will lead to positive decision making.

### 4. Become a legal advocate for yourself.

You would be surprised how much you can do yourself, legally speaking. For example, I have written an article titled [Deadbeat 911](#), on how to get your child support as a self-represented litigant. I've attached legal forms that are filled out as an example.

You may not qualify for legal aid but there are legal experts at courthouses that help self-represented persons on various legal matters, often in family law. They are called 'duty counsels' here in Canada but I'm sure there are similar lawyers in U.S. and U.K.

Another way to do this is to find a lawyer who is willing to review your work before you file it and basically work with you on a limited scope. This will also save you thousands of dollars.

I think everyone should have the ability to file an application in court. Why? Because having the knowledge and confidence to deal with legal issues on your own is a powerful tool when dealing with an ex who has unlimited monetary resources. It's the ideal time to attain necessary knowledge and experience in order to avoid being completely victimized.

You don't have to be powerless to the legal system.

### **5. Be the best version of you.**

Although it may sound counter-intuitive, having less time with your kids is an opportunity. It means you have more time for yourself. That's something that we're not accustomed to. It can take some getting used to if you were a full-time SAHM (stay at home mom).

It will be painful and lonely at first but if you take a positive view, it will be the beginning a beautiful friendship—with yourself. This will allow you to be an even better mom. So, now is the time to learn something new, be open to meeting new people, or re-discover your passions. Remember, no one can replace you as the mother of your children. No one

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## **Sex & Love**

### **Sexual Neglect**

Are you in a sexless marriage? Do you often get rejected by your husband? That should have been on the list for a 'bad husband costumes' (a term I learned from my teen aged son). If you are in a sexless marriage, you have plenty of empathy from me.

It is unhealthy physically to be in a sexless marriage, never mind the emotional toll it takes. Your self-esteem takes a beating over the years of neglect. Unfortunately, this is a topic that often goes unaddressed. I guess it's still taboo. Also, most women would have you believe their husband wants it all the time and they can't keep up with his voracious appetite. This may be true in some cases but not in as many as they would have us believe. So if you feel ashamed of the fact that your marriage is so far from this stereotype that you've forgotten what it feels like to be touched intimately, know that you're not alone. With the children and their needs and demands, it's easier to let it slide than to question what could be wrong. But wrong it is. If you are suffering this kind of neglect I recommend you address it immediately. Nothing says dying marriage louder than "lack of sex".

### ***Is it time to raise the white flag?***

I was in a relationship as such and began to feel ugly. I thought there was something unappealing about me. I'm not a nympho by any stretch of the imagination. I'm a normal, healthy woman. However, instead of flourishing in my sexual peak, I was wilting away. It

didn't matter how many expensive haircuts, or how beautiful my clothes, I was not sexually desired by my partner. I can hardly think of anything crueler in a relationship.

I was recently thinking about a trip we took to Italy several years before our separation. I think we were together around 12 years at the time. Some of our close friends had invited us to join them on a cruise of the Amalfi Coast, undoubtedly one of the most beautiful cities in the whole world. Well I can tell you we didn't have sex once on that trip. He flew me half way around the world to neglect me in every way possible. Even emotionally, I don't recall sharing an intimate moment with him. One beautiful day we boarded one of those tour buses to take us all up to the ruins of Pompeii, an incredible historical site. But when we got on the bus, he continued to walk past me to the back, leaving me to sit alone. When I looked around, all the couples sat together quietly talking. The neglect was poignant being that it was conducted amidst the most romantic countryside in the world.

When I think about being in Italy all those years ago, I think of myself as the Lady in the Yellow Dress. Because I have a picture of myself standing on the famous bridge over the Tiber River. I'm wearing one of my favorite dresses a soft yellow, linen shift dress. I didn't realize at that moment how beautiful I really was. Only now, when I see that picture do I realize my own lost beauty and the shame and waste I allowed by staying in a loveless relationship.

I wanted to share this personal story with you because I think the importance of sex in a marriage is crucial. Neglect of this sort can breakdown a marriage permanently.

Today, I can be in sweatpants and a t-shirt and feel beautiful. Even if I could afford the beautiful clothes I bought for that cruise, I don't need them to incite desire from my partner. In a sexually healthy relationship, you feel validated. You feel beautiful and wanted. It is a gift your partner gives you. When intimacy is strong in a relationship, everything else will fall into place.

It's never too late to learn to embrace our sexuality without shame!

### Finding Your Inner Sex Goddess

Hello, where have you been? That's what you'll be asking when you find her. I can't think of a better time than post-divorce, to get in touch with your inner sex goddess. She's dying to get out! Finding her will be exciting, fun and rewarding. Embracing your sexuality means owning it. Dressing in clothes that feel and fit perfect instead of revealing our cleavage and bulges. Nicely fitted, beautiful fabrics like silk, pure cotton, cashmere and linen can feel heavenly next to the skin.



Sensual means our senses. Feel, touch, sound, sight; they all play a role in finding our inner sex goddess. Inner, meaning from within as opposed to the obvious. Sure, great sex plays a big part in this awakening but most importantly, it's how you feel about yourself that counts.

### **START HERE...**

- 1. Positive self-talk** – when you look in the mirror compliment yourself
  - 2. Wardrobe**– how do your clothes feel and look on you? Go through your wardrobe and try on everything. Anything that doesn't fit or you don't feel confident in get rid of! This includes updating the lingerie collection.
  - 3. Bedding and Bath** – what state are your bedding and bath towels in? They should enshroud you in softness, comfort and give you a sense of decadence. If they don't get rid of them and invest in some quality bedding you can slide into (naked of course) and feel beauty against your skin.
  - 4. Music** – Do you play your favorites? Or do you just listen to the radio because it's easier? Pick out some sultry tunes, make your personal playlist. Is it Jazz, classical, pop, rock? Is there an era of music you find sexy?
  - 5. Shoes**– What's the situation with your shoes? Do you live in sneaks? I love sneakers but a girl needs a high heel especially to boost her body self-confidence. Invest in a great pair of go to heels that will look great with skinny jeans or a skirt.
  - 6. Hair maintenance** – a regular cut and highlights can do wonders for your self-confidence. I have been guilty of neglecting this and I have vowed not to let it go again!
  - 7. Nails** – tidy? Pretty? Get them softened and treated once every few months and you will feel beautiful.
  - 8. Spa treatments** - again, I am guilty here and since ruminating on this post and reading all about the beauty of French women (which I aspire to be, ahem) they take their spa treatments SERIOUSLY. They wouldn't miss an appointment and there is no guilt or assumption of selfish behavior about it.
  - 9. Zumba** – or any exercise. Zumba gets you moving in ways you didn't realize you could!
- You'll notice I haven't mentioned makeup. I don't believe makeup gives us the same sense of goddess as our clothing or touch, scent or sound. Some would argue a good red lipstick will add glamour to a plain Jane. I guess there's some truth to that but overall, and maybe this is a personal opinion, makeup can't come close to doing for the senses what cashmere, silk or a beautiful scent can do.

In fact, I started going without a drop of makeup as an experiment. It started with laziness. Some days I would forget to put on makeup. Then I discovered I loved getting ready for bed and not having to think about taking makeup off. It was a relief. I have never been a big make up wearer and even if I spent 10 minutes putting it on I would have people say “You don’t wear any makeup, do you?” I would think *Huh, why did I spend ten minutes on my face?* So just to see how I would feel without it, I decided to continue with my bare face. At first, I felt strange going out to do errands and even meeting clients without a drop of makeup. I wondered if they would find me less attractive. But no one seemed to notice.

I felt different. I felt naked in a sense. The flaws including the dark circles under my eyes are all out there for the world to see. But I remind myself, men have all of those things and we don’t judge them for walking around without covering up their flaws. After one week, I’m used to the face looking back at me and bonus; I’m taking better care of my skin. Instead of spending money on eye shadow and concealer I can invest in quality skin care products. Cleaning my tiny bathroom, I put all the makeup paraphernalia under the sink, out of sight. I loved the de-cluttered result. So, the consensus? Less money spent and less clutter, and a purer self-image. I still use hair products, nail polish and perfume so I wouldn’t give all my girly rituals up. The point is developing my confidence as a naked face, just me without the trappings, was a surprising experiment.

Now, looking at fashion magazines advice on makeup seems ridiculous. Who actually would wear those colors? And who wants raccoon eyes? They might look attractive on 18-year-old models but not in my world! I must confess though, I do miss my mascara and I may go back to it eventually. I would recommend this experiment for any goddess. You will likely learn something about your inner confidence by going without your usual cover up.

To find your inner sex goddess, start with a wardrobe edit, great shoes, music, hair and a little exercise. Take the no makeup challenge and find your inner beauty. Use your senses to feel more sensual and have fun!

### Have You Found Your Handyman Yet?

Warning: this post is full of double meanings and suggestive scenes. Ladies, have you found your HANDYMAN yet? Every ‘single’ woman needs a Handyman on her speed dial. Preferably, he’ll know how to use a variety of tools to fix your broken toilet OR your broken heart “hey Baby, I’m your handy man...” As James Taylor crooned back in the day.

Yes, handy man is a euphemism for transitional or what I like to call, a re-sexing partner after divorce. If he actually wears a tool belt that’s a bonus.

The first few months of my separation I was a sole homeowner and a little overwhelmed with the things that needed fixing. I found a handy man ad in the newspaper. It was 2005, back when we would actually read a newspaper. It was also a hot, lonely summer and I needed some jobs done. I needed a fence put up to 'pen in' my crazy dog. She was the type that liked to pull Houdini at the most inconvenient times.

So my Handy man showed up on my doorstep one hot, July afternoon. The job would involve cement mixing, chain link fence erecting, popsicles and eventually a little romance. Don't judge me. He was thirty-something and worked without a shirt and wearing nothing but faded Levi's (what is it about faded Levi's?) and work boots. Well, one job led to another.

You could say he broke me in. Me, being a woman who married young and to a man who preferred to view me as chaste and not slutty. Really every woman should be able to be slutty with their husband, do you agree?

Then, months later there was the tree pruner. He was tall, rugged, 50-odd years and strong. I watched him from the window. Fastened to the tree he climbed high carrying the chain saw. It took hours for him to complete the job. When he was done, I wrote him a check and told him how healthy the tree looked. His eyes scrunched up warmly when he smiled. He had an obvious passion for trees. I wanted to know if he had other passions he might care to indulge.

Somehow, he got talking about his kids (he was divorced too). One thing led to another. After, he didn't make empty promises but said next time he was pruning in the neighborhood he would call. He did too.

It's better than Tinder. Take a look around, what do you need help with? Call a handyman today...and see what happens tomorrow.

I didn't mention the electric and gas man who came when my fireplace wasn't working. Wouldn't you know it was December and -30 below. Silver linings. There were others too but I didn't allow all of them to be my handyman for example, the dad from school who was married. Really? Do you always s\*\*t where you eat? Oh, and the one who installed the hot tub. I asked him to try it out...

That didn't actually happen. I don't really have a hot tub. The point is, the transitional or re-sexing man is strictly a physical thing that will get you back in the groove.

"Come-a, come-a, come-a come, come. I'm your handyman, ya....ya. hey Baby I'm your handy man..."

Thank you, James, John and especially you Steven, you were my own personal handy man during that long, hot and lonely summer.

## 7 Deadly Signs He's Not the One for You

Forget the sins, let's talk about the signs. Deadly ones. Meaning if two or more of these are in your relationship then stop, drop and roll it over. In other words, **stop** any plans for marriage, **drop** any ideas about long term commitment and **roll** him gently out the door.

So, what are the 7 deadly signs? I've come up with some pretty obvious and some **not so obvious** signs that the man you're with may not be meant for you. If you're divorced and hoping for a second, long term relationship then you'll want to read on...

OR, if you're recently engaged but feeling unsure or cold feet, then this is also a must read.

### 7 Deadly Signs He's Not the One For You

**1. He has a natural aversion to children** – Need I explain this? I mean if he doesn't like children what are the chances he'll want any of his own, never mind develop affection for the children you already have. Some of these types claim they would like their own but not other people's children...ummm, enough said.

**2. He suffers road rage regularly** - Any guy who is always angry 'behind the wheel' is displaying a propensity for anger elsewhere. We all suffer road rage once in a while and I'm not saying if a guy displays this at any time—that he's ready for the roll however, if it's consistent and ongoing then you should be concerned.

**3. He was raised by wolves** -He was an orphan or had a horrible upbringing. Unfortunately, these are the ones we feel bad for and have lots of sympathy but these men come with a caveat. You can't fix what's broken. Many personality disorders stem from childhood trauma, so unless he has been diligent about working on issues, these may come out in the relationship in the form of narcissistic behavior or high insecurity.

**4. He freaks out about his eggs** - You wouldn't think eggs, a most innocuous food, would make the list of 7 deadly signs but hear me out. If he has to have his eggs cooked perfectly and complains in restaurants about them...what else is he going to freak out about?

**5. His car is precious** - He complains if you shut the door 'too hard' or if your shoes are dirty when you get in. He spends inordinate amounts of time and money detailing and cleaning it. It's a car. An **object**...

**6. He refuses to talk about sex** - If he's not able to talk about it, how is it going to be part of your life now and in the future? It's always better to be with a man who is willing and enjoys talking about it and isn't self-conscious about the hot topic of sex.

