

MEN'S DIVORCE GUIDE



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IS IT REALLY OVER?

Learn the ways women express themselves, the reasons for staying or leaving a marriage and how to handle the question of whether your divorce is really over.

By Sam Buser & Glenn Sternes

When a marriage ends, most of the time it is the woman who makes that decision. Constance Ahrons, a leading authority on divorce, reports that between two-thirds and three-quarters of divorces are initiated by women. So the majority of this article addresses how guys respond when the woman leaves the marriage. However, sometimes it is the husband who decides the marriage is over. Therefore we include answers for many of the questions that men ask when they decide to go. *Is it really over?*

Before a woman leaves a relationship, especially a marriage, she usually makes a lot of complaints about why she is unhappy. If the complaints fall on deaf ears, the woman will usually intensify her complaints, perhaps with a different twist. If she concludes that it does no good to complain to her man, she may eventually give up the complaining, but that doesn't mean she's satisfied. It means that she has given up trying. For most women, it takes years before they are truly convinced that nothing is going to change.

How was I to Know She was Ready to Leave?

Many guys are surprised when their woman leaves, despite the fact that she may have been threatening to leave for years. Maybe guys get a false sense of security from endless threats. It's like the story about the little boy who cried "wolf" too often. After a while, the villagers stopped believing him. Maybe you stopped believing your wife's threats as well. Or maybe you knew she was mad or unhappy; you just didn't know she was *that unhappy*. Remember that, in general, women are less likely than you to express their feelings directly; especially when they know it will cause a conflict with you. If the two of you have tried discussing problems before to no avail, then she's probably not going to tell you that she's fed up enough to leave.

George came home from work one day to find his house empty, his kids gone, and a note on the fireplace mantle stating, "I've filed for divorce." Stunned, he walked outside, only to be confronted by a sheriff's deputy who asked his name. The deputy then officially served him with papers indicating that his wife was suing him for divorce. "I never saw it coming," he told the psychologist as he paced the consultation room during a meeting of a men's group.

"Didn't you know she was angry?" asked one of the group members. "Well, I knew she was mad, but I didn't know she was *THAT* mad," he replied. George then went on to describe detailed complaints that she had made for years — all of which he had essentially ignored. The only surprise, really, was that she had waited so long to leave him. He got lulled into a false sense of security because she had not left him before. Sometimes, the handwriting on the wall is quite clear, if we could just see it.

Why Wasn't She Honest with Me about Leaving?

If your wife left you, and you had no clue it was coming, it may have been because she was afraid of your reactions. If there has been a history of violence

between the two of you, she wisely chose not to tell you of her plans. Or maybe you never touched her, but at some point, you threatened to harm her or make her life difficult if she tried to leave. In an argument, you may have used "You'll never see the kids again," or "I won't let you have a penny" or even "I'll never let you leave." Even if "all you did" was put your fist through the wall a couple of times when you were angry, you may have scared her sufficiently so that she was unwilling to be honest with you when she made her decision to go. If any of these scenarios fit, then your wife may have been smart not to tell you. You might say that you never "really" would have done any of those things, but how was she supposed to know that? The best you can do now is to not do anything else she would *experience* as threatening.

If She was So Unhappy, Why Did She Wait So Long to Leave?

Women are generally reluctant to leave relationships, even bad ones. They tend to stick it out in an effort to make it work. Women stay in unsatisfactory relationships for a number of reasons.

Why Women Don't Leave

- *Love*. "I still love him. He's like two different people."
- *Children*. "Our children are better off with a father. I couldn't raise them as well by myself."
- *Economics*. "My standard of living — and that of the kids — will go way down if I leave him."
- *Religious Beliefs*. "Marriage is a solemn commitment. Divorce is against my religious beliefs."
- *Pressure from Family and Friends*. "They tell me it is my duty to stay with him. They keep urging me to stick it out, promising it will get better."
- *Family History*. "People in our family never divorce."
- *Culture*. "Divorce goes against our cultural values."
- *Work Reasons*. "I would have to go back to work. I don't have job skills."
- *Isolation*. "I have no place to go."
- *Fear of Failure*. "I don't want to feel that I failed at marriage."

Is the Woman Always Right?

Please note that we are not saying that the woman is always right. Rather, we are saying that when she becomes convinced that it does no good to complain to her man, the relationship enters a dangerous phase. At this point, a seemingly minor — even innocuous — event can precipitate her moving out. One wife who we know left her husband immediately after she overheard him say something negative about her to their child. They had argued repeatedly over the years to the point of major conflicts, but she remained in the marriage. However after overhearing this one conversation, she suddenly packed her bags. Was it really the man's remark that ended the marriage? No, his wife had given up on getting him to address her complaints, and this simple overheard conversation was just the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.

I've been Thinking About Leaving Her. How Honest Should I Be?

