

# Managing Your Emotions

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It's been said that divorce is 95% emotions and only 5% legal: it wasn't for the emotional component, divorce probably would be cheap and easy – someone like me could write up all your divorce forms in an afternoon, create your parenting plan, calculate support, and divide your assets and debts in a fair way and have you on your way in no time!

Unfortunately, it really isn't that easy because we are humans with lots of feelings. And they start WELL before the divorce does. When we go through a divorce, we are going through a death, in a way – the death of a shared dream, the family unit, the marriage. It is one of the most stressful things a person can experience and with that comes tidal waves of grief, shock, anger, guilt, fear, anxiety, and more. You've heard of the stages of grief, right? Well, we will go through all of those stages – sometimes linearly, sometimes all at once. And so will our spouse – and to complicate things, we are going to be experiencing these feelings differently from them, at different times.

## Shock

- Initial disbelief, oscillate between numbness and panic.
- Searching for answers to “why” and related solutions.

## Denial

- Avoid discussing divorce as solution.
- Invest heavily in saving your marriage.



# Anger & Blaming

- Frustrated (but often cathartic) outpouring of emotion.
- Blame spouse for past, present and future problems.

# Bargaining

- Offer to do anything to make things right again.
- Distracts from and postpones the feeling of loss.

# Depression

- Sadness associated with realization of the inevitable.
- Often deepens after unsuccessful “try again”.

# Acceptance

- Recognize new identity and set healthy boundaries.
- Hold up responsibilities in new circumstances.

# Rebuilding

- Acceptance deepens – truly letting go of the past.
- Find the way forward with hope for stable, happy future and rebuilding self-esteem!



# Common Feelings



- **DOUBT/DENIAL**  
Is this the right choice?



- **FEAR/ANXIETY**  
I have no idea what to expect, and no one I know has gone through this.



- **ANGER**  
Why did my partner do this to me?



- **SADNESS/DEPRESSION**  
Why did it have to come out this?



- **GRIEF/LOSS**  
Loss of the marriage, normalcy, home, other relationships.



- **GUILT**  
Especially for the dumpers.



- **SHAME**  
I don't want to be a divorcee; what if people judge me?



# The Problem with Unresolved Difficult Feelings

Unless intense feelings are addressed in a healthy way . . .

**GUILT** over a divorce can lead to:

- Giving an ex more than is fair (financial, parenting time, the house, etc.)
- Beating oneself up, which can leave you stuck, instead of using self-care and self empathy to learn, grow & forgive.

**EXTREME ANGER** toward an ex-spouse can lead to:

- Revenge towards an ex that may negatively impact you, your children, your future relationship with your ex or ex-in-laws, and a large financial burden for potentially unnecessary legal fees.
- Lasting bitterness and resentment.

**GRIEF**, left unresolved, can lead to:

- Depression.
- Difficulties working and carrying out activities of daily living, including parenting.



In my experience, one of the biggest mistakes we can make during a divorce is not tending to the emotional component. When we make decisions, when we communicate out of fear and anger, we run the very real risk of blowing up the process, which can result in tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees, an inability to successfully co-parent, long term emotional damage, and a long, tortuous divorce that may end up in Court.

### ***You don't want that. Believe me.***

“Well yea, Liz, duh”, I can hear you saying. “Easier said than done, especially when my spouse is an a-hole!” Look - I get it. But this is a great time for you to start building some life skills that will serve you well beyond your divorce - AND save you tons of money and heartache.

SO let's talk about some very simple things you can do to help keep your emotions regulated and help keep you out of those trauma responses (fight, flight, freeze, or fawn), that are not useful when you're going through a divorce.



- Consider trying a natural deep breathing pattern like a physiological sigh or other breathing exercises. This technique involves two quick inhaleds followed by a longer exhale, which can help calm the sympathetic system and activate the parasympathetic system, promoting relaxation.
- Incorporate movement into your routine as a stress-relief strategy. Whether it's taking a walk, practicing yoga, or dancing to your favorite song, physical activity can help release tension and regulate your nervous system, contributing to a sense of relaxation and well-being.
- Explore the use of a weighted blanket to promote relaxation and calmness. The deep pressure touch provided by a weighted blanket may activate the parasympathetic nervous system, helping to naturally relax your body and calm your mind, offering a soothing effect during times of stress.
- Practice meditation to calm your mind and reduce stress. Find a quiet space, close your eyes, and focus on your breath or a calming phrase to center your thoughts and promote relaxation, even if you start with just a few minutes a day to gradually build a meditation practice.
- Introduce mindfulness into your daily routine to reduce stress and increase present-moment awareness. Take moments throughout the day to pause, take cleansing breaths, and focus your attention on specific sensations or surroundings, fostering a habit of intentional mindfulness that can be drawn upon during times of elevated stress.
- Engage in activities like singing or laughter to stimulate the vagus nerve and promote relaxation. Both singing and laughing increase oxygen intake, contributing to improved mood and energy levels while helping you feel more relaxed and at ease.



- Utilize the power of touch for relaxation by giving yourself a massage or a comforting hug. Gently massaging areas like your temples, neck, or feet can help release stored stress, while wrapping your arms around yourself can provide comfort and a sense of security.
- Explore Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), a practice involving gentle tapping on specific points of the body while focusing on calming phrases, to help regulate emotions and calm the nervous system. Additionally, engaging in bilateral movements like tapping or rocking can effectively calm the nervous system.
- Consider the practice of earthing by placing your bare feet on the ground, as preliminary evidence suggests that direct contact with the earth may help calm the nervous system and restore balance.
- Experience the invigorating effects of cold water by taking a cold shower or splashing your face with cold water, which can help jolt the nervous system and reduce stress.
- Embrace co-regulation by connecting with trusted individuals and sharing emotional experiences, as tuning into each other's emotional states can help stabilize and balance the nervous system, providing a sense of support and comfort during times of stress.
- Prioritize quality sleep as a crucial component of stress management and overall well-being. Adequate sleep allows your body and brain to rest, rejuvenate, and regulate, helping to clear your mind from stressors and promote a refreshed state upon waking.

***Keeping your emotions regulated will do more for smoothing out the divorce process than almost anything else, so don't take your feelings lightly!***