**7. He doesn't laugh at your jokes** - Ever. If he doesn't get your humor then, trust me it won't be much fun going through life without a laugh. This works both ways too. If you don't get his humor but he's hot, it won't be enough. A sense of humor is the top of the list for what people look for in a mate and also what long 'marrieds' claim to be their secret.

Just to be clear, if your man has **one** of these signs, it probably isn't deadly but if you're nodding your head at almost all of them? Stop, drop and roll. While we are NOT perfect either, we should be cognizant of some deadly signs that could be portentous of a difficult or unhappy marriage.

All we really want is to find the one who is perfect for us, with all his imperfections. Are you ready to stop, drop and roll or are you on your way down the aisle?

### Dreaming of That Perfect Fit

**After divorce we feel defeated in love. We might stop believing in it altogether.** We may be spending what little energy we have left after the battle, providing and being there for our children. We've stopped believing in fairytales but the time will come eventually when we look forward to new relationship(s). Maybe we're even looking for that perfect fit we call love.

**I don't presume to advise anyone on finding love. Oh no-not me** but I am a firm believer in asking the universe for what you want. **I am a believer in dreaming up your ideal situation. If you don't know what it or he looks like, then how will you find it or know when he is standing at your doorstep?** Because he may not look exactly the way you envision. **It all starts in the power of thought.**

I should clarify that when I say 'perfect', I don't mean a perfect man but someone who is perfect for you. There is a difference but we don't need to go there. Do we?

**Did you ever buy a dress because you could picture yourself wearing it at some unknown future event? Besides, it was a perfect fit? And it waited in your closet until just the right moment.**

Well, **with certain qualities that would make him *your* perfect fit is an exercise in asking the universe for what you want.**

**He may not be here yet but let that special dress in your closet be a reminder that good things come when we least expect it.** I always find the most suitable shoes, dresses and clothes when I don't need them. For example, there might be a great shoe sale on with the perfect size, style and color just for you. Do you need them right now? **No**, but you know they'll be worn with love because they're **that perfect**. **Now, I'm not comparing a man to a shoe sale, or a style of clothing or dress but I am comparing the *finding* of that man to the perfect shoe or dress.** When you're looking the other way, he'll see you. When he's the last thing on your mind you'll be the first thing on his.

Destiny seems to work this way I'm not sure why. **I know when I've gone looking specifically for that perfect something, I almost NEVER find it. People say that about love, 'don't look so hard and it will find you'.** Well, there are lots of theories out there about

finding the perfect man or the perfect love and I do not claim to understand them. I don't have any answers except to say don't give up hope. Don't stop believing in love.

The first step is dreaming your beau up and destiny will provide him in time...all in good time. Meanwhile, for heaven's sake (as my grandma used to say) **when you find that dress that fits you perfectly, BUY it!** Start Dreaming, Girls!

## Plenty of Fish in The Sea-Watch Out For Sharks

**I'm sharing my 10 Red flags that indicate your new man may actually be a shark.**

Divorced women become unwitting prey for sharks skimming along just below the surface. They're under the radar with their fin and teeth well hidden. They're floating in bars, restaurants, and at social media and dating sites.

There's plenty of fish in the sea but it's not always easy to spot the shark.

So, *what are the sharks looking for and why should we be concerned?*

They're looking for vulnerable women with money in their bank accounts and a strong credit rating. They're looking for women with a solid RSP or 401K. They're looking for women who are looking for love, vulnerable women who have recently lost their partner due to divorce or even death. Women who are uncomfortable with their single status and longing for a plus one become an easy target for the shark.

Sharks secretly need your financial standing. They may be looking for some contribution to their failing business. You won't know this since they keep their motives as well hidden as those teeth and sharp fins. It's not until after they have wined, dined and 69'd you that they start to show signs of financial strain. Only **after** 'blowing high dough' during the courtship do they show signs of cracking. Usually they have the ring on your finger **before** their fin breaks surface.

Hang on. What about the women who do this to men? Sure, they do and they're called 'gold diggers'. Here we're talking about men preying on vulnerability of women.

How can you avoid ending up shark prey? Be very aware and check out all the details of your new Fish before it's too late...heed these warning signs;

### **10 Red Flags Your Fish is a Shark;**

1. His romantic gestures are grand and over the top.
2. He spends exorbitantly at restaurants and bars-soon you will be doing this for *him*.
3. He has *more* than one crazy ex-wife.
4. His line of work is undefined.

5. He claims to have fallen in love with you very early in the relationship.
6. He makes statements like; “I’ve never felt this way before about anyone.”-um, right.
7. He is mysteriously absent from time to time without an explanation.
8. He wants to get engaged and pressures you for a commitment early in the relationship.
9. You haven’t met him yet but feel connected to him in an inexplicable way-NO, you are being manipulated over social media.
10. Your gut instincts are telling you something isn’t right.

I’ve seen it happen, a woman who got ‘taken’ financially or emotionally by a man who she fell hard and fast for.

One common denominator with these sharks is they’re in a hurry to secure a commitment. The reason? Once they have a ring on your finger and said the vows, they can finally let their guard down. After all, they can’t possibly maintain the perfection and gestures of romance for an extended length of time (see red flag #1). The commitment brings them that much closer to getting what they want from you, financial security. Once they have what they want...they disappear only to be replaced with a man you don’t recognize---the Shark.

Always stop and ask yourself **and** him “What’s the rush?”, “Why not take our time?” Tell him “Good things come to those who wait” and “only fools rush in”. Because think about this, the very definition of commitment indicates that you are promising something:

“Commitment-noun

: a promise to do or give something

: a promise to be loyal to someone or something

: the attitude of someone who works very hard to do or support something” Merriam-Webster dictionary

We’ve seen it on Oprah, 20/20 and Dateline. We’ve heard the stories. He disappeared after the wedding. He cleaned out the bank account after his name was put on the account. Maybe she finds out he is still married to someone else *after* her wedding! In some cases, we know the men who are doing this. They can be extremely convincing and charming. They make up all kinds of stories and excuses for these misdeeds, mostly all are lies.

What to do? Know and identify the red flags. Obviously, there could be a good reason for one red flag out of ten but if there is more than one? Run the other way. Also, remember a relationship on social media is just that, a virtual relationship in a virtual world. No need to give up on looking for love, just recognize the fish from the shark and keep the

relationship on your terms. Above all else, **listen to your instincts** because they're always right.

In the meantime, Caveat Emptor, ladies! Enjoy the Fish in the sea but **always be on the lookout for sharks!**

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## Money

### Budgeting Steps & Tips

The overwhelming issues surrounding your divorce include financial worries and a decrease in disposable income. Suddenly one, or the same income is supporting two households. Perhaps your support is inconsistent and often late.

The goal here is to get your budget closer to a 'balance'. You don't have to be a financial wizard to take control. Maybe, like I was, you were financially dependent on your spouse and have been out of the work force for several years, raising children. All of these circumstances lead to a great amount of stress during divorce. But if you get your finances under control you will have more energy left to deal with children and other requirements.

Finances are also highly tied to our emotions and self-esteem so if we have some measure of control here we feel a lot better about ourselves everywhere else. Take these simple steps to begin your financial independence and to maintain less debt and more cash.

#### Quick Budgeting Steps;

1. If you haven't already, open your own bank account and credit card. You want to establish your credit score.
2. Draft a monthly budget by listing all of your expenses and all sources of income
3. Do a quick analysis; what is the number you get when you subtract your expenses from your income? Is it in the minus? Is it in the plus?
4. If your number is below zero; start cutting back expenses immediately
5. If your number is above zero you can start a fund every month for legal expenses or emergencies
6. Where can you cut back on your expenses? How much per month can you put away into a fund for legal fees or emergencies? Getting your number above zero for the following month should be your immediate goal. Once you get your budget 'balanced'



you can relax in knowing you're not creating debt every month and you're meeting your expenses.

### **Quick Budgeting Tips to Saving;**

Cut back restaurant eating.

Buy less in bulk. We don't need boxes of Mr. Clean or Drano at the ready when one bottle will do.

Grocery shop smart. Don't go when you're hungry, use coupons, buy the specials.

CD/book /clothes swap with friends. Keep a fresh collection without spending money.

Less spa treatments. Cut back to 4x per year instead of 12x per year.

Cut back cell phone plans. How many texts are necessary? Can you save money on your phone plan?

Pay credit cards on time to avoid late fees. Late fees can cost \$80-\$100/month which is up to \$1,200/year! if you get charged late fees, call and complain they will remove them once or twice saving you \$200.

Check out online shopping and use entertainment coupons.

Keep medical insurance plans up to date to avoid high costs for health care.

Use cash only for a month of personal expenses. Put \$1,000 in an envelope and replace cash with a receipt until the cash is gone and the envelope is full of receipts. Upon review, you'll see exactly where you are spending your money.

Try to do one or two of these tips and you'll begin saving cash immediately.

If you are entitled to child/spousal support and are not receiving it speak to a lawyer immediately about arranging a legal agreement with your ex in order to get your due support. Your support will assist you in meeting expenses and consequently alleviate stress.

Remember you are in a state of transition at the initial stage of separation. You are likely trying to figure out your career options which might include upgrading. Upgrading your skills and education costs money therefore your support is key to getting back on your feet.

If you feel overwhelmed take a deep breath and take one 'bite' at a time. There is no need to rush into any financial decisions especially if your ex is able to support you until you are established. Support can be long term as well, if you were in a long-term marriage. My article "[Deadbeat 911](#)" provides valuable information for you to take action to get your child support.

Financial independence can be overwhelming at first but once you sit down and take a look at the situation, it isn't so difficult to harness spending and find a balance. But there will be unexpected expenses from time to time to throw you off. Like the time my hot water tank blew. Of course, it was the middle of winter and I hadn't been receiving any support so to pay an extra \$500 was discouraging but I had no choice. I dipped into my savings. Then there was the time the starter on my truck went...well, you get the picture. Expect the unexpected.

Be cognizant of your finances, take action and finally enjoy the results of being in financial control. Financial independence is actually a great lesson and challenge of divorce. It is an important life skill. Remember, there is no perfect formula to money management as it is an evolving, lifelong process.

I recommended the book Jean Chatzky, *Make Money Not Excuses* It's a great starter book for those of us who have not been economically independent.

### Let's Talk About the 'M' Word

So, let's talk about the 'M' word. No one wants to, right? Talking about money in any way, shape or form tends to cause anxiety in most of us. It does in me, I know that. We're worried we don't have enough, what we do have is somehow already spent and we won't have enough in the future.

Divorce certainly feeds into these fears and anxieties. It's a process of division and losses. It's a numbers game and many of us don't like working with numbers. That said, I like to think I've learned and improved some of my bad habits during and after divorce. For example, I learned that I wouldn't live in poverty after all. I learned that I could (sort of) live within a budget (something I wasn't interested in doing before) out of necessity. I learned that simple tricks can save a bundle of cash over time. I learned that I wasn't as bad with numbers as I originally thought.

Note that I've written a whole chapter on money management during divorce in the [book](#). I lay out a sample budget and ways to cut back spending and live on less. Here's the thing; it's not *all* bad. It's not a terrible sacrifice to learn to manage our money and to discuss the 'M' word. Many of us were taught that it's uncouth to discuss our personal financial issues but I beg to differ on that. Silence breeds ignorance in many topics of life but especially where our money is concerned.

So, we've got our day to day finances under control but what about our future? Typically, as a married person you plan for your financial future together but once we're separated/divorced, we're responsible for **our own** financial future. To be fair, at initial separation we're dealing with highly emotional issues and it's difficult to think about twenty years from now, let alone next week. Eventually though, we have to.

That's where I kind of dropped the ball. I had RSP's, or the equivalent of a 401K in the U.S. These didn't help me with my everyday living though, as there is a huge price to pay in taxes if touched before their time. So, there they sat in two accounts during my divorce and for many years after my divorce.

That was my mistake.

I don't want you to make the same one.

I ignored my RSP's. I thought that's what I was supposed to do. Let them sit there and earn a few pennies every year. The point was it would be there when I 'retire' so, just leave it be, right? Wrong. There is no good reason to ignore your RSP account. You should be looking at your monthly statements, not just glancing at them and filing them away like I did. Really take a good look at them and see where you could improve your account. What are you paying your adviser annually? Are they paid based on fees or on percentage of returns?

Do you have Mutual Funds? Are they earning you any returns on your account or are they simply earning your adviser returns? This can be a problem with financial advisers affiliated with your bank. That's what was happening on my account but I was ignorant to this glitch. In hindsight, I should have sought a second opinion on my statements to determine if my money could be earning improved returns. I didn't do this for a few reasons. I didn't have the confidence and I didn't make my money management a priority. I didn't know where to take my statements or who to turn to.

So, based on my mistakes here's **5 tips to better manage your financial future;**

**1. Once your divorce is settled, take your RSP account statement to two or three reputable investing companies** outside of a national bank. Make appointments. Meet the people there. I emphasize meeting them in person for the same reason you meet lawyers in person before choosing one. You have to rely on your instincts when it comes to choosing professionals and an investment adviser is no different. Once they review your statements they can ascertain if your account is earning you decent returns and if it isn't they can recommend an improved portfolio. Most investors from **reputable companies will give you a free review.**

**2. Don't stick to your investment adviser just because they've always taken care of your account.** That's the mistake I made. Were they actually looking out for my best interests? Absolutely not. I remember feeling uneasy about one of them but I ignored my instincts. I didn't know how nor take the time to make the changes that were necessary to take care of my financial future. There was comfort in the status quo, a false sense of security.