Unless your wife is likely to be violent, suicidal, take the kids and hide their whereabouts, or burn the house down, be totally candid with her. Of course, we are not saying that you should use threats of divorce to indicate how angry you are with her. Only tell her that you are planning to divorce if that is what you are going to do. By being honest with her about your intent to divorce, you begin the transition in a healthier way. As Robin Green put it, "The best way to lend dignity and respect to the end of your marriage is to be as honest with your spouse as he or she will allow you to be."

I Left Her, but What If I'm Having Second Thoughts?

It is not uncommon for men (and women) to decide to leave a marriage and then later to have second thoughts. After all, she may seem like an impossible person right now, but a few years ago you thought you wanted to spend the rest of your life with her. Is she really all that different from the person you first chose to marry? While it is true that you

learned more about her after you married, it is also true that you have built some history with her.

If you are having some second thoughts, give yourself more time before you take further actions. If you have hired an attorney, ask the attorney to put matters “on pause” while you contemplate what you want to do. We don’t recommend that you dismiss your previous concerns about the marriage. Just take some extra time to evaluate. Don’t completely cancel legal proceedings, until you have greater clarity about what you want. You may want some alone time to think. You also may want to meet with your wife to discuss what she is willing to do (e.g., make certain concessions, go to marital counseling, join Alcoholics Anonymous).

One benefit from having seriously contemplated divorce and *acted upon it* (for example, by moving out or hiring an attorney) is that your partner knows that you are serious about ending the marriage. You may have threatened to divorce or leave before to little effect. Such threats lose their impact unless it becomes clear that you are willing to go through with the action. Now, however, it is more evident that you are willing to end the marriage. This may give her greater reason to reconsider her position.

If you’ve reached such a point in your relationship, you may be well off to seek a competent marital counselor. A marriage counselor can help mediate your disputes and disagreements. Having an experienced third party to listen to both sides can be invaluable at this juncture.

If you are reconsidering your decision to leave the marriage, you might want to check out Dr. Phil’s book *Relationship Rescue*. It offers a pretty good, no-nonsense, man-friendly approach to reconnecting with your partner.

I had an affair, and the thing that you should know is the odds are heavily against going from an affair with someone to a long-term, lasting relationship with that same person. One reason is that both parties know the other has already had an affair. They cheated once, and are both capable of deception. So they each

Even if “all you did” was put your fist through the wall a couple of times when you were angry, you may have scared her sufficiently so that she was unwilling to be honest with you when she made her decision to go.

lack trust in the other’s fidelity. We have seen men who gave up their careers, their children, their homes — everything — to pursue a woman. Most of those men eventually come back to see us or our colleagues for more counseling because they have jumped from the frying pan into the fire. Affairs are not good solutions for a failing marriage. They only make matters worse. If you are in the midst of an affair, we recommend that you, at least temporarily, put the affair on hold, and resolve what you are doing about the marriage. If the marriage cannot be salvaged, then it is best for you and all concerned to end the marriage rather than to carry on a double life.

Should I Offer to Go to Marriage Counseling?

Perhaps your partner said that you should go to a therapist, or that the two of you should see a marriage counselor. You probably blew the idea off. Most guys ignore or even ridicule their partner’s request for marriage counseling, perhaps convincing her even further that nothing is going to change.

Jerry was asked by his wife to go to marital counseling. His response? “If you don’t like the marriage, why don’t you go to counseling? You’ve got the problem.” He reported to us that the next time he saw her in person was three months after their divorce was final. If she suggests marital counseling, just say “yes.”

If you are interested in reconciliation, we recommend that you take the initiative and suggest marital counseling. Your

partner’s response is likely to be that it’s too late, and that you should have agreed to it before. Tell her she is right. Confess you made a mistake, and urge her to reconsider. Sometimes, if she does not really want to leave you, she will accede to your wishes. If so, don’t assume that the battle is over. She may only be going to counseling now as a way of reducing her guilt about leaving you. On the other hand, she may be holding onto a shred of hope about the relationship. She will need to see that you are sincere in your willingness to change things in the marriage. This is *not* the time to point out where she is at fault. It is a time to recognize and acknowledge *your* contribution to the marital problems. If marital counseling continues, there will be time later to address your complaints about the relationship.

You may be skeptical that you can get any kind of benefit from marital counseling. However, in his survey of married men, Neil Chethik found that two-thirds of guys who had gone to a marriage counselor believed that it had been helpful. At this point, if you are interested in keeping the marriage, you have little to lose. ■

This article has been edited and excerpted from the book The Guys-Only Guide to Getting Over Divorce and on with Life, Sex, and Relationships by Sam J. Buser, PhD and Glenn F. Sternes, PhD. Copyright ©2009. Published by Bayou Publishing. Sam Buser and Glenn Sternes use their combined expertise in working with men, men’s issues, relationships and human sexuality to bring you this book. For more information about speaking, workshops and private coaching, please visit www.GuysOnlyGuides.com.

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Concealing Information From Your Divorce Lawyer



A family lawyer presents eye-opening “real life” examples of how concealing information during divorce can backfire.

