

7 Pieces of Advice for Parents Going Through a Divorce



If you have gone through a divorce, you know how life-shattering the process can be. It's not only for you; if you have kids, it can be equally devastating to them. Though I'm not a professional counselor, I do have the wisdom of someone who has come through a divorce and lived to tell about it.

Getting through my divorce was the hardest thing I have ever had to do, but I made a promise to myself at the very beginning that I would successfully recover. I didn't want to be one of those women who 20 years after her divorce still complains, moans and talks about it to anyone who will listen. I vowed to myself that I would be happy again, not just for me, but more importantly for my kids.

I believe I have succeeded in that goal! I think that makes me as qualified as anyone to pass out advice about what I have learned over the past four years.

The following are my seven best pieces of advice for anyone facing a divorce:

1. Seek out support.

You are going to need someone to talk to. You will feel tempted to chat with anyone who will listen about your divorce – barista, co-worker, Target employees. Resist that urge. I mean this with a heart full of compassion for you: They don't care.

I had a few key friends who didn't stop taking my call when they saw my name pop up. They would let me vent. They would let me cry. They were supportive of me and steered clear of any ex-spouse bashing. You want to find friends who will lift you up, not ones who will jump on the "Isn't he the worst!" bandwagon. I never would have recovered without their support.

I also found it helpful to join a support group. Saddleback Church's DivorceCare meets every Friday night (It's a 13-week program) at its Lake Forest campus. The program includes a workbook and weekly meetings that allow for breakout discussion groups with other people going through divorces. It was a great way for me to get advice and support in a safe environment.

2. Keep your kids out of the drama.

It baffles me when I hear stories of parents who share the dirty details of their divorce with their young children. (This includes talking about the divorce within earshot of the little ones.) It's hurting these poor kids all over again. I've had parents say to me it isn't possible to leave them out of the line of fire of a divorce, but it is possible. My kids haven't ever heard me say a negative word about their dad. They don't know the specifics about our divorce (or marriage) and don't need to. Find a friend to talk to (see No. 1).

3. Find a good distraction.

This might seem like a frivolous piece of advice, but it is key to a successful recovery. Find something that makes you happy and do it. You will have an enormous amount of extra time on your hands now that you don't have your kids 100 percent of the time. Sometimes the gap left by the lack of family activity can be downright depressing. Don't fill up your time by stalking your ex-spouse on Facebook or telling yet another stranger your sob story: Find something to do!

I joke that Pinterest and the "Downton Abbey" TV series got me through my divorce. You don't have to start a nonprofit or complete an Ironman; just find something that gets your mind off the chaos that runs rampant during a divorce.

4. Get financial advice.

One of the biggest changes that occur in a divorce is your financial situation. Be proactive and get some guidance. I found someone new to prepare my taxes, and I completed Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University. These two simple steps put me on a path to financial stability.

5. Resist the urge to vent on social media.

We all know people who write long venom-filled tirades about their ex-spouse on Facebook – we have all probably blocked a few. Or then there are the passive-aggressive vague statements that are meant to draw sympathy. I believe this kind of behavior reveals more about the character of the person posting nasty things about their ex-spouse than it does about the ex-spouse. Your attorneys will tell you for different reasons not to do this, but I'm talking from a social side: no one wants to hear it. Step away from your keyboard and call a trusted friend (see No. 1).

6. Don't engage in text wars.

Divorce makes typically rational, kind people say and do things they wouldn't even think to do or say under normal

conditions. It is a crazy-making machine. For your own peace of mind, resist the temptation to drag in every issue you ever had with your ex-spouse to answer a simple question about when the kids had their last shower.

And on the other end, if your ex-spouse wants to send you long texts (or emails) about how you did them wrong, simply don't respond. It does absolutely no good to "set things straight" and will just leave you furiously texting in line at the grocery store or at an Angels game and will never accomplish anything.

I had a divorced friend who told me she created a mental file in her mind called "And that's why we're not married anymore." Every time her ex-spouse did or said something that made her angry or upset she would file it away there. It's a good practice of just letting things go.

7. Pray for your ex-spouse.

This is hands down the hardest thing to do on my list. I remember when a friend first told me to do this. I thought he was out of his mind. He assured me it would help me recover (as he did from his divorce). Practicing this every day will eventually give you peace and let you move on with your life.

If you're not a religious person, you can still get the benefits of this by wishing the best for your ex-spouse. At first you might do it through clinched teeth and with an angry heart, but eventually, over time, it heals you to be positive. If you have kids, in the end, you will need this peace to pass on to them.