**3. In your divorce settlement, be careful of making any 'retirement savings deals' in lieu of spousal or alimony support.** If you require support to live on and bridge the financial

gap that comes with being an economically dependent spouse (the purpose of Spousal and Alimony support), RSP's aren't going to benefit you for day to day expenses. You won't be able to access the money without the tax penalty meanwhile; your ex will avoid any tax costs. How is this to your advantage? It isn't. My lawyer recommended that as an option to my ex without discussing it with me first. This was early in my divorce. I ended up getting a new lawyer because obviously, she wasn't exactly looking out for my best financial interests.

**4. It's never too late to start an RSP or 401k.** Save a little money every month until you have enough to finally deposit into RSP account. The primary purpose of the account is to waive income tax on that money at the end of the tax year. Once you have an account started, your money should 'work' for you and earn you returns. In other words, it will build and grow over time until your retirement.

**5. If you don't see any growth on your account, get that second opinion.** There is no reason your account should be stagnant. A balanced portfolio should reflect some earnings. Mine was stagnant while my adviser told me it was safe...it was really dead and I've ended up losing years of returns on that money that I could have otherwise been accruing.

**6. Consolidate RSP accounts** if you have more than one. Why have two separate accounts? It only adds to the confusion and effort you require to keep track of funds and maintain some control over your money. I had two accounts in my name during the marriage and I'm not sure why. Both were (are) spousal RSP's.

Bonus Tip: If your RSP or 401K is a Spousal account and you have been awarded it in the divorce settlement, then have the Spousal title on the account changed to a regular RSP or 401K. This will avoid any problems transferring your account if you decide to at a later date. You will need to provide 'proof' that your spouse is no longer a contributor to your account and that you are in fact, divorced and it takes a few weeks to complete.

Interestingly, I only recently learned that my ex-husband stopped making deposits into my spousal RSP's five years *before* we separated. I'm curious as to why he stopped and where did the money he would normally contribute end up going? The purpose of the spousal RSP's is to reduce income tax and prepare a couple for the future financial stability. So, why did my ex stop contributions and better question why did I not even know? Another marital mystery unsolved.

Learn from my mistakes, Escapees and take the 'M' word by the horns. Learn. Read. Pay attention. Taking action will surely allow for improved returns, and that means a more stable financial future. Don't coast or sit on RSP's that are not earning you anything. There's no need to put your faith in one adviser without second opinions nor to remain loyal to your ex's advisers after divorce. You have every right to move and change

investment agents. Also? You don't have to be 'The Wolf of Wall Street' to take some initiative and ensure your RSP account is a balanced portfolio earning you some returns without high risk.

So, talking about the 'M' word isn't so terrible. Talking about your money and future financial picture will improve your confidence and allow you to start being proactive. Talk with family and friends you respect. Ask them what their retirement planning entails. How do they manage their accounts and are they satisfied with their advisers?

This will decrease anxiety because once we begin taking care of our financial future, we know we're going to be okay. Spend a little time managing and less time worrying. You'll reap the benefits in feeling secure and looking forward to the future instead of dreading it.

Your future's so bright, ya gotta wear shades baby!

### Should You Buy or Rent During Divorce?

Should you buy or rent during divorce? Ideally, we would like to keep the matrimonial home and live there with the children. The last thing we want to do is let go of all of those memories we've made there. However, the cost of the household and your ex maintaining *his* own house is not feasible for many divorcing couples.

The reality is most couples end up selling the matrimonial home and each downsizing to accommodate a maxed-out budget. But it's not as bad as it sounds. The question being, what is best for you? Is it buying a new home or renting? Renting has a stigma attached to it that says '*a person who rents is too poor to own*' and '*you're throwing away money every month that you could be putting toward a home*'. Rarely do we hear about the upside of renting, whether it's an apartment or a house or a basement suite. Also, rarely do we hear about the hidden costs of owning a home. Let's flip that stereotype.

#### **First to decide which scenario is best for you answer these 3 questions...**

1. What is my current income? Will it decrease in the next few years, considering the financial burden of divorce?
2. Is my city's real estate market inflated? If you live in a city that is notoriously the most expensive real estate in your country, then it is likely you live in a real estate bubble

Real Estate Bubble Defined (Wikipedia)-A **real estate bubble** or **property bubble** (or **housing bubble** for residential markets) is a type of economic bubble that occurs periodically in local or global real estate markets. It can be identified through rapid increases in valuations of real property such as housing until they reach unsustainable levels and then decline.

3. What will it cost me annually to own a home? Is it equal to or more than my annual income?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, you would be wise to rent for the time being. If your income is less than it will cost you to own a home then there is no sense in buying. You will be behind the eight ball financially and there is no guarantee your property will increase in value. If you live in a city with the most expensive real estate in the country the chances of your property increasing in value in the short term is unlikely. The market may be in a peak right now and the last thing you want to do is invest in the market at its peak.

**Factor in the additional costs to own a home...It's not just the mortgage...**

1. Property taxes; these can be as much as \$200/month and can increase without warning.

2. Home Insurance; usually close to \$100/month

3. Maintenance costs; even for a home that has nothing wrong with it plan on spending \$100/month for ongoing maintenance such as yard, small repairs, major cleaning (furnace & carpets), and exterior upkeep.

4. Interest on mortgage; the % you pay to borrow the money to buy the home -over a number of years this can add up to a significant figure

5. Condo fees; These can be as much as \$300/month and you have no control in the amount

6. Unexpected costs; a new roof, replacing windows, a broken furnace all of these things can happen at any time depending on the age of the home-\$100/month for a contingency fund should help cover these costs

If your annual income is greater than the costs of the mortgage and extras, with enough left over for living expenses, then buying might be a logical option for you. If you live in a city where the buyer's market is reasonable, your home purchase may prove to be a solid investment reaping returns within five to ten years.

However, if you cannot afford to own a home you will not be doing yourself any favors by going into debt with a large mortgage with absolutely no guarantee you will be able to sell the home for more than you bought it for. You may not be able to recoup your costs and worst case scenario, you may not be able to pay off your mortgage. Weighing all of these factors will help you in your decision.

## The upside of renting...

When you rent an apartment, you know what your monthly costs are up front. There are no additional fees. You do not have the added costs of maintenance, property taxes or condo fees. You don't have the responsibility of maintenance and upkeep. If your rent is half the amount it costs you to own for example, you can save money. If you can save money every month, you may have an opportunity to buy back in to the housing market when the real estate bubble pops and home prices decrease. Also, renting offers a sense of security for a single woman. Your neighbors are close by, your apartment is secure (always rent on the third floor or higher) and you are not vulnerable to burglaries. As much as we want to provide a home for our children, remember that they're gone half the time in a co-parenting arrangement. A home that seems just right or spacious when the kids are there can seem like a monstrosity in their absence.

Letting go of our home we raised our children in can be traumatic. Looking for a new home can be discouraging. Often rentals and homes we can *now* afford are much smaller or older. Try not to let that get to you. Viewing apartments can be depressing, I'm not going to lie but there are some gems to be found if you look hard enough. A smaller space can be a blessing. It costs less to decorate and you can make it super cozy.

The question is, should you rent or buy? It is a personal decision and should be based primarily on your income and the current real estate market in your hometown. Remember, renting is not a terrible option for a temporary arrangement. It does not mean anyone is a 'loser' or 'poor'. Rather it means you are wise and make smart financial decisions that make sense not just for today but for your future. As in all big decisions, remember to listen to your instincts. The old cliché is true, no matter where it is or how big it is ---"Home is where the heart is."

## Christmas on a Budget For The Single Mom

The pressure to buy the best gifts ever and on a budget—seems impossible. Well, I have a few ideas and tips for you. The best way to give gifts and save money is to make them. You don't have to be Martha Stewart to do it either. First, I'm sharing some of my favorite recipes with you and then I will offer a few money saving tips for the season.

First, a little Christmas anecdote. I remember it was my last 'married' Christmas and I stressed about gifts. My ex-husband and I had a circle of friends that cherished the gift giving season and you could say the gift giving got a little out of hand. For several years, I had felt my gifts didn't quite measure up. The women were very particular about the gift wrapping as well. No pressure. That year, I bought my ex's best friend a red wine gadget. You put it on the top of the decanter and it filters out the tannins. It wasn't a cheap gadget by any means. I thought about buying him a decanter to go with it but I also knew he and his wife had a few of them already. Plus, that would have taken the gift up to an exorbitant price range.

When he opened the gift his wife said something like *how nice, did you get him a decanter too?* The gift wrap had barely hit the floor—kind of rude. Always show gratitude for the gift rather than look around for another one. My face turned beet red with embarrassment as I answered ‘no’.

Screw that. That’s not what Christmas is about. As a newly divorced woman or a single mom, the last thing we need to do is spend a bunch of money on gifts. So, let’s make a few things...homemade gifts are made with love...

## **Home Made Gift Ideas;**

### **Citrus Vodka**

– One of my old recipes that was always popular with a few friends. They asked for it every year. It’s so simple to make, too.

- buy or reuse a pretty bottle or a clear wine bottle
- buy a 26 oz. vodka (it doesn’t have to be expensive)
- peel of 1 lemon around the width of the lemon making long, curly peels
- peel of 1 lime ”
- peel of 1 orange ”
- Place peels in bottle, alternating lemon, orange and lime
- pour vodka into bottle
- seal with cork or twist cap and place in freezer for at least 7 days before giving away
- Best served chilled or from freezer, use in a martini or mixed with juice

### **Shortbread Cookies**

-Place in a pretty tin or bag, with ribbons and bows and you’re good to go

2 c butter (1 lb. at room temp)

1 c fruit powdered sugar

3 1/2 c flour

1/2 c rice flour



Cream butter in large bowl. Blend in sugar until smooth. Combine flours in separate bowl. Blend combined flour into butter mixture. Shape into round balls, place on ungreased cookie sheet. Press down with small fork. Sprinkle with green and red or chocolate topping. Bake at 275-degree oven for 45 minutes. Let them cool on the baking sheet for a few minutes before removing to cooling rack. Makes approximately 2 1/2 dozen cookies.

### **Homemade Bailey's**

13 oz. vodka

1 can (300 ml) eagle brand condensed milk (the magic ingredient). I swear it says that on the can. I can't make that shit up. It's magic juice.

2 tbsp. chocolate syrup (I use Nestle's Nesquik)

1 pint (16 oz.) of table cream ( I even use the 5 % light version for fewer calories)

**Put it all in a blender. BLEND. Drink.**

For gifts: Pour in glass bottles. Wrap it up. I dare you to not drink it before you give it away. Drink whatever is left in the blender. You'll be fine.

NOTE: This recipe makes enough to fill a blender. It will last as long as your cream 'best before' date shows.

### **Hot Pepper Olive Oil**

This recipe is from Emma of [A Beautiful Mess](#) Blog. It's her dad's recipe and it sounds lovely and spicy!

Author: Emma Chapman

All you need to throw one of these together is a glass bottle that can be sealed, 18-20 dry ornamental peppers, and about 1 cup of olive oil. You could easily recycle any glass bottle you have/collect. I used a reusable one I had on hand. Whatever you use, just be sure to clean it first.

Slice each pepper so that the insides and seeds are exposed. This is usually the hottest part of any pepper. I prefer to wear gloves when I work with any type of hot pepper. I just keep a small package of disposable gloves under my kitchen sink. I don't use them often, but when I do need them they come in really handy (pun!!!!)

After cutting the peppers, add them to the jar and fill with olive oil. Allow that to soak for 2-3 days before use (or before you gift the bottle to someone).

### Kim's Saltine Cracker Toffee

Oh, yummy. Thanks to Kim of [My Inner Chick](#) this recipe is easy and a guaranteed hit. Makes a great gift in those cute Christmas tins.

-in Kim's words;

Ingredients:

- 2 Sticks of butter
- 2 cups of Brown Sugar
- 1 ½ sleeves of Saltine Crackers
- Milk chocolate chips or Large chocolate bar.

Method:

1. Line long cookie sheet with tin foil and lightly spray
2. Cover entire pan with saltine cracker (usually a little over one sleeve)
3. Boil butter and brown sugar in pan (Watch & Stir constantly)
4. When the mixture bubbles, pour immediately over crackers. Spread.
5. Let sit for a minute, then pour chocolate chips or cut up candy bar. It will melt like silk!
6. Spread over mixture. I crush up a few crackers for the top, as well.
7. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours.
8. Some people break up the toffee, but I cut into squares like bars.

### Peppermint Chocolate Bark

This is so easy to make and so tasty. Just throw it in a festive clear bag with some ribbon and your friends will love you. I double this recipe if I'm making for gifts.

8 squares white chocolate (8 oz.) OR 16 oz.

1/2 c crushed candy canes OR 1 cup

1. In top of double boiler over hot, not boiling, water melt chocolate, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat; cool to room temperature.
2. Stir in crushed candy canes
3. Spread in thin layer on waxed paper. Cool completely in refrigerator
4. Break into chunks to serve. Store and/or gift in airtight container.

Makes 8 oz. OR 16 oz

Tip: -chocolate must be cooled before adding candy cane or it will not become firm.