By Joseph Cordell, Esq.

We tell our clients that the most valuable thing they have in their case is their credibility — their credibility with their lawyer, with their children, with social workers or the GAL, and especially with the judge. “The moment your credibility is called into question, even slightly, is the moment you start to lose ground in your case,” we warn. “The judge has only a very short period of time to get to know you and form an impression of you. If the judge hears one inconsistency, one lie or untruth, it colors everything else you have to say.”

Of course, sometimes a client might honestly forget about a tiny retirement savings plan from three jobs and 15 years ago, or about a small plot of property in the woods that his great-aunt left him 20 years ago. But

Don't try to tell your lawyer or a judge that you forgot about that offshore bank account or about your part-time job. Even if it's an honest mistake, it makes you look bad if the other side's lawyer brings up something you have not mentioned.

don't try to tell your lawyer — or a judge — that you forgot about that offshore bank account you set up two years ago, or about your part-time job as a carpenter. And even if it's an honest mistake, it makes you look bad if the other side's lawyer brings up something you have not mentioned. If your wife knows about it, she probably told her lawyer. At trial is not the time to find out that she paid better attention to your financial affairs than you thought she did.

Two Types of Men

Some clients don't provide any information at all. Two types of men seem to fall in this category. One type doesn't want a divorce. We tell them what we need, over and over, but they simply don't give it to us. They think that if they don't hand over that bank statement or don't produce those tax records, maybe this whole nightmare will go away. They're in denial, and thereby denying their lawyer time to review the information and plan the case. Further, they are only delaying the inevitable; opposing counsel will obtain the information by subpoena eventually.

The other men who drag their feet on providing information are the high-flyers, often professionals or executives. Maybe they don't like the idea of someone telling them what to do when we insist that they "get those records for us." Maybe they think it's beneath them; that it's something that an administrative assistant should handle. Well, we don't care. Have an administrative assistant handle it. Just get it to us. If you say you can't find your bank records, we can contact the bank and get them for you, but it is going to cost

you time and money, and add significantly to your legal fees. (Most lawyers really do work hard to keep fees down. We profit more by keeping fees down and getting more referrals than by running up avoidable costs.)

I've had men try to hide their gambling problems, or "forget" to mention that little detail about a DWI arrest. Inevitably, those things come back to bite us — and surprise us, to make matters worse — at a trial. If your wife knows something about you, then you'd better assume her lawyer is going to know it, too. And if your wife and her lawyer know something about you, they may use it against you. If you once threw a shoe at your wife, I want to know about it — even if you missed her on purpose — because she might cite that as an example of your violent tendencies. If you once said, "I wish I was dead," I want to know, because she could claim you are suicidal. If you once stuck a few free samples of Claritin in your pocket in the examining room when your doctor's back was turned, I want to know, because she might cite it as an example of your dishonesty or your reliance on drugs. You might think those are ridiculous examples, but they're not. Your lawyer needs to know anything and everything your wife might say about you to hurt you or your case.

Even if you are sure it's something your wife doesn't know about, tell us anyway. I once had a client who was absolutely sure his wife did not know about a bank account he kept secretly on the side. He had used the money in the account to fund a number of affairs over the years, paying for dinners, drinks, and hotel rooms with his girlfriends. If the

client had told me about the bank account, we would have had to include it in the financial statements, and his soon-to-be-ex-wife would have been entitled to half of the money in the account. But the client didn't tell me. He figured there was no way his wife could have found out about it. But she did. One of his ex-girlfriends was angry with him for dumping her, and she told the wife about the account. The wife's lawyer sprung it on us in court. As often happens when a judge finds out that a guy is trying to hide assets, the judge awarded the entire amount in the account to the wife.

It's Not Always "Case Closed" After the Decree

Some men think that if they can hide an asset until the divorce decree becomes final, they're in the clear. Not so. I had a client who sold a lot of stock when he realized a divorce was on the horizon. He sprinkled the proceeds into a bunch of bank accounts here and there. He disclosed a couple of the accounts, but not all. His wife's lawyer hired financial consultants — which is not unusual in cases involving a lot of money or complicated holdings — to go through the books. The consultants found almost everything, except for a couple of offshore accounts that had a combined total of about \$100,000. I asked the client if what the wife's consultants found was everything and he said yes. The two sides reached a settlement that was approved by the court, and the case was closed. The client figured he had saved himself about \$50,000, since his wife hadn't found the \$100,000 in offshore accounts and avoided having to give her half.

About six months later, a statement from an offshore investment house came to the client's former home address, where his ex-wife still lived. Puzzled, she handed it to her lawyer. Her lawyer handed it to the financial consultants, who quickly tracked down the account. My client was busted. He came dragging back to me crying for help, but there was nothing I could do. He had lied to his wife, the financial consultants, to the court, and to me, his lawyer. The ex-wife's lawyer petitioned the court and the case was re-opened. The

settlement decree was altered and my former client was ordered to give his ex-wife an additional \$100,000 plus her lawyer fees in reopening the case. Why lie and risk losing not only your self-respect but twice as much as it would cost you to tell the truth?

