

Divorce Recovery: Knowing What to Expect Can Reduce Your Pain

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Divorce is an extremely painful process and experience. Most people experience a range of emotions during the process that they often struggle to make sense of and to process through. It is a time of high levels of stress and the bombardment of confusing feelings create a challenge in surviving and coping. Identity is challenged and distorted by feelings and attempts to make sense of those feelings. Self-esteem is compromised and may take some time to recover. People may feel isolated and alone. They may feel shame, guilt, grief, hurt, overwhelmed and many other feelings.

While you are under the most emotional stress of any time in your life you are called upon to be the stabilizing influence and tower of support for your children and sometimes even other family members. Non-custodial parents often fear that they will ultimately lose their children to the other parent and engage in counter-therapeutic conflict behavior over the children.

Stress can lead to a range of emotional and physical symptoms, such as headaches, backaches, sleeping difficulties, appetite changes, fatigue, concentration difficulties, short term memory problems, and many more.

Knowing that what you are experiencing is within the range of "normal" divorce reactions may assist you in processing through the stress, the crazy-making thoughts, and the painful feelings.

Resources are available to assist you in making a successful adjustment to divorce and to regain a happy life. Many marriage and family therapists specialize in divorce recovery. Many churches offer divorce recovery support groups. Many self-help books have been written on the subject.

The best self-help resource for working through the adjustment process is the classic self-help divorce recovery manual, "Rebuilding: When Your Relationship Ends" by Bruce Fischer. This little book provides the information that you need to be able to identify and accept your feelings, and to be able to identify what is adaptive and maladaptive response behavior. It assists with providing perspective on grieving the loss of the real relationship and the fantasy relationship and assists in moving toward healthy detachment. It can provide assistance in working through painful feelings, regaining a healthy sense of self and restoring self-esteem.

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