-also, don't let the chocolate boil as it will change the consistency

### **Quick Christmas Budgeting Tips**

-get your stocking stuffers now—big stores have sales early in the season

-if you're having guests for Turkey dinner stock up on your dry/canned goods ahead of time so your dinner shopping won't be so overwhelming

-stock up on paper towels, and food wraps, dishwasher soap as it's inconvenient to run out of these necessities over the holidays

-check out your local thrift store as they dedicate the whole store to Christmas and you can find lights and décor (all the money goes to a local charity)

-if crafting or photography is more your 'thing' you must visit [A Beautiful Mess](#), it's a goldmine of ideas

Ho, ho, ho. Happy Holidays and Happy preparations.

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## **Narcissism**

### **Narcissist or A\*\*hole? Know the Difference**

There seems to be an EX Narcissist epidemic. The most common statements I hear over social media and blogging are "My Ex is a Narcissist." OR "I was married to a Narcissist." Funny, you just don't hear I was married to a complete A\*\*hole anymore. Why? Because the A\*\*hole has been replaced by the Narcissist it seems.

Narcissism is a personality disorder (NPD) which technically, can only be diagnosed by a psychiatrist. But with the power of the internet we can all identify signs and symptoms of Narcissism at our fingertips. We already know what an a\*\*hole is, right? So, let's find out what a Narc (short for Narcissist) is. We're curious so we begin reading and watching YouTube videos. Voila, we're convinced our Ex really is a Narcissist and maybe he IS.

In fact, your ex may very well be a Narc but be careful in self-diagnosing and labeling your ex, especially on social media and if you're a blogger. I'm not saying this to minimize

your experience with your ex in any way. Rather, I write this in hopes to better understand the differences and the similarities between Narcs and a\*\*holes or even alcoholics and abusers.

## **The Narcissist**

“Narcissism, in lay terms, basically means that a person is totally absorbed in self. The extreme narcissist is the center of his own universe. To an extreme narcissist, people are things to be used. It usually starts with a significant emotional wound or a series of them culminating in a major trauma of separation/attachment.

“No matter how socially skilled an extreme narcissist is, he/she has a major attachment dysfunction. The extreme narcissist is frozen in childhood. He/she became emotionally stuck at the time of his/her major trauma of separation/attachment.”- How to Spot a Narcissist by Samuel Lopez de Victoria, Ph.D.

The Narcissist is incapable of intimacy, remorse or deep feeling. Loving a Narcissist is like pouring all of your affection into a funnel and watching it fall out the bottom.

No matter how much you do for them, they will not appreciate or notice. They only notice when you stop ‘doing’ for them. The people closest to the Narcissist are simply a reflection of himself. His image is EVERYTHING.

### **Personality Traits of the Narcissist:**

Turns every conversation to him or herself

Expects you to meet his or her emotional needs

Ignores the impact of his negative comments on you.

Constantly criticizes or berates you and knows what is best for you.

Focuses on blaming rather than taking responsibility for his own behavior.

Expects you to jump at his every need.

Is overly involved with his own hobbies, interests or addictions and ignores your needs.

Has a high need for attention.

Braggs, sulks, complains, inappropriately teases and is flamboyant, loud and boisterous.

Is closed minded about own mistakes. Can't handle criticism and gets angry to shut it off

Becomes angry when his needs are not met and throws tantrums or intimidates.

Has an attitude of “anything you can do, I can do better.”

Engages in one-upmanship to seem important.

Acts in a seductive manner or is overly charming. - taken from Samuel Lopez Victoria PhD.

## **A\*\*hole**

A selfish individual who often puts their own needs above everyone else, and is not afraid to offend people

Usually described as rough on the outside but mushy or soft inside

The a\*\*hole has the capability to care and show his feelings on occasion

The a\*\*hole is capable of true intimacy once they let their guard down.

Something to consider here is we are all capable and probably have been an a\*\*hole at one time or another. The time you finally spoke your mind and told your best friend what you really thought OR the time you made a joke that was just a little too cutting...yes, these are a\*\*holey things to do and often we regret them almost immediately. However, it is unlikely that we all have been narcissists at one time or another. Narcissism is a disorder and condition that cannot be overcome easily.

The similarities and differences between your run of the mill A\*\*hole and your nightmare Narcissist (Narcs):

### **1. Narcs love to Gaslight. A\*\*holes light their own fires...**

Gaslighting is when the Narc falsely convinces the victim that they are defective. For example, the Narc might say "It's too bad you don't get along well with people because if you did we would have more friends." This is a mental type of abuse that if continued over a long period of time takes away the victim's self-confidence and sense of reality.

### **2. Narcs never apologize. A\*\*holes love to Apologize...**

Apologies come fast and furious with a\*\*holes. They usually have the common sense to know when they have made mistakes or hurt someone and they will follow up with an apology. The problem? They usually repeat the mistakes and continue in their a\*\*hole ways. There's a saying *if you're in a room with more than ten people and there isn't an a\*\*hole in sight? You're the a\*\*hole.* Well, I don't necessarily believe that but it is a funny statement on the fact that there is usually one a\*\*hole in a crowd.

Narcissists on the other hand, never admit wrong doing. It is absolutely beyond their comprehension that they may have hurt someone or done wrong. They blame the victim every time. They make an excuse every time.

### **3. Narcs know what they want and how to get it. Rules don't apply to Narcs. A\*\*holes understand the difference between right and wrong.**

**4. Narcs never go too far to get what they want. A\*\*holes know when to quit.** They are capable of knowing when they've gone too far.

**5. Narcs are among the most charming people you will ever meet. A\*\*holes are not charming.**

**6. Narcs are superficial. A\*\*holes have deep thoughts and analytic capability.**

**7. Narcs play the role of 'victim'. A\*\*holes rarely act like victims.**

**8. Narcs are habitual liars, twisting facts to suit their reputation. A\*\*holes don't habitually lie to get their way.**

**9. Narcs are socially insatiable. They can never get enough attention. A\*\*holes often enjoy time alone and don't feel insecure about their solitude.**

Gee, the A\*\*hole is beginning to sound like Prince Charming but I'm not suggesting that A\*\*holes NEVER lie, act like a victim or USE people only that if and when they do it's with a conscience and with some remorse.

### **Alcoholics vs. Narcissism**

I think it's easy to confuse an alcoholic or a physical abuser as a Narcissist. Yet those problems do not automatically define the person as a Narcissist. Alcoholics have some similar characteristics and personality traits. They put their drug of choice before everyone and everything. It is the ultimate in selfishness. They can lie and charm to get their drug or next drink. A physical abuser is often a victim of physical abuse himself and is using his learned technique to take control of a situation or person. That does not make him a true Narcissist. Physical abusers typically show and experience remorse. Narcissists are NOT able to feel remorse.

If you were married to a Narcissist who physically abused you, and was an alcoholic? You suffered the ultimate terror. It couldn't possibly get any worse short of losing your life to that person—you could write a book, no doubt.

**In Case You're Still Not Sure, More Traits of The Narcissist-** Signs taken from Nina Brown's Children of the Self Absorbed: A grownup's Guide to Getting over Narcissistic Parents.

"Neglects the family to impress others.

Does it all

Is a super person to gain admiration.

Threatens to abandon you if you don't go along with what he wants.

Does not obey the law—sees himself above the law.

Does not expect to be penalized for failure to follow directions or conform to guidelines.

Ignores your feelings and calls you overly sensitive or touchy if you express feelings.

Tells you how you should feel or not feel.

Cannot listen to you and cannot allow your opinions.

Is more interested in his own concerns and interests than yours.

Is unable to see things from any point of view other than his own.

Wants to control what you do and say—tries to micromanage you.

Attempts to make you feel stupid, helpless and inept when you do things on your own.

Has poor insight and cannot see the impact his selfish behavior has on you.

Has shallow emotions and interests.

Exploits others with lies and manipulations.

Uses emotional blackmail to get what he wants.

May engage in physical or sexual abuse of children.”-Nina Brown

When you read the personality traits of a narcissist you realize what a serious disorder this truly is. That is why it's important not to mislabel, or self-diagnose. Remember there are varying degrees of Narcissism. Some are more extreme and dangerous. Any form of narcissistic abuse is very damaging.

If you were married to a Narcissist or have a relationship with a Narc in any capacity, you are a victim. It is important to understand the best methods to protect yourself. Some people have ongoing relationships with Narcs while many discontinue *any* connection with them. Finding what works best for you and your situation is key as well as educating yourself on the disorder.

Before we announce to the world “I was married to a Narcissist.” Make sure you know the difference between a full-fledged Narcissist and a run of the mill A\*\*hole. Also? Be careful not to confuse alcoholism or an abuser with a Narcissist. I hope this helps you decipher and give some more thought to who your ex *really* is and what makes him so *freakin'* hard to deal with! By the way, yes women can be Narcissist as well, obviously.

### Narcissists in Relationships-5 Scary Facts

Let's remind ourselves why we are indeed foolish to continue relationships with Narcs and why sometimes even setting boundaries isn't enough.

More specifically what are the **5 scary facts of being in a relationship with a Narcissist?**

**1. You're always wrong.**

Never mind the facts. The facts are always negotiable with a Narc. They will exaggerate, change and retell the facts to suit them. They will lie. The facts don't matter because you're wrong, regardless. Even if you're in a court room the truth can be misrepresented in front of a supremely intelligent judge. In other words, lies can be substituted for truth and fact presented as fiction because there will always be blurred lines with a Narcissist. The Narc will lie to cover up your truth.

**2. The Narcissist does not care for or love you.**

They may proclaim their love. They may scream and shout about how much they care about you (usually in a patronizing way). You can rest assured the only time you'll hear that kind of proclamation is when you have done something they don't approve of. They will tell you how 'concerned' they are about you because you've 'changed'. Why? You no longer do as they ask or tell you to. You're no longer fulfilling their wishes.

They falsely 'love' you when you are supplying them with their ego's needs. This probably sounds familiar whether your ex is a Narc or you're a child, an employee, a sibling or a friend of a Narc. It doesn't matter; you are a supply, a pawn. The minute you stop being a source of supply that's the minute the Narc stops 'loving' you.

It goes like this; 'Love' turns to 'concern' which quickly turns to anger and resentment. "How dare she treat me that way?", "How dare she give me the silent treatment, after all I've done for her." These are common complaints of a narcissist.

**3. The Narcissist does not see you as an individual.**

You are simply a part of their world, their agenda and are exploited as such. Your tastes, interests, opinion are not of interest to the Narc (unless they corroborate his). Instead, you are a reflection of them. You are part of their plan and must fulfill their needs. That means that if you are *different* than they are and represent something they can't understand, they will not tolerate it.

**4. You will be charmed by the Narcissist.**

Yes, that's right. Even though they don't care about you, they don't see you as an individual and you're mostly always wrong; you will be charmed by their humor, generosity and artificial warmth. They're gregarious, nice people when they want to be. How do you think they maintain their supply? By being friendly and warm until you challenge or question them.

**5. You will eventually have to set severe limits or end the relationship altogether.** After all, four of the above scary facts are recognized and obviously taking a big chunk out of your everyday happiness, you will want to do something about it. It is impossible as a normal, functional, beautiful human being to continue a relationship with



a Narc. The time will come when you have to set boundaries, or completely disconnect, depending on the circumstances.

*What about the asshole you might be wondering. What's the difference and can I have a relationship with one?* The answer is yes, you can. In fact, assholes are much easier to deal with. They usually show remorse when they are caught out on their bad habits. They have the ability to apologize and try to change.

Of course, ultimately, we want to have relationships with people who are respectful, considerate, polite, pleasant and generous. We want to be around people who see us as individuals and care for us in spite of our differences in opinion.

You can tell the difference because A\*\*holes are capable of empathy while Narcs are not. A\*\*holes although argumentative will appreciate and encourage different opinions while Narcs will not. So, not that I would condone having an a\*\*hole for a boyfriend, lover or friend, there is hope far beyond a Narc.

Narcissist will tell you you're wrong no matter what the facts, evidence or event in question

Narcissists do not care for or love you

Narcissists do not see you as an individual

Narcissists can take you in with their charm

A relationship with a Narcissist ultimately comes to an end or is moderated with strong boundaries to maintain your sanity.

The point of listing these 5 scary facts about Narcissists, is to remind you that **no matter what you do for them, they will turn against you the moment you stop**. Recognizing that the relationship is not reciprocal and that **you** are not crazy or wrong are important facts to keep you on track with your own life goals.

Narcissists take and take. They hurt and wound. They rarely are capable of change, so don't set yourself up for disappointment in thinking there is something beyond the cold stare you get when you speak your mind.

### Managing the Narcissist

As promised, this is Part 2 of the Narcissist subject. We discussed the difference between a run of the mill A\*\*hole and a Narcissist in Part 1. Understanding the differences and similarities can help us put the personality disorder into perspective and reduce our inclination to label people including our exes. Before embarking on this post, we need to understand that we all have some narcissistic qualities but it is the extreme Narcissistic personality that we discuss here.

If you are living with, dealing with or related to a Narcissist or a personality that has high narcissistic qualities this is the post for you. There are ways to handle the narcissist if you

must have them in your life. Handling the Narc will save you from the emotional stress involved and long term damage that the Narc often causes.

The first thing that needs evaluation is whether or not you *have* to deal with this person. If you can safely remove yourself from the person, that is always the healthiest route to take. If you don't 'need' or require this person in your life, then why deal with them at all. Cut your losses and disconnect from them immediately.

If you are related to the Narc, married or co-parenting with them, it is unlikely you can simply withdraw from the relationship. On the other hand, you're tired. You're exhausted. You need to put an end to catering to the Narc. You're not a Holiday Inn nor a Wendy's drive thru, existing to accommodate and feed the Narcissist.