Nothing but the Truth MEANS Nothing but the Truth

Speaking of perjury, clients do ask us about that. Sometimes they have done something wrong, and they want to know if it's all right to shade the truth while under oath. I think they expect us to wink at them, or give them some sort of signal that it's okay because this happens all the time in court. Well, we're not going to do that. We're not going to encourage or endorse or in any way approve any sort of testimony that is not accurate. Under oath, in response to questioning from your wife's lawyer, you can answer the questions as narrowly and precisely. But you must tell "nothing but the truth."

We were recently involved in a case where the wife was independently wealthy, an heiress, and she was asked questions specifically about her trust fund. The heiress answered artfully. She made it sound as if the trust fund was her sole source of income, about \$500,000 a year. When it eventually came out on cross-examination that the heiress actually had two other trust funds paying her more than \$1 million a year, she ended up paying through the nose, and her lawyer ended up on the wrong end of an ethics investigation.

Revenge and Punishment: Two Traps

Men often misjudge the importance of one particular fact: cheating wives. As lawyers, we try to be sympathetic and listen. We know it's tough any time someone you love has betrayed you and wants to leave you for someone else. You were good enough for her once, but not anymore. She's found someone better. That used to matter much more, years ago, in divorce law. If one party committed adultery, that party was at fault, and that was cause for divorce. But things have changed. Many states have no-fault

divorce, and even states that still ascribe fault tend to downplay infidelity. In truth, in most divorce cases, and especially in terms of dividing the property, the law and the courts don't much care if somebody had an affair as long as the children weren't harmed or marital funds weren't misused.

But some guys can't get over it. They want revenge. They need to make it public, they need to punish her, and they need to make her suffer. I remember we had one client who simply couldn't let it go. "This is the worst thing she could have done to me," he told us. "Killing me would have been better." He said this made her a horrible person and a horrible parent. He wanted full custody and wanted her to see their kids as little as possible. It took the judge about two minutes to shoot down that whole rationale. Having an affair typically doesn't mean the mom is a bad parent. It means she fell out of love, or she found someone else. It happens, it's human. The law has become less and less interested in the emotional side of divorce and more and more focused solely on the contractual aspects. If that client had been running the case, he probably would have showed himself to be angry and irrational; his wife might have won full custody. Instead, we finally got him to focus a little on other aspects of his wife's life — she mishandled their money, she kept getting fired from jobs, she didn't get along with his parents — and we built on a series of small things to the point where we were able to get the guy shared custody.

Sometimes in divorce cases both parties have skeletons that they'd like to keep in the closet, and they tacitly agree not to bring them up. She won't mention that he hit her, and he won't mention that he hit her because she was waving a butcher knife. I once had a client who told me that he and his soon-to-be-ex had been swingers. They would go to parties where they'd swap partners with other couples and have sex orgies, sometimes with multiple partners over the course of the evening, one after another, and sometimes multiple partners at once, threesomes and foursomes. His soon-to-be-ex told her lawyer, too. They were involved in a custody battle, but everybody sort of

reached an unspoken agreement not to mention the wife-swapping — "don't ask, don't tell" — since both were equally involved. It never came up during the proceedings. I've got to tell you, though, that throughout the proceedings, the soon-to-be-exes often looked at each other with blazing, angry eyes, and then looked away. I wondered if they were thinking (a) hey, I could destroy him or her if I told about the wife-swapping, and then, (b) oops, I'd be destroying myself, too. It was like a staredown. I, for one, was glad neither of them blinked.

The bottom line is that we know it's impossible for a client to tell his lawyer everything. A wife might bring up something the husband said seven years earlier in the heat of an argument, and it hadn't made any difference then or any time since then. But she might bring it up. The important thing is for a man going through divorce to at least hit the highlights of things that might work against him, and then let the lawyer explore the various topics if necessary. If you cheated on your taxes or with another woman, tell your lawyer. If you sometimes holler or sometimes get sullen, tell your lawyer.

Don't make a stupid mistake: Tell your lawyer everything that might work against you. ■

*This article has been edited and excerpted from the book *The 10 Stupidest Mistakes Men Make When Facing Divorce And How To Avoid Them* by Joseph Cordell, Esq. Copyright © 2010. Published by Three Rivers Press. Joseph Cordell is founder, with his wife, Yvonne, of Cordell & Cordell, P.C., one of the leading law firms in the United States representing men in family law cases. He is also the creator of www.DadsDivorce.com. For more information, visit www.cordellcordell.com*

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The Emotional Consequences of Infidelity and its Impact on Divorce

By Aida Seetner, BScOT, M.ED., RMFT, RSW

When the emotional impact of infidelity is unresolved, the divorce process can be turned into a costly and stressful battle — one that lasts far beyond the end of the marriage.

