

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Living with Divorce

Separating from someone you had hoped would be your partner for life inevitably carries pain. It can leave you feeling overwhelmed and like a failure, particularly if you are surrounded by "happy families."

Understanding the accompanying emotional and physical stresses is the first step in learning how to deal with separation or divorce. When you accept your feelings and learn to care for yourself during this stressful time, you'll not only cope with divorce, but even thrive.

Emotional Stress

Not only is the act of separating or divorcing a huge stress in itself, but it also carries secondary stresses. These can affect the family and the individual in many ways and include:

- **Feelings of being a failure.**
- **Missing the warmth, friendship and financial security** they had, or hoped they would have with their former partner.
- **Parents are suddenly faced with a much bigger job.** Some will face added responsibilities of caring for children alone, and some will have less time with children, whose needs will be greater. Conflicts surrounding child care frequently add to these difficulties.
- **Parents may also feel guilty, lonely and resentful and have concerns** that the children will forget or turn against them.

Physical Stress

As in any stressful situation, the body is affected in many ways, which can include headaches, backaches, ulcers, asthma and more frequent colds and flu. Even when divorce is a relief, physical symptoms can take hold.

Coping Strategies for Divorcees

Although divorce is painful, it can also be a time of new relationships, learning and growing. Here are some tips to help you get through the tough times:

- **Recognize your feelings.** It's normal to feel lonely, frustrated or even hopeless. Be sure to release your feelings and anxieties.
- **Allow yourself to cry or yell if you need to do so.**
- **Reach out to others.** Friends, relatives, support groups and therapists can all help. A hug, phone call or letter can mean a great deal.
- **Take risks.** Try a new activity. It will keep your mind off your problems and help you meet new people.
- **Treat your body well.** Watch your diet and avoid turning to alcohol.

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- **Get plenty of exercise** by doing something you enjoy.
- **Indulge yourself with small treats** like long baths or reading magazines in bed.

Time for Your Children

Divorce is hardest on the children. Kids will need your love and support now more than ever. Here are some small daily things that will help children continue to feel loved and supported:

- No matter how tough the day has been, greet each child individually with lots of hugs and affection to let them know you miss them and recognize their needs.
- Tub time, tuck in time, kitchen time and other daily events can be loving moments for children when someone is willing to listen to them.
- Remember that when you pay attention to small things, your children may be encouraged to talk to you about the serious things too.
- Avoid speaking poorly of your ex-partner. Your kids will still need the love and support of both parents and may feel they have to take a side if parents are negative about one another.
- Talk to your children in age-appropriate ways about the divorce. Kids often feel like family problems are their fault. Reassure them that they are not to blame and they are still loved by both their parents.

The stress of divorce can cause enduring issues for everyone in the family. Remember that if the relationship wasn't working, divorce can be a relief and even a positive change. Look after yourself and respect your former partner, particularly where children are involved.