So, take a deep breath.

You're going to have to push yourself out of your comfort zone to manage a Narc.

Why? By nature, you're giving, caring and have a huge heart. A Narc eats those things for lunch then belches so loud everyone can hear (a female Narc will nibble ever so daintily). You're going to have to get tough. You're going to have to be sane. They will tell you you're insane, but you're the sanest person in the world and you have to stay that way for you and for your children. Here are 5 things you can do now to alleviate the pain, avoid being victimized and stay sane;

## **5 TIPS to manage the Narcissist**

**1. Understand that you can't reason with a Narcissist** - Don't waste your breath. Using logic is like shooting blanks at a perpetrator. They don't absorb facts or truths. They only have their own interpretation of the facts that are twisted to reflect well on them. Stop talking and start doing. Don't bother explaining. Take action where necessary to accomplish what you need to.

Example a) As a co-parent- Give the Narc a calendar of the parenting schedule instead of explaining the schedule

Example b) As a child of a Narc-Never explain or defend yourself. Instead, stick to facts while in any discussion

**2. Tell the Narcissist how things will benefit them** - if you need to negotiate with a Narc always approach your request with the POV of how it will help them, make them look good or benefit them in some way. The Narc will cooperate if they see that they will be getting something positive from you or your request.

Example a) As a co-parent-show them with the parenting calendar that they will have the children on their birthday, on Christmas Day or for a special event they have coming up. Use a highlighter to bring home the point that he/she will get the kids on specific days

and occasions then they will be less likely to complain about when you're getting them. Remember, a Narc is like a child mentally, and will disagree and bring up petty differences like a three-year-old having a tantrum, even after you've done something for them.

Example b) As a child of a Narc-you need them to sign a permission form for a school trip, or sign off on a sport registration? Tell them who else is attending the event, sport, or team. If there are people he knows involved, he won't want to look like he doesn't agree with your participation. To avoid looking like a jerk to the other people, he will sign the forms.

**3. Set and maintain boundaries** - this may include zero tolerance for verbal abuse or it may be that you can't meet alone with that person but require a third party to keep the contact from deteriorating. For more tips on setting boundaries check "[Stop Being Too Nice](#)"

Example a) As a co-parent; have exchange of the children in a neutral, public place to avoid unnecessary confrontations

Example b) As a child of the Narc-only seeing the narc father or mother with a sibling present, or at a neutral location

**4. Minimize contact** - the less contact means less stress for you

Example a) As a co-parent; avoid attending events or school teacher interviews with your ex. Instead arrange to attend when he isn't there or make a specific appointment

Example b) As a child of the Narc-Avoid trigger locations or times of day with the parent. Stay away from home during hours that the parent might be drinking for example

**5. Document Behaviors or verbal abuse** - keeping a record of statements made, where, when can lend credence to your position. You need not 'explain' anything to the Narc (see #1) but recite the statements if need be. When they have said abusive things, or misrepresented the truth, you have documentation to back you up. You can also document when you have done favors for the Narc to counter their argument that you 'do nothing for them'.

Example a) As a co-parent-you can show the Narc his behavior and state that is why you have little contact with him or the next time he accuses you of keeping the children from him; you can show him exactly how many times you have allowed him access on your scheduled time (including dates, events) because you will be keeping a record.

Example b) As a child of a Narc-When the narc parent is sad and playing on your sympathies (being the victim) you can recite back to them their verbal abuse with exact statements including time, date and location. Reminding them of their abusive behavior will counter their claims that 'you' (as the child) are cold hearted or don't care about them.

Figuring out what makes a Narc tick is essential. If you've done any research or read Part 1, then you know that their number one concern at all times, is how they appear to other people like their friends, colleagues or family members. Anything that may cause a lapse in their perfect image will cause insecurity and a possible lashing out. If you have questioned or challenged them, then you are the source of their perceived demise.

What are the triggers that cause arguments, abuse in your relationship with the Narc?

### 3 Triggers

- 1. They are among their supply** - often in their 'group' they find security in dishing out nasty verbal remarks and will target you if they think they can get away with it
- 2. You're on their turf.** In their house, office or their favorite restaurant they will take on a sense of territorial power
- 3. You're alone with them** - you become vulnerable because they feel they can say anything to you and no one would believe you anyway if you were to report their conduct

Think about your personal situation and try to identify triggers in your relations with the narcissistic personality.

Often just being yourself, thinking for yourself and making decisions without consulting them can cause anger in the Narc. When the Narc is angry with you, they want to stop you in order to take back control. They want to show the world that 'they make the decisions' and they will not be 'disobeyed'. Your independence will threaten them. What does this mean if you're a co-parent with a Narc ex? It means that you have to really work on #2 to ensure you can have access to your children and keep the parenting schedule somewhat intact. Make them think your ideas are actually theirs. This is where you'll be out of your comfort zone but in order to manage a Narc we have to try to think like them (to a point). If we can see things the way they do, then we can anticipate the problems before they happen.

In spite of this effort, know that in dealing with a Narc, you can be as sweet and cooperative as Apple Pie At a mode, this will not guarantee reciprocal cooperation from your ex. The Narc will always take issue with any suggestion on your part, no matter how gentle, that things could be done differently or better.

The other serious problem in dealings with a Narc is they are almost always sure to misrepresent the truth. They will fabricate and make up stories about you. They undermine you, no matter how hard you try to accommodate their needs. Why? Because they simply fear that your very presence will expose their perfect image they have built up for so long.

Narcissists are among the most insecure people on the planet.

They may hold powerful positions in some cases, but they are still insecure children underneath it all. Think Hitler.

The thing is, Narcs can be highly charming and gregarious. Like anyone, they have some good qualities. The problem is when you cease to feed that constant need in them, that's when things get ugly. In the end, we have to let go of the idea that this person loves us or that they can change.

Finally, remember, you're *not* a Wendy's Drive Thru. You're *not* a Holiday Inn, and you're *not* Apple Pie A la Mode. You no longer exist to feed or accommodate his/her supply. You will never please a Narcissist. You stopped that when you left. So, try incorporating some or all of the 5 tips, and identify your Narc's triggers and you'll reduce your personal emotional costs in your relationship.

### Scapegoating in Families

Have you heard of this syndrome? I hadn't heard of it until I randomly came across this post in my Facebook feed;

***Scapegoating: When You Get Stuck Trying to Outrun Someone Else's Shadow*** by Glynis Sherwood. This article answered many questions for me. It solved a mystery that I just couldn't figure out.

You know when you feel as though you're banging your head against the wall? You're playing by the rules. They tell you what you need to change, what you need to do. 'If you do *this*, you can have *that*'. You're trying your best but your best isn't good enough. Woops, you'll have to try again. Try again. And Again...

Well, doing the same thing over and over while expecting a different result is insanity. I guess I'm a little insane.

We've all heard of the black sheep of the family. Scapegoating is the black sheep, intensified 100X. The scapegoat in a family is often the sensitive, independent or the outspoken one. Either way they are the one family member that won't accept the superficial front covering the dysfunction. They're the one who asks questions. They're the one who tells the truth. They're the one who doesn't play the game according to the dysfunctional rules and even when they do, they still get blamed for things that go wrong. This syndrome can start in childhood and continue into adulthood. It is a form of bullying within a family.

*"The family scapegoat is the fall guy for other people's troubles. If you are the family scapegoat, then the shadow you are trying to run from is not yours, but your family's. Specifically, the shadow of your family's criticism – which you may have come to believe; your family's rejection – that makes you question your lovability; and your family's shame – which can severely undermine your self-worth".* – Glynis Sherwood  
See more at [Glynissherwood.com](http://Glynissherwood.com)

Interestingly, these families can be lots of fun, gregarious and generous with outsiders. You may not guess that a family uses these debilitating ways to deal with their problems by looking from the outside in. They are not inherently bad people. They're simply stuck in a destructive, hurtful pattern of coping. They have lost sight of the fact that what they do is abusive. They are simply trying to survive and justify their own issues and problems. However, this doesn't excuse the scapegoating behavior and doesn't mean that the family scapegoat should let this continue. Everyone deserves love and if that means you must break away from this pattern by creating change then start today. No one can make you happy or love you as much as yourself. As a scapegoated family member, it is up to you to change the pattern and recognize that if it isn't possible, to move on toward healthy relationships.

### **Top 5 signs you're a target for Scapegoaters;**

You're told often what YOU need to change

You're excluded or overlooked for family events, functions or activities

You're the butt of sarcasm and negative remarks

You're iced out by certain family members (it's like you don't exist or have been forgotten)

Often you hear statements that begin with "If you \_\_\_\_\_" "presenting something you should do to get the acceptance and love you're looking for. i.e. if you do this then you can have that.

What I think is interesting and valuable for all of us to understand is that the victim of scapegoating in a family has lingering issues. Until they understand that they have been victimized, it can affect many facets of their lives. Choosing partners, choosing friends and even careers often continue the pattern of verbal abuse. Why? The scapegoated family member has low self-esteem. They have been told not just in words but in actions that they are not worthy of the family love or acceptance. Over time and without an understanding of what Scapegoating is, the victim accepts their position in the family, one of a punching bag. So, it makes sense that they would go on to choose a life partner who would do the same.

According to Glynis Sherwood, Scapegoating happens in families that are headed by alcoholics, abusers or narcissists and that's where the dysfunction begins.

*" Scapegoating enables the family members who point the finger to operate under the illusion that all is well with them, and that any family problems originate with the person targeted for scapegoating. This is a primitive, and sometimes unconscious, psychological defense known as "projection". "* – Glynis Sherwood, M.Ed.

### **Top 5 Strategies to change or cope;**

1. Challenge the myth that you're not worthy i.e. act like you're good enough
2. Begin pleasing yourself above trying to please everyone else
3. Learn to say 'no'
4. Make yourself unavailable for parent/sibling scapegoating i.e. set boundaries
5. Begin nurturing healthy/non-abusive relationships i.e. accepting you're worthy of love

**What can we learn from this syndrome?** We can take a look at our own family experience AND we can take a look at the family that we've created in our marriage. I have seen it happening in my own family while intact and after separation. As parents, it's important to understand this syndrome and ensure that our own children are not being targeted this way. The stigma can last a lifetime. We want our children to be healthy and feel loved above all else in this world.

The good news is we can overcome this syndrome by standing up to false behaviors, negative beliefs and by choosing supportive relationships. Once we begin to make these healthy choices we begin to heal and we are less likely to tolerate bullying or any form of abuse. If we love and accept ourselves, we won't allow people in our lives that are not able to do the same.

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## **Divorce Recovery & Healing**

### **Letting Go-3 Tips**

**Letting go is a big 'divorce phrase'** that gets thrown around by friends, family, lawyers, mediators and random folks. Everyone talks about it like it's putting your shoes on to go out. It should just happen naturally, as if it's a part of our routine. But it is so far from routine. It is so far from second nature, it's often the last step in a long and arduous divorce process.

It happens at different times for each individual. No one can tell you when it's time to let go and that's why I'm not going to do that either. But I will give you **3 tips to help you** along the way. Because it is a journey not a destination and I've been there myself.

### **Letting Go-3 Tips;**

1. **Less REGRET** – You are not defined by your divorce nor the mistakes you've made in that divorce
2. **More AWARENESS** – You are more than your divorce so give yourself credit for how far you've come, who you are now and who you intend to become

**3. More ACCEPTANCE** – accepting new experiences and new people into your life will allow you to move forward.

When you think about it, isn't letting go a lifelong lesson? Isn't it something we start to learn as a child when we're told we can't take our blankie or our teddy bear to playschool? We are learning to let go of things and people throughout our lives. **With LESS REGRETS** bring **AWARENESS** of who you are besides a divorced person, and **ACCEPTANCE** for new experiences and people. One day at a time.

I also like what Country musician, Carrie Underwood says about letting go:

"I guess it's going to have to hurt, I guess I'm going to have to cry, and let go of some things I've loved to get to the other side. I guess it's going to break me down, Like fallin' when you try to fly, Sad but sometimes moving on with the rest of your life starts with goodbye"- Carrie Underwood

### Music Therapy

I saw on Pinterest recently this tag line; "**The problem with real life is there is no soundtrack playing in the background.**" I couldn't agree more. With the emotions during a divorce; sadness, loneliness, anger, happiness, confusion, and everything in between, what better way to deal with it then some music therapy?

There are so many ways to deal with these emotions however what is often overlooked is the power of music during these turbulent times. Get the stereo out. Remember that thing that has giant speakers and an amplifier attached? Get your old CD's out or records if you can go back that far. Be your own DJ for the night. This will go well with a glass of wine.

Turntables are rising in popularity again. My daughter's latest hobby is collecting vinyl. They don't call them records anymore. Many bands are releasing their latest albums in vinyl as well as the CD version. I was surprised to know this too.

Okay so, you've got your glass of wine and you've got a mess of 'albums' in whatever format at your feet. Pick an old favorite. Turn up the volume, sing along. Before you know it you'll be dancing. I bet you forgot about some of your old favorites.

There's something inherently rewarding about putting your music on rather than mouse clicking on your i-tunes, am I right? Here are some song recommendations to match your emotion. Yes, there are lots of emotions during divorce so let's set them to music! Our soundtrack starts here...

### **Our Emotional Divorce Playlist:**

#### **Anger**



*Hit Me With Your Best Shot*, Pat Benatar -I know this one has been overplayed but remember how powerful petite Pat was in the video and how original the idea of an angry woman on revenge was at the time?