The topic of infidelity is a heated one, which lends itself to a wide spectrum of speculations, judgments and emotional reactions. It also leads to many questions such as: “How could this have happened?” “Should I stay or should I go?” “Can my marriage be saved?” “Will I ever be able to get past my anger?” and “Will I ever be able to survive this divorce?”

Defining Infidelity

To begin with, we must keep in mind that what constitutes “infidelity” to one person or couple, may not constitute “infidelity” to another. The key factor that bonds all definitions of infidelity is the feeling of betrayal as an outcome. The act occurs within a committed relationship and is a violation of the agreed-upon norms and boundaries (whether clearly stated or implied) within that relationship. It may be sexual and/or emotional. It may be precipitated by either party in the relationship. In a number of studies conducted in 2005, it was found that

infidelity occurs in approximately 25% of all relationships and tends to be initiated by more men than women. In my practice, I have found an equal proportion of male and female betrayers.

Infidelity is Often a Symptom

“How could this have happened?” is a common and natural question; and not a simple one to answer. Often, but not always, “infidelity” is a symptom of an underlying troubled relationship. The “betrayer” is unable to cope with unresolved conflicting issues in the relationship, be they emotional and/or physical. Rather than choosing to tackle the issues directly with her/his partner, he/she chooses to seek out another partner in secrecy. One example of an issue that I have seen in my practice was of a man who felt powerless in his relationship with a critical and domineering wife. Having a secret extramarital affair was the only way he could find to assert his independence. Another example was a woman who no longer felt emotionally

or physically passionate about her marriage, but feared hurting her partner by telling him. Instead, she found passion in a secret relationship with another man.

A second possible source of “infidelity” is unresolved emotional issues within an individual that are not directly related to his/her marriage. These can include a history of childhood sexual abuse, childhood emotional deprivation, sexual identity issues, or an internal struggle with feelings of self-worth.

Whatever the origin of the act of infidelity, the resulting emotional reactions in the “betrayed” cover a wide spectrum, but tend to be consistent across individuals. Shock, devastation, anger, sadness, shame, anxiety, self-doubt, confusion and a desire for revenge are but a few. Some common emotions in the “betrayer” include fear, sadness, guilt, remorse, shame, anxiety, confusion and feelings of worthlessness.

Infidelity: Relationship at a Crossroad

Once the act of infidelity is exposed, the impact on the relationship is typically devastating to both parties. The essential question that follows is: “Should we recommit or quit?” Relationships can be saved through couple therapy as long as both parties are equally committed to the process. Having one party stay at home while the other pursues therapy will not ultimately save the relationship. Both parties must be willing to invest a high degree of effort over an extended period of time, and “time” itself must pass for true trust to be restored. On the other hand, it is not unusual for one party to choose to reconcile, while the other chooses to end the relationship. This will pose an extreme emotional challenge to the partner who wishes to work towards reconciliation. Many of the reactions that I have described above (e.g. shock, devastation, anger, sadness, shame, anxiety, self-doubt, confusion and a desire for revenge) will be intensified and further complicated by grief and mourning.

The Potential Emotional Damage

When a decision to divorce is made, both partners will be experiencing a “death,” and their emotional response will be similar to the response to an actual death of a loved one. Each individual will enter a stage of grief and mourning, which will be experienced to varying intensities. If one person does not want to let go while the other is ready to quit, the former person may suffer a more intense grief reaction, which is typically characterized by feelings of anger and depression. An unhealthy divorce will most likely follow if healthy grief work and the resolution of feelings of betrayal are not achieved. Here are some typical case scenarios:

A male client was enraged with his wife for pursuing an extramarital affair and then asking him for a divorce. He found that he could not let go of his rage, and chose to use his 10 and 12 year-old children as a weapon against his wife. He attempted to alienate his children from her by continuously bad-mouthing her to them (including telling

them that she cheated on him), and evoking guilt in them when they chose to spend time with her rather than him. Furthermore, this client attempted to gain full custody of his children and to prove that his wife was an incompetent parent. In reality, his wife was an extremely competent and compassionate mother with whom the children had a very strong and healthy bond.

This serves as a critical example of how unresolved feelings of anger resulting from infidelity cannot only impede a healthy divorce process, but can also cause serious emotional damage to the children. It is crucial that children are given the freedom to bond equally with both of their parents, regardless of whether one parent betrayed the other. The children should NEVER be told about the betrayal, as then they will be pressured to take sides. Furthermore, each child feels that he/she is an extension of each parent. When one parent bad-mouths the other, the child’s self-esteem is deeply injured.

Another case example would be a female client who caught her husband in bed with another woman. This client was suffering from feelings of inadequacy prior to the discovery. Her low self-esteem predated her marriage. As she found her husband distancing from her in the last few months, her self-esteem plummeted. She decided to file for a divorce based on infidelity but, at the same time, concluded that it would be best for her husband and three children if she slid out of the picture as quickly as possible. She therefore directed her lawyer to give her husband 75% of the assets, as well as full custody of the children. Clearly her actions are not only short-changing herself, but also the emotional needs of her children to have both parents present and active in their lives.

A third example would be a male client who always felt a deep sense of emotional deprivation in his marriage. In his eyes, his wife attended to everyone else’s needs before his own. This left him feeling chronically and deeply hurt and enraged. To add insult to injury, this man discovered that his wife was having an affair with another man, after

which she asked for a divorce. In retaliation, the client was determined to “rob his wife clean” of any equal division of assets. In his mind, she “owed” him for all the years that she deprived him emotionally and for her recent affair. A vicious legal battle followed.

A fourth example would be a male client who engaged in an extramarital affair for one year while continuously feeling torn. On the one hand, he could not exit the relationship, but on the other hand he experienced extreme guilt and shame. Finally, finding these emotions unbearable, he broke up his relationship with the other woman and approached his wife with a full admission of guilt. Witnessing her distraught state and experiencing her intense rage, his feelings of shame and guilt became unbearable. As a means of alleviating the intensity of his emotions, he entered the divorce process with the intent of giving his wife “anything” she wanted. This allowed her to demand “everything” as a means of discharging her anger.

All of the above examples address clients who struggled with deep unresolved emotions resulting from the cause and effects of infidelity. As a consequence, each client entered into an unhealthy divorce process. In the first and third examples, both clients were motivated by rage and a desire to gain revenge against their partners. In the second and fourth examples, the clients were motivated by feelings of extreme inadequacy, shame and guilt. Such unhealthy sources of motivation typically create the basis for high conflict and highly problematic divorce processes. All family members suffer, including innocent children.

A Healthy Divorce is Possible

Psychotherapy can assist individuals in gaining awareness of their unresolved emotional issues, working these issues through, and developing new skills to cope with the reality of a dissolved marriage. Upon completion of such work, these individuals will be well-equipped to enter a healthy divorce process. It becomes a win-win situation for all

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rageaholic:

Abstain From These Behaviors

An effective action plan for what we can do to control our anger.

By Newton Hightower

The first question to ask yourself is, “Why am I reading this article?” The fact that you even have this article means that either you realize you have a problem, your wife is leaving you, the children aren’t talking to you, or you may just feel guilty at how your anger is affecting your family and your life. Apart from the damage your anger is doing to your marriage, we know that conflict between parents is traumatic for children.

“What Can I Do to Never Blow Up Again?”

You may have made resolutions such as:

“I will never do that again.”

“I will never scream like that again.”

“I will never put my hands on her again.”

Making resolutions like “I will never rage again” doesn’t work. If it did, you would not be reading this article.

While our intentions are often good, we rageaholics just can’t make our resolutions work. Simple self-talk and global affirmations about our “inherent goodness” don’t work. Although we should be aware of our internal voices, we must also learn to develop new voices to replace the “soldier talk” and the heroic rescue fantasies discussed in this article. More than anything else, we must have a plan of action. What follows is an effective action plan for what we can do to abstain from expressing anger.

When Angry — Stop the Following 15 Behaviors:

1. Stop Speaking.

Stop telling yourself:

“I’m not going to just sit here and let her talk to me that way.”

“She’s the one who needs to shut up for once.”

The all-time, fail-proof, safest action when we feel rage well up inside is silence. We must abstain from speaking, keep the lid on our pressure cooker, keep the valve shut and turn off the fire by stopping the thoughts that build up the steam. We either have to change our internal dialogue or learn to shut it off.

Silence is the number one behavior to learn. Being silent doesn’t mean

that we have stopped listening. Instead, it means that we are in control of our anger.

2. Stop Staying.

Stop telling yourself:

“But she hates it when I walk out on her.”

“It’s my house; I’m not going anywhere.”

What does “stop staying” mean? It means leave the scene quickly and quietly. Imagine an anger scale of 0 to 10. Zero equals no anger and ten equals rage. Once you have gone to 5 or higher, get out. It’s probably too late if you wait until you get to 8 or above. In fact, once you get that angry, you won’t be able to restrain yourself from speaking and you probably won’t be able to leave. When you feel your anger start to go up the scale or if it just jumps up to 5, don’t stay. Leave quietly.

How do you know when you’ve reached a five on the anger scale? Well, you should begin to monitor your anger signs to become aware of your internal states. Each person has different physical responses when he gets angry. Some people will sweat profusely; others will feel their muscles tightening. Some will get clammy hands, and still others will feel their blood pressure rising. Learn your anger signs.

3. Stop Staring.

Stop telling yourself:

“I was just looking at her.”

“I’m not staring. She wants me to look at her when she talks, so I was looking.”

Couples who stare intensely at each other when they are angry are

actually glaring. Looking someone in the eye in a hostile way is taunting and provocative. On the streets this kind of behavior has led to more than a few severe beatings and even deaths. Glaring is a primitive fight or flight response and is often a precursor to physical violence. Many ragers use staring and the “evil eye” to intimidate those around them.