*Rolling in the Deep*, Adele -How could I leave this one out?

*Not Ready to Make Nice*, The Dixie Chicks- one of my favorites

*Get out of This House*, Shawn Colvin

*Fun House*, Pink

*So What*, Pink

*Since You've Been Gone*, Kelly Clarkson

*Ramble On*, Led Zeppelin

*You Give Love a Bad Name*, Bon Jovi

*I Will Survive*, Gloria Gayner

### **Sadness**

*Crying*, Roy Orbison

*Hallelujah*, Jeff Buckley (classic Leonard Cohen)

*Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me*, Elton John

*Taxi*, Harry Chapin

*Everybody Hurts*, REM

*The Winner Takes It All*, Abba

*Why?* Annie Lennox

*Time*, Chantal Kraviazuk

*Like Knives*, City and Colour

*Just Somebody That I Used To Know*, Gotye

### **Loneliness**

*All by Myself*, Eric Carmen, classic self-pity (think Bridget Jones)

*Circle of Friends*, Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians

*Tonight I Want to Cry*, Keith Urban

*Shilo*, Neil Diamond

*Eleanor Rigby*, The Beatles

*Cruel Summer*, The Bangles

*Such a Lonely One*, Prairie Oyster

### **Happiness**

*I'm Free*, The Who

*I Can See Clearly Now*, Johnny Nash

*Daydream Believer*, the Monkees

*Up On The Roof*, The Drifters

*It's My Life*, Gwen Stefani

*Holiday*, Madonna

*Girl, Put Your Records On*, Corrine Bailey Rae

*I'm Walking on Sunshine*, Katrina and the Waves

*Ants Marching*, Dave Matthews Band

*Bird On A Wire*, Jennifer Warrens (lyrics Leonard Cohen)

*Brand New Day*, Sting

For music inspiration follow my 'music love' board [here](#)

Do songs bring back vivid memories, feelings of times and places?

I learned the power of music recently.

At my yoga class the instructor played a mix of pop songs which was unusual because in yoga we typically listen to spiritual, instrumental music without lyrics. Unfortunately, the pop songs were all from around 2005-06, exactly the time of my divorce. It's one thing to talk about it here, but to be called out by my memories so cruelly, in the middle of yoga? James Blunt moaning "Goodbye My Lover...." One of the most crushing break up songs of all time. "Please, I beg of you...!" I almost screamed out in the class. Then this one from 2005... Breathe (2 am) by Anna Nalick;

“2 am she calls me because I’m still awake  
Can you help me unravel my latest mistake?  
I don’t love him, winter just wasn’t my season.  
...We can’t jump the track,  
We’re like cars on the cable  
And life’s like an hourglass glued to the table....  
No one can find the rewind button, Girl  
So, just cradle your  
Head in your hands  
And breathe, just breathe...”

Indeed!

How could I beg the yoga instructor to ‘pick another year’ without embarrassing myself?

Ah, the power of music.

Do you find solace in music? Is it therapeutic...does it speak to you, tell your story. I believe music is comfort, relaxation, stress relief, letting go and finding our pain. So, go ahead and make your own divorce play list. Turn it up. Cry, laugh, dance, get lost in thought. Enjoy the therapeutic benefits of music!

### Anger Management

Did you remember to take your happy pill today? Last week? Last month? It’s hard to feel happy in the middle of an emotionally and financially taxing divorce.

Forgiveness, love, joy and fun are often substituted with grudge, hate, worry and anger. So how do we deal with these negative emotions? Since we can’t simply take a happy pill and get over it, we have to look to other methods to adapt. How about embracing it? Owning it?

Get mad. Deal, then heal. No happy pills required. Besides, I don’t know about you, but I could have used some happy pills *while I was married*.

The problem is, as women especially, we’ve been raised to be ‘nice’. We are taught that anger is ugly and unbecoming on us. Anger belongs to the male gender. Be a nice girl and do what you’re told. Even in this modern age, we have recently been raised to abide by this nearly silent rule. We must break that starting now.

Tell people you're angry and why. I remember being out for lunch with my mother and sisters and one of them said "Oh. You're mad." As if they were surprised. I replied, "Yes, I am. I'm angry and I have every right to be." I know it sounds obnoxious to tell people you're angry and I don't mean you should go around telling strangers and whoever will listen. That would guarantee you to lose friends.

On the other hand, don't hold it in all the time because harbored anger will cause physical illness. Colds, flu, aches, stroke, heart attack in extreme cases, are all caused by stress. Stress increases with unaddressed anger. *That* is something to think about next time you pretend nothing is bothering you.

### **You might be wondering, *what do I do with all this anger?***

#### **5 Ways to Release Anger;**

**1) WRITE**– tell it like it is in a letter or journal. Let it rip. No one is going to ever read it but caveat, keep it well hidden. I made the mistake of leaving mine in an obvious place and a 'friend' not only read it but corrected my grammar and that's how I knew she was in my personal business. That's a subject for another blog though.

**2) BOX** – hang a punching bag in your home, don some gloves and go at it when the mood strikes. It's exhausting, which is the point.

**3) SMASH STUFF** – yup. Raw eggs, dishes, that statue you never liked, that gift you never really liked.

**4) ADOPT A THEME SONG** – as mentioned previously in Music Therapy, songs; *Part of Me* by Katy Perry, *I'm still a Rock Star*, by Pink, *Hit Me With Your Best Shot* by Pat Benatar, *It's My Life* by Gwen Stefani, *Under Pressure* by Queen.

**5) EXERCISE** – any kind is great to let out anger. Running, hiking, spin class or try something new mock rock climbing, kayaking. Learning something new will give you the challenge and the ego boost when you succeed.

Give these a try and see what a difference it will make on your health and your outlook. You won't need that happy pill. Let the anger out in a healthy and acceptable way when you need to. Timing is everything, so try not to let it stew. Happy anger to you! P.S. Let's make sure we teach our daughters it's okay to be angry. It's a normal, human emotion.

### **Can We Go Home Again?**

On Facebook, the other day, a divorced father and friend of mine (from one of the first divorce support groups I belonged to) posted an interesting set of photos. The status update read "*went to see the old house today with the kids. We peeked inside the windows and went in the backyard. I planted that tree and look how big it is now.*" He

had some of his old photos mixed in with photos he took of the kids beside the tree. I thought it was really great how he had images of 10 years ago, and today, how the kids and trees had grown. Bitter-sweet, I think.

It got me thinking about my recent view of my old marital home, where my babies were born. I didn't get to walk around and peek in windows. My view was a virtual one. I couldn't see the back of the house but I could sketch it from memory.

One of the biggest changes during divorce is the loss of the marital home. Some couples agree to have one spouse continue to live in the home, presumably the parent who is the primary caregiver. Often though, it is short lived. Unexpected expenses during the divorce process can cause a couple to re-examine the arrangement and many choose to sell the home, as discussed in *Should You Rent or Buy...* Eventually, the spouse will come to terms with the fact that it's too expensive to continue living in the marital home. While it was designed for an intact family, now there is only half. Sometimes there's only one person (during weeks the children are with the other parent) rattling around in a home that doesn't fit them anymore.

Imagine walking around in clothes three sizes too big, same thing. It's time to go down a size (or two) and find a home that better fits you and your lifestyle.

As practical a decision as this is there are always emotional strings attached to the home the children were born in. The backyard full of memories and sounds of a different time, a time of innocence with a little denial on the side. Birthday parties, dinner parties, arguments, first days of school, Lego pieces, fresh baked cookies, snow days, friends over to play, messes to clean, cats to rescue, dogs to be found...and the list goes on.

That was then, this is now.

Before my ex and I separated we moved out of our marital home that we had lived in for 14 years. We moved into our dream home. The dream home didn't save us and my memories *aren't* of that home. It's the one we lived in for 14 years that I will always remember and view as the marital home. The one with the ink marked doorframe, showing the growth of the children year by year.

Recently I looked up the old address and Google earth popped up with an image. I was surprised at what I saw. It was the old homestead alright but it looked so small and insignificant in the image. It looked the same as all the other homes on the street. Not to mention, someone had torn up the yard. Literally, they had removed all the shrubs and a few of the trees we planted and nurtured all the years we lived there. We couldn't afford to landscape the yard until the second or third year we lived there and when we began the process it was a slow one. Each year one or two more tiny trees and a hedge here and a vine there. I put a great deal of effort into it, really.

Gone. All gone. Ugly.

The house looked kind of neglected. I stared at my computer screen and felt lost. Was that how my neighborhood looked 12 years ago when we moved? I don't think so. Or do my images in my head of my first home not quite match reality? It simply could be a question of time taking its toll on the property. Maybe Google earth cameras skew the image so badly that they look uglier, smaller and unkempt? It's just a capture of a moment in time after all. Maybe the house was having a bad day? Maybe those cracks in the sidewalk there before and I just never noticed them.

As my Facebook friend said "I guess it's true what they say, you really can't go back home, eh?"

I guess not.

Sometimes, it's better to keep our memories in our head rather than try to revisit them literally. The place is rarely the same as we left it, whether time has ravished it, or the new inhabitants fail to care for it as much as you did. Either way, the reality today won't be the same as the memory of the place in your mind. Sad but true. Of course, we're not meant to look backwards because we're not going that way.

### Are You Worthy? Yes!

First, YES, you are worthy. WE are all worthy. Except isn't it true that we have been either taught or heard that recording in our minds that says we are NOT worthy? We do not deserve...but it's a lie. An absolute lie. You are worthy and deserving.

wor-thy

*adjective*

adjective: **worthy**; comparative adjective: **worthier**; superlative adjective: **worthiest**

deserving effort, attention, or respect.

"generous donations to worthy causes"

synonyms: virtuous, righteous, good, moral, ethical, upright, upstanding, high-minded, principled, exemplary;

Believing we are worthy is the very first step toward wanting and striving for a better life. For example, accepting that we do in fact deserve that Mother's Day card, that hug, that raise, that promotion, that love...

Love. WE all deserve it.

One of the things we learn in an unhappy marriage is that we aren't good enough. We don't deserve what we already have, so who are **we** to complain?

I remember my ex used to tell people he paid for my haircut. At a social gathering, if someone complimented me on my clothing or hair he would quickly point out that he 'paid for it'. I think he may have said **how much** he paid...and it was meant to be a joke but I felt so small in those moments. I felt unworthy. Do I owe him for my haircut? Should I pay him back? Apparently, it was his money, not ours, at least that's the way he saw it.

Awkward.

So, this isn't really about my hair or clothes. What's it really about? This is about that little voice in our head that tells us the same stories again and again, one of them being; *you don't really deserve that*. This will leak into all aspects of our life if we're not cognizant of it.

There's no denying that part of initiating a divorce is deciding you deserve more or better. It's that wake-up call that says 'psssst, what are you doing here?' and 'why are you putting up with that nonsense?'

Going through the divorce process is a test of sorts. We learn how much we deserve. Because believe me, if you don't think you're worthy, you'll end up with very little. The lawyers and your ex will tell you a story about how little you deserve so it's up to you to thwart that. This is true for many circumstances in life, not just divorce.

The bottom line? You have to believe you deserve it before you can ask for it.

### **5 Ways Feeling Unworthy Is Self-Sabotage:**

You never ask for more

You don't expect anything

You're afraid to stand up for yourself

You lose confidence

You stop believing in yourself

You can see how damaging this is so how can we change it?

Start by taking a look at where this attitude/belief has come from? I'm sure it's not something you made up about yourself. It's likely that this has come from years of being treated 'less than', 'not enough' and being told outright that you don't deserve something because \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) reason. Recognize how untrue these statements were/are and reshape your thoughts.

Start a new story. Rehearse your **personal 'worthiness' mantra**:

"I deserve the best."

“I deserve love.”

“I am worthy and accept my half.”

“I am worthy of and accept spousal/alimony support.” Because you *are*, and if you don't ask, you won't get—as the saying goes.

I've heard so many women say “I left with nothing.” I remain horrified by this. What part of their brain made them think they were unworthy of monetary support? You know what else? Almost every one of these women regrets leaving without some of their sentimental items and that they eschewed their opportunity for support. They simply didn't have the fight in them or maybe deep down they didn't feel worthy of it.

Remember, unless you were only married for a year, have your own fabulous career and haven't stayed home with children—then okay, alimony support may not be a part of your settlement. Otherwise, it's there for a reason. It's up to you to ensure your financial stability, to believe you deserve it and finally, to accept it.

I'm not saying we have to be greedy. Being greedy is when we want to take it all. I realize there are a lot of those types out there too and they do nothing to help the cause. As we discussed earlier, we need to stop being too nice. Being too nice is a part of not owning up to the fact that we deserve more. Being too nice is like saying *that's alright, I didn't deserve it anyway*.

Are you worthy? YES. If you feel you are not worthy, can you change that way of thinking? YES.

Start asking, trying, believing, doing and soon you will have what you deserve, the BEST.

### Pieces of Me

At times, I have stopped short of spilling my heart here at The Wine Diaries. My fear of vulnerability has held me back. Not only was I afraid of what *you* would think of me but I was worried about ‘*who*’ would think of me. I was worried about what you would see and judge of me and my life. It's not perfect. It's full of flaws and mistakes then again, so what. I'm ready to think out loud and let you get to know me a little better.