4. Stop Interrupting.

Stop telling yourself:

“I have to interrupt because what she’s saying is wrong.”

“What do you mean don’t interrupt her? She was the one who interrupted me.”

It is sometimes impossible to tell who is interrupting whom when anger begins to rise. It is important not to interrupt and to allow others to interrupt you, but this is the one thing that most of us ragers feel we can’t stand.

Why is it that we ragers always think we are on the verge of making some profound and interesting point when someone interrupts us? We say, “Wait a minute. That’s the one thing I can’t stand. I’m just about to get to the point here.” We need to train ourselves not to interrupt others. If someone interrupts us, we must allow it. If interrupted, we need to go back to number one: Abstain from speaking. If we are getting madder, then we shouldn’t stay. Our wives will notice the silence and they will notice us leaving quietly. They will also notice that we are allowing them to interrupt us without interrupting them.

5. Stop Cursing.

Stop telling yourself:

“Hey, you don’t know where I work. Over there, everybody curses all the time.”

*“You mean I’m supposed to say ‘ouch’ instead of *&.%@#\$\$+ when I stub my toe?”*

One of the most important behaviors to abstain from immediately is profanity. The reason is not from a moral or religious point of view, but

Simple self-talk and global affirmations about our “inherent goodness” don’t work. Although we should be aware of our internal voices, we must also learn to develop new voices to replace the “soldier talk” and the heroic rescue fantasies.

from a psychological and behavioral perspective. If we don't curse, we don't inflame our rage. If we abstain from all profanity, no matter what, it will immediately reduce the amount of anger we must manage. In other words, cursing adds steam to our pressure cooker and inflames our anger.

If you were to have a temper tantrum without profanity, where you stomp your foot and say, "Gee whiz, I'm really upset by that. Golly gee, that really frustrated me," then took a blood sample, you would likely find no biochemical change. If you were to pretend having a temper tantrum with profanity, even though you were not angry, then took a blood sample, you would find a biochemical change. These changes would occur because the use of profanity starts the flow of adrenaline for rageaholics.

Some men in anger groups have worked on stopping profanity for an entire year before they went through a full day without cursing. Other men have been able to do it almost instantly.

6. Stop Name-Calling.

Stop telling yourself:

"But she was calling me names. She's the one with the problem."

"I didn't mean it when I called her those names. She understands that I was just angry."

Name-calling is another way to produce steam. It is also a behavior that we rageaholics need to abstain from immediately. We need to stop using not only the vile, crude names, but also names like "stupid" and "crazy." Using those names inflames an argument. When we name-call, even in jest, our spouse doesn't know we are "just kidding" and doesn't think it is funny. Name-calling hurts others and it raises our anger level.

Name-calling is a destructive element in a relationship. If you call your wife a bad name, there's no going back. It could take months for her to recover. You may think, "I'm over my anger.

Some men in anger groups have worked on stopping profanity for an entire year before they went through a full day without cursing. Other men have been able to do it almost instantly.

Why can't she let it go?" Ragers don't understand the level of destruction caused when they call their partner a name. It's like former President Truman saying to the emperor of Japan, "It was just a couple of bombs. What's the big deal?"

7. Stop Threatening.

Stop telling yourself:

"Sometimes I just want to warn her she's about to go too far."

"You're not going to talk to me that way. No one is going to talk to me that way. I don't take that kind of talk from anyone."

Even subtle threats wreak havoc in terms of your partner's fear of abandonment. The object is to make a woman feel more secure through the use of reassurance rather than argument, accusations or threats, which would only increase her anger and fear of abandonment.

8. Stop Pointing.

Furthermore, stop telling yourself:

"I was just trying to get her attention."

"I'm not aware of my pointing—it's a natural thing to do."

Pointing a finger at someone is frequently an unconscious behavior. We ragers might need to ask our spouse and friends to tell us when we are doing this. In my therapy groups, members make each other aware of finger-pointing. Instead of pointing at the other person, you need to look at yourself.

9. Stop Yelling, Raising your Voice, or Talking in a Mean Tone.

Stop telling yourself:

"Yelling is the only way to get her attention and let her know I'm serious."

"I'm not yelling. She's not listening. If she would just listen, I wouldn't have to yell."

Like other self-destructive behaviors, raising our voices and yelling only fuels our anger. Like finger-pointing, we are sometimes unaware of how loud we are talking. First, we must gain some awareness of these behaviors. On a scale of 0-10 (0 equals silence), when you raise your voice to a 2 or 3, it needs to be brought to your attention. (How do you know if it's a 2 or a 3? Ask other people to let you know.) It is important for spouses, family members, friends and therapists to intervene early when we begin to raise our voices. They can say something like, "You are beginning to raise your voice. Please lower it." As a rager, our appropriate response should be, "You are right. Thanks for pointing it out." Having others point out to us when we are raising our voice and yelling will help us monitor our behavior.