*Today*, right this minute is a mere piece of me. *Yesterday* is an image made up of pieces, some broken and some whole. *Tomorrow* will bring new fragments and moments. Put it all together and it's my LIFE. A mosaic life, cracked and broken but lovingly put back together.

Once broken though, we are a little more fragile...but stronger at the same time.

**Why I began to blog and write... full exposure**



You see, I started the blog with an audience in mind. The audience in fact is sometimes NOT who I imagined. My audience sometimes *is* the pieces of me. Pieces of my past visiting and I wasn't all that comfortable spilling my heart out to be viewed by my past. What would people think? What would he or she say? Would they joke and make fun of my inner most feeling and thoughts? I'm still not comfortable with that notion, but I realize something. It doesn't matter what **they** think of me. Why should it? So, I'll let myself do some reflecting and share some pieces of me, with YOU.

### **Life Experience Makes Me Who I am...**

It's been nine years almost to the day since I moved out of my marital home. Hard to believe. I suppose because of how much I've learned and what I've been through since then, it seems it should be a lifetime of years passed. I feel like a different person. You could say I broke into a bunch of pieces, exposing my true self slowly, gradually. I morphed and shed my skin. I'm still changing and putting those pieces of me back together in a new way. In the process, I've become more confident but make no mistake, I lost friends and I incited anger in people. I wasn't always the popular kid on the block. I went from 'yes' girl to 'no way' woman.

What I've learned? Being right isn't easy. Doing what's right for you? Even harder...it's going to piss a few people off.

**“You’ve gotta kick at the darkness ‘til it bleeds daylight”- Bruce Cockburn-Lovers In a Dangerous Time**

So, yeah some of my pieces are far from perfect. They don't all fit together without a few cracks and chips.

### **Putting the Pieces Back Together With Love**

My life is far from over (God willing) and I'm still changing every day and I am with someone who encourages this process. I'm allowed to be 'me' with a few of the pieces out of place. Just to be. It's simple. It's forgiving. It's wonderful. It's like a jug of water after a desert trek. Do I pour it over my head or drink it in one gulp?

Rule of life: people are always changing.

But just because nine years have gone by does not completely erase the pain of the divorce. For example, I have met so many amazing women on the internet. They blog, too and many of them are in the thick of their divorce. It's a reminder of how I've moved forward. Interestingly, though just recently someone close to me made a comment inferring that my divorce was so long ago, that it's ancient history. No, it's part of who I am today. It's made me stronger. It's taught me much about the people around me. So, even if it was many years ago, that doesn't make it irrelevant today. It certainly re-shaped my relationship with those closest to me. It changed my relationship with my family, my parents and my children. It's a big chunk of the mosaic.

In fact, my divorce only **began** 9 years ago. It officially ended 2012, only two years ago. That puts it into perspective. A Divorce is not simply an event in your life. It's a process...an ongoing, messy process that requires a steady navigator.

Speaking of relationships, let's talk about the kids for moment. I rarely speak of them or my Partner (with a capital 'P') and step son here on my site. That's mainly because I respect their privacy. But they are a huge part of my life. They are the ones that encourage me to continue trying new things and never give up. They're the ones who love me unconditionally. It is not automatic though. Every relationship takes conscious effort to maintain and appreciate. At the same time, they are the **easiest** relationships of my life. My children have gone through plenty of stress yet they are always there for me. They have grown and learned through this experience as well.

### **When Past and Present Collide...**

There's nothing like a death to cause reflection.

Recently an old friend passed away. He was my Ex's best friend but he was also my friend for many years while I was married. My ex and I met him and his wife together through a mutual friend. We hit it off and so began a long and winding friendship. Leading up to the divorce though, the friendship hit some rocky patches for me. Suffice it to say that I had to let go after my husband and I separated. As I emphasized in my book, sometimes we have to let go even if the people are wonderful individuals. We had different priorities. I was changing my life. I had to do some pruning to grow healthy and strong.

There goes a piece of me.

My children were very saddened by their Uncle's (they always called him uncle) passing and I happened to be there with them when they found out. We reminisced about our friend who was like family to us. It was a terrible reminder to me that even when you let go of people, the memories remain. Yes, your past and present can intersect in a moment or a split second. When you least expect it, someone from your past can fill your mind with the detail as if you just saw them yesterday.

"Though I know I'll never lose affection for people and things that went before. I know I'll often stop and think about them...in my life, I've loved you more."-John Lennon-*In my Life*

Here's the thing, nine years have passed and my life is dramatically different. I am dramatically different. But the memories, pain, lessons and growth are still very real.

What am I trying to say? *You* can change your life. *You* can shed your skin and improve and 'be' happy. But you cannot erase lessons from the past. Divorce can be devastating but it can also be beautiful. Seeing pieces of me and of where and what I would do differently is, well, as pretty as a mosaic.

Today is a mere piece of you. Tomorrow, a new piece. Put them all together and you have a life. I hope your life mosaic is not just pretty to look at but well LIVED.

### Writing Was My Light During the Darkness Of Divorce

Even though it's been several years, I still think back to those early, dark divorce days. I'm referring to the initial separation and all that entailed. I failed to fully prepare for the tsunami. How could I? I had no clue the depth of the storm ahead.

I coped with those early, dark divorce days by journaling. I wrote everything in a little book. My darkest fears, anger, wishes for my ex, love for my children—you name it, it went in there. I guess it would be exactly how some people blog today. But that was 2005 and blogging wasn't really a thing. So, my journal was my savior, my light.

It was about two years into my divorce when the emotional and legal frustration began to really take a toll. That's when I came up with the idea of writing a self-help book specifically for women who were thinking of leaving their marriage. If I could ease one woman's suffering, it would ease some of my own.

I resolved to write a book that truly did tell the real story about divorce. And so, I began in the wee hours of the night, drafting up an outline of chapters. I knew exactly what to include. There would be a chapter on lawyers, co-parenting, what to do before leaving the marital home, what to expect socially after divorce and how to cope with the reactions of friends and family. In other words, I *KNEW* exactly what a woman would want to know because it was all the things I didn't know but had to learn.

I wrote and wrote. I wrote while waiting for kids at pick up. I wrote at work when the store had no customers to wait on. I wrote in the middle of the night. I wrote in tears on Sunday afternoons when I missed my kids and my heart was breaking. I included excerpts from my journal because remember—I wanted this to be an honest and true account of ending a marriage and beginning the divorce process. I wanted this book to be from my heart and to really speak to other women starting this journey.

It took me five years to complete. I stopped writing for about a year when I went through some pretty traumatic and harrowing divorce experiences. My losses and challenges left me without the gumption to finish my book.

Then something clicked. I was angry as hell. I was angry at myself, at my ex, at the system for letting me down. So, the only way to fix that was to finish my damn book.

That's exactly what I did.

I had a few writers recommend that I write under a pseudonym, when I was almost ready to publish. I considered it at great length and made my decision with much consideration.

The result is a book that I promote myself and talk about with women openly. It's exactly the way I wanted it. I take full credit and criticism equally for my work.

You could say my writing kept a little light shining in those dark days, illuminating the path for me.

Today, I like to think my book is the sliver of light that shines out of the darkness for folks struggling through divorce right now. It's made my struggle worthwhile.

Last but certainly not least, if you're thinking about writing a book about your divorce I would recommend three important tips;

- 1) Make sure you always keep focus on WHY you're writing it. It shouldn't be simply to air your complaints, there should really be a greater purpose.
- 2) Decide early in the process if you will be publishing under a pseudonym or your real name as this will determine the type of content you will share.
- 3) Always hire an editor before the final printing or formatting of your book.

Writing got me through one of the toughest times of my life. Not only did it shine a light during the darkness, the result was a vehicle to help others. You can share your story too, begin by putting pen to paper.

### 50 Things I've Learned

In honor of my 50th birthday...gulp...I'm sharing my humble list of **50 things I've learned in 50 years**. Some things are funny. Some are things you'll say "She's just figured that out now?" Yes, I'm still figuring things out, so please have a read and a laugh.

#### **50 Things I've Learned...in no particular order;**

1. Turning 50 is strange because I still feel 25
2. You won't please everyone, so please yourself
3. Granny panties are underrated
4. You cannot cook brown and white rice together. Ever. Here's why:

Lisa Thomson

August 21 · Facebook

How can you screw up making Basmati rice? Start with 1/2 cup white rice (that's all that's left in the bag) add 1/2 cup of brown to make it healthy. WRONG. Brown takes 20 mins longer to cook than white. No problem, pour out the brown into a separate pot. Kay, pick out the brown grains from the white grains (couldn't get them all). No problem. No one will notice. Place tight fitting lid on when the boiling begins. Can't find the lid to the pot.

Have looked in every friggin' cabinet, even the dishwasher and washing machine. No problem. Put a pan over the pot...? Didn't work. Ordering take out later. I shouldn't cook.  
THE END.

5. Be careful at MARTINI parties, if you have too many you'll tell someone off, fall on the floor and then get carried home by your friends

6. On the subject of booze; if you lick your wine glass (at the rim only, not the whole glass, silly) before sipping you won't leave a lipstick mark

7. On the subject of lipstick, Liz Taylor had it right "Pour yourself a drink. Put on some lipstick and pull yourself together."

9. People are more important than 'things' (although cashmere, diamonds and silk are lovely)

10. Avoid commenting on a person's body parts; i.e. refrain from asking "did you get a boob job?" (someone asked me that not long ago)

11. During Battle, know when to throw in the towel but don't give up too soon

12. Some people you will never please. No. Matter. What.

13. Sometimes it's okay to drink the whole bottle of wine

14. Love trumps all

15. Laundry doesn't have to be complicated-put it all in the dryer, (note to self) stop obsessing over perfectly wrinkle free shirts and jeans that won't fade

16. A little dust is a sign of a happy home

17. A nod and a smile is sometimes the right answer

18. Your kids need a hug more than a lecture

19. True friends are the wine of life

20. Jelly fish friends, the type that sting, are better left behind

21. It isn't easy being right

22. Don't attempt a self-bikini wax

23. Everyone has their own truth, even about the same event

24. Single moms and dads are some of the best parents out there

25. When everything seems wrong, it's time for a nap

26. Wearing a bra that fits is like getting a boob job, but don't ask...

27. There's nothing wrong with peanut butter sandwiches for dinner on occasion
28. If you're having a bath with your lover make sure a candle doesn't fall in the water, you'll be cleaning wax off your tub for weeks
29. GRATITUDE really works
30. Being scared is often the beginning of something great
31. Promises made with the best intentions are often broken
32. The only PROMISES I make are to myself and I sometimes break those
33. A road trip with a girlfriend is good for the soul
34. If you lick a frozen fire hydrant your tongue will stick, no matter what your brother says
35. I'm WORTHY and so are you
36. Everyone is facing something tough, especially after 50 years on the planet
37. Pay attention to 'signs' because if you ignore them they get bigger and more disturbing
38. If someone tells you at your wedding that your groom looked bored during the first dance, you still have time to annul the nuptials
39. Always trust your gut instincts, your intuition, your heart—they're rarely wrong.
40. I am the fragrant breeze of a summer's night that turns the pages of his dreams...I know this because he told me in a poem.
41. "WAITING is the mystical space between the dreaming and its coming true"-I read that somewhere.
42. When you feel like you're losing your mind, you're probably finding it.
43. We all have BEAUTY
44. "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time."-Maya Angelou was right
45. Sometimes a line in a movie resonates and you hear it in your mind at random moments—here's mine  
"Your marriage was over. You wanted back...welcome back."-*The Verdict*
46. Don't spend time with people who don't VALUE you
47. Don't take an online IQ test after drinking wine
48. Don't give anyone a back stage pass to your life

49. Lawyers don't have all the answers, sometimes you have to BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE

50. Be the HEROINE of your own life

51. Self-acceptance is a process of accepting the good, the bad and the ugly

## Dear Lisa-Reader Questions Answered

I get some pretty interesting questions coming in from readers and site visitors. So, I decided to share them on the blog occasionally. Everyone can benefit from a little extra information and I'm sure you will relate to selected questions. Please note, I do not give legal advice nor do I disclose the person's real name.

**DEAR LISA,**

*HOW CAN I GET MY HUSBAND TO PAY ME MY COURT ORDERED CHILD SUPPORT? I'M THINKING ABOUT GOING BACK TO A JUDGE. HE SAYS HE DOESN'T HAVE A JOB ANYMORE AND CAN'T PAY. HE JUST STOPPED. I HAVEN'T GOTTEN ANY SUPPORT FOR 6 MONTHS. MY SON IS 4. I HAVE TO PAY FOR HIS PRE-SCHOOL NOT TO MENTION ALL THE OTHER COSTS. HELP. – SUSAN*

**Answer:**

Hi Susan, there is a silver lining here believe it or not. Since you have a court order outlining the payments to be made by your husband as opposed to a verbal agreement which is not legally binding, you simply have to take the next step and **have the order enforced**.

I do not recommend going back to court, in front of a judge because that will land you in the same boat. You may walk out with a second order or worst case scenario; your husband may oppose the current order giving the Judge reasons to reduce the amount payable on the existing order. Not to mention, you will be poorer after paying a lawyer to represent you. You don't want that. What you want is for him to start paying you, period.

Instead, **go directly to your Province or State's Family Maintenance Enforcement Department.**

Here, you will **fill out an application** providing detailed information on your ex-husband including physical description (include a photo if you can), his driver's license number, any other licenses he has, place and name of Employer etc. You will also need a copy of the signed and sealed court order. Also, since your Ex hasn't paid for 6 months, you will calculate the amount owing (called ARREARS) and this will also be collected on your behalf.

Once you have completed the application 'package' you will send it in to the department for processing. When your application is completed, you will be contacted with a file number, I.D. number and password. NOTE: The Department will not allow any negotiating between you and your ex once you are registered.

The set-up process can take up to 4 weeks or more. The application package is quite extensive so you want to make sure you're including everything they require. Missing items will only delay your file.

Once your file is activated, the department will communicate with your Ex and act on your behalf. He will likely begin paying immediately to avoid driver's license restrictions, income garnishee and fees and penalties for late payments.

**The bonus?** You get your support without paying extra costs for a lawyer or fighting with your ex. It works like a charm.

**The drawback?** Their system is not perfect and sometimes they make mistakes. You have a responsibility to ensure they are well informed and always include updating information for them.

**Your Homework:** Google your local (State or Provincial) Family enforcement office on the internet. Read through their site to get the application details, rules, requirements to understand YOUR enforcement agency.

**The Take Away:** Court orders are virtually useless if the person is not following the order. Utilizing your Family Enforcement office will ensure your Ex pays and follows the order on an ongoing basis.

### **Dear Lisa**

*How would I find out if my boyfriend and his soon to be ex-wife followed through with their Court date or if they cancelled the whole process of the divorce? My boyfriend tells me the court got pushed back but no specific date given yet; I have reasons to believe they may have cancelled the whole process of the divorce. He wouldn't be one to admit it to me, is there a way to find this out? I don't want to continue to be in a relationship with him if there's not going to be a divorce.*

### **Answer:**

It is common for court dates to be changed/delayed. The only way to find out would be to call the court clerk's office and inquire on the date but you would need the case number. I don't know how you would get the file/case number without doing some snooping.

I don't blame you for being concerned but you would be better to talk to your boyfriend about it. Calling in to inquire appears that you're sticking your nose in, so to speak even if your intentions are justified.



Sounds like trust needs to be reinforced in this relationship. If you don't trust what he says now, will you be able to trust him later on in the relationship? Good luck and I hope it works out for you.

Sincerely,

Lisa

See what I did? I threw a moral answer in with the practical...I'm not the relationship expert but it seems obvious trust is the key to holding a relationship together.

*Dear Lisa,  
I know you are not a professional in the field...just looking for some outside input on my situation since I can't talk to family or friends about it.  
My husband has been having multiple "emotional" affairs. He always says they are nothing but I feel differently. He says he's just talking and nothing is happening. I don't believe a word that comes from his mouth anymore. I don't trust him to go anywhere by himself. He tells me he doesn't want to lose me or our kids.  
I'm not even sure what I'm asking here. I'm so confused on what to do.....How do you choose between loving yourself enough to rip apart not only our little family but our extended family too (we are all very close in a very small community)  
I love him I do but I feel like it's not enough. I don't know how to stop him from wanting to talk to other women. Thanks for having an ear, if you did read this.  
I'll just skip over the part about not being a professional. I'm not a marital counselor—true. But when it comes to smelling a rat, I've become a pro.*

**Answer:**

Dear Sandy,  
It sounds like you're in a difficult position. There is no proof that he's having affairs, yet, your instincts are warning you. The fact that you don't trust him is a huge red flag. A marriage without trust is next to impossible to maintain with confidence, love and happiness.

Your question about how do you know when to rip your family apart? That is something only you can answer. Perhaps some marital counseling will help you and your husband move forward and re-build trust. Hope that helps a little.

Sincerely,  
Lisa

**Dear Lisa,**

*Any advice you can spare-My SIL needs child/spousal support.  
I found your story by googling advice for my Canadian sister in law who is at the beginning of her divorce process and she is completely dependent on her husband for financial support for herself and their 2 girls. He is refusing to pay her anything and is*

*already using the saying u will pay etc etc. I am in \_\_\_\_\_ so very hard for my husband & I to help her from here. Is there any advice or anyone or anything you can think of that she can contact to give her help and advise? Obviously, there is a whole lot more of nastiness to this story so any help would be much appreciated. Thank you for your time.*

**Answer:**

Dear Concerned Family Member,

The best advice I can give you to pass on to your sister in law, is for her to get a lawyer. She should seek legal advice right away. I have legal tips and I devote part of my book to discussing how to hire a good/suitable lawyer.

Thanks for reaching out and I wish her all the best.

Sincerely,

Lisa

**Second Question:**

*Lisa, so sorry I didn't mention that she has one already but as you can imagine The expense of asking a million questions is overwhelming & can feel like you're on your own ... we ask my sister in law to always contact her lawyer but she says she feels like she is bugging her a lot. My husband & I feel that she has so much on her plate that ... she is overwhelmed with the main priority of keeping her children safe & she was not expecting this to turn out this way. Like I said before there is so much more to her situation, one example her husband is an alcoholic. I was just wondering if there is any help available for her with this that the advise is free & supportive for women like her. She is freaking out that their house just sold & she has to find somewhere to live with the girls & she doesn't have any money. I want to thank you so much for responding straight away it means so much to my husband & I as we are at a loss to help her from the other side of the world, but we will keep trying to do what we can from here. So much appreciated for any other advise you can give. Thank you Lisa. We feel someone cares. Xxoo*

**Second Answer:**

Dear Concerned Family Member,

I'm not sure about in her exact community but often there are divorce support groups. That might be a place for her to start for moral support. She should prioritize her issues as follows;

**Number 1**, she needs to start looking for a place to live. Renting would make the most sense for her at this point. **Number 2**, does she have access to the marital, joint account? If so, she should make a withdrawal (of half the amount that is in the account) and open her own account. **Number 3**, she needs to get her lawyer to set up child and spousal support immediately so she will have financial income to live on and for her girls! She'll need to provide information to the lawyer regarding her husband's income. **Number 4**, she'll need her own credit card if she doesn't have that already.

Those are 4 things she needs to do, sooner rather than later.

Is she your husband's sister? Does she have other family where she lives? If not, then **I advise your husband to make a trip out to help her.**

All the best to you. It will be ok in time.

Sincerely,  
Lisa

**Dear Lisa,**

*“Hi Lisa, I wonder if I could get your advice on something. I just read your post, “Divorce Bully” and I recognize all the signs in my girlfriend’s ex-husband. I’m doing a little research to try to help her. She’s been divorced for two years and she has two sons ages 5 and 7 with her ex. They share custody. The problem is, he verbally abuses her every chance he gets. He’s never on time bringing her sons back to her home and always changing plans they make so that she can never rely on his word. The latest problem is he won’t let the boys go on a summer holiday she planned. The reason? He doesn’t want his sons near me. I love her and it kills me to watch the pain he causes her. She continues to agree to his plans and still he always blames her when things go wrong. He will email or telephone her and verbally berate her. She cries after and I can see the physical toll it’s taking on her.*

*When I try to talk to her about it, she shuts down. She tells me not to get involved and that she will handle it. The most she has shared about her past with her ex is that this verbal abuse was a constant in her marriage and one of the reasons she left him. When I point out to her that she hasn’t got away from it, she won’t talk about it. She is being bullied and fits all the signs you mention. My question to you is, should I try to talk to him, let him know I won’t allow him to treat her this way? Or should I stay out of it like she has asked? I’m furious every time I see the pain he causes her. I need to fix this but I’m not sure if it will make things worse.”*

**Answer:**

“Hi Dave, reading your email really hit me like an arrow in the heart. This kind of situation is more common than we realize. After the divorce, sometimes the verbal abuse not only continues but gets worse. I can understand your frustration in seeing this happen to someone you love. You don’t want to see your girlfriend in pain especially caused by the same person repeatedly. Here’s the problem though, it is ‘her divorce’ to deal. It is ‘her battle’. She has to be the one to decide when enough is enough. I know this is hard to hear but she is right. Nothing good comes of a new partner getting involved in child custody issues or any other divorce issues. Here’s what I suggest you do; be there for her. That’s it! No words, just a safe place to land when she needs it. Strong arms to hold her when she feels she can’t go on. These simple acts will show her how much you care, love and believe in her. In time, you will give her strength and the confidence she needs.

Right now, telling her you want to intervene is actually telling her she’s not handling things properly and you need to fix it for her. Telling her how to deal with her ex is like saying she isn’t strong enough to do it herself. Instead, show her you believe in her. Give her some credit that she can and will handle it.

My only caveat to this advice is, if her physical safety is in question. If that is the case then keep a record of the events, report anything to the police and yes, by all means be a protector. Lastly, if you remain calm, she will open up to you. If you over react then she will worry about sharing certain things. Keep that in mind because you want her to feel safe and not judged when she talks about her divorce or her struggles. Opening up that communication will also keep you in the loop and improve things going forward. I guess in all this, I'm saying you can show your support in ways that don't directly interfere and this will in turn, give her some self-confidence to deal with the situation."

### **The Take Away:**

Direct involvement isn't always the answer in helping our loved ones. Sometimes it's the simple gestures of showing support that will empower the one we love to take her own action to solve her problem. Divorce is such an emotional and volatile time that having third parties get involved isn't always the best course of action. That said, personal safety should always be the priority.

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## In Conclusion

### A Final Word

Thank you for reading *A Divorce Companion*. I hope you enjoyed it and found value in the many tips and stories I've shared over the last five years. Above all, I hope this has provided a source of divorce comfort for you.

Sincerely,

# Lisa xo



### About the Author:

After an acrimonious divorce, Lisa wrote about her experiences for personal, therapeutic purposes. Several years in, she decided her experience could offer insight to other women or economically dependent spouses and her book *The Great Escape; a Girl's Guide to Leaving a Marriage* was born.

Lisa blogs and writes for DivorcedMoms.com, HuffingtonPost.com and at her own website. She also writes fiction at her small, sunny (when it's not raining) desk in Delta, B.C. Canada. She lives with her long-time Beau and is a mom to three adult children, her daughter, son and step-son. Her passions include yoga, painting, nature, wine, the ocean and reading not in any particular order. Get to know Lisa better at [lisathomsonlive.com](http://lisathomsonlive.com)

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### Resources and Further Reading

Book *The Great Escape; A girl's Guide to Leaving a Marriage*  
[https://www.amazon.com/Great-Escape-Girls-Leaving-Marriage-ebook/dp/B007H11JIA/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1453055191&sr=1-1&keywords=the+great+escape%3B+a+girl%27s+guide+to+leaving+a+marriage](https://www.amazon.com/Great-Escape-Girls-Leaving-Marriage-ebook/dp/B007H11JIA/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1453055191&sr=1-1&keywords=the+great+escape%3B+a+girl%27s+guide+to+leaving+a+marriage)

Broken Dream Home <http://www.lisathomsonlive.com/the-wine-diaries/>

Legal Terms <http://www.lisathomsonlive.com/legal-terms/>

Amy Cuddy Ted Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks-Mh1QhMc>

First Chapter *The Great Escape; A Girl's Guide...* <http://www.lisathomsonlive.com/book-excerpts/>

Embracing Your Inner Bad Girl by Lisa Thomson [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisathomson/the-perks-of-being-a-bad-girl\\_b\\_6237350.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisathomson/the-perks-of-being-a-bad-girl_b_6237350.html)

Vashti Seacat <http://www.lisathomsonlive.com/something-ive-been-meaning-to-tell-you/>

U.S. Domestic abuse hotline 1-800-799-SAFE

Canada Domestic abuse hotline 1-800-363-9010

The Wine Diaries *Fire!* <http://www.lisathomsonlive.com/the-wine-diaries-fire/#more-2520>

Woman's Divorce Forum <https://www.firstwivesworld.com/>

Parental Alienation [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parental\\_alienation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parental_alienation)

An earlier post on PA <http://www.lisathomsonlive.com/parental-alienation/>

Youtube video on PA <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yc8k7mV6rwQ&t=1s>

*The Great Escape; A Girl's Guide to Leaving a Marriage* [https://www.amazon.com/Great-Escape-Girls-Leaving-Marriage-ebook/dp/B007HI1JIA/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1453055191&sr=1-1&keywords=the+great+escape%3B+a+girl%27s+guide+to+leaving+a+marriage](https://www.amazon.com/Great-Escape-Girls-Leaving-Marriage-ebook/dp/B007HI1JIA/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1453055191&sr=1-1&keywords=the+great+escape%3B+a+girl%27s+guide+to+leaving+a+marriage)

Divorce Law Protect or Infect <http://www.lisathomsonlive.com/divorce-law-protect-or-infect/>

Kelly Rutherford's story <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/10/kelly-rutherford-custody-battle>

Deadbeat 911 <http://www.lisathomsonlive.com/deadbeat-911/>

Credit score <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nickclements/2016/05/20/finally-anyone-can-get-their-official-fico-credit-score-for-free/#68a8935a2a52>

*Make Money Not Excuses* by Jean Chatzky [https://www.amazon.com/Make-Money-Not-Excuses-Financial/dp/0307341534/ref=sr\\_1\\_9?ie=UTF8&qid=1483542476&sr=8-9&keywords=jean+chatzky+books](https://www.amazon.com/Make-Money-Not-Excuses-Financial/dp/0307341534/ref=sr_1_9?ie=UTF8&qid=1483542476&sr=8-9&keywords=jean+chatzky+books)

How to Spot a Narcissist by Samuel Lopez de Victoria, PhD <http://www.dr.sam.tv/about-dr.sam/>

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