Furthermore, stop telling yourself:

"Hey, what's she talking about? I wasn't yelling, cursing or anything."

"This is how I normally talk. If she wanted some mushy-mouth guy, she should have married one. That ain't me."

The "mean tone" is an important but hard issue for rageaholics to understand. Even though we are abstaining from the more obvious behaviors of rage like touching or slamming doors, our wives may feel that we despise or hate them, just by the tone of our voice.

10. Stop Being Sarcastic. Stop Mocking.

Stop telling yourself:

"She doesn't understand that I'm just joking."

"She has no sense of humor. That's the real problem."

Sarcastic one-liners are fine for television sitcoms, but they don't work for maintaining a real family life. When the actors leave the stage after delivering their sarcastic remark, they go back to their dressing rooms. After we drop a sarcastic one-liner, we have to stick around for the consequences. Often ragers don't realize how much pain and hurt our sarcastic remarks cause. We misjudge the impact of our sarcasm. We need to stop making wisecracks about our wife and family members.

In addition, stop telling yourself:
"I was just trying to show her what it sounds like when she snivels about work all the time."
"That's just the way I let her know when she's nagging me too much."

11. Stop Throwing Things, Slamming Doors, or Banging Walls.

Stop telling yourself:
"It's just a way to let off steam. Besides, I'm not hurting anyone."
"At least I don't break things like I used to. Now I usually just throw pillows."

We need to stop throwing things like pillows, keys and other objects. All objects including shirts, jackets and underwear should also not be thrown. Throwing is an aggressive act that is perceived as threatening and intimidating by those around us. Throwing things—regardless of how harmless the objects are—fuels our anger.

Also stop telling yourself:
"Slamming doors is just my way of letting her know I really want to be left alone."
"I don't see who or what it hurts to release my anger a little."

Slamming a door shut is the ultimate "last word." We ragers were trained in the "two slam exit method." We first curse out whoever is in the room, then slam the door. We wait a few seconds, then open the door again, say a few more vile things, and slam it shut. This action results in several things. First, it fuels our anger. Second, it is a provocative act that reeks

of intimidation. Third, it says that we won't stick around to work things out. Slamming doors is also a good way to infuriate the other person.

12. Stop all Non-Affectionate Touching.

Stop telling yourself:
"She was out of control. I was just holding her on the bed so she could get control of herself."
"I was just defending myself when she tried to slap me."

It's unacceptable to touch in anger, including any kind of aggressive touching like pushing or holding. It's also a bad idea. If the police are called and your spouse or girlfriend has bruises, that is domestic violence. In that instance, you can be arrested and jailed.

13. Stop Telling "Hero Stories."

Stop telling yourself:
"I just wanted you to understand what really happened."
"I did pretty good considering I was provoked."

"Hero stories" are stories we tell about how we lost our temper or made a sarcastic remark. When we retell the story, it makes us look like a hero for standing up against someone. Seldom do we tell these stories with shame; mostly we tell them with pride. It's as if we are waiting for our audience to say, "What a man" or "Yeah, you really told her off." Often we find ourselves using profanity when telling and retelling the story. Telling hero stories is like getting two rushes for the price of one. We lose our temper and get a rush of adrenaline, then we call and tell a friend our hero story and get another rush.

Hero stories only fuel our anger by making us look bigger than we really are. They often hide pain, anguish and fear.

14. Stop Sighing, Clucking, or Rolling your Eyes.

Stop telling yourself:
"Well, it's discouraging to hear her complain all the time."

"My sighs just mean I'm tired. It wasn't directed at her. She's too touchy."

Another behavior to abstain from is using various kinds of sighs. These sounds are often a way to express anger, disgust or disapproval. The sighs can also heat up an argument, especially if people are overly sensitive to each other's moods.

Nonverbal explosive responses generate a lot of hostility in relationships. More and more researchers are finding that couples express most of the hostility to each other in nonverbal ways, so the how is as important as what we say.

15. Stop Criticizing and Stop Lecturing.

Stop telling yourself:
"If I don't criticize her, how will she know when she does something wrong?"
"You mean I can't express any of my feelings?"

It is essential that we abstain from criticism. A lot of men with rage problems think it's our job to help our wives improve by pointing out their shortcomings. Stopping this behavior in ourselves calls for a dramatic shift in values. It is not our job in life to point out what others are doing wrong. ■

This article has been edited and excerpted from the book Anger Busting 101: New ABCs for Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them by Newton Hightower. Published by Bayou Publishing. Newton Hightower is a licensed psychotherapist, founder and director of the Center for Anger Resolution, Inc., in Houston, Texas. You can purchase the book at www.BayouPublishing.com.

For more articles on anger, please visit:

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the Single Father

By Thomas Hoerner

Some practical and positive tips on how to adjust to being a single father.

The day I arrived home with my children was a Sunday, halfway through a two-week school break. My kids were out of school, and I had to work in less than 12 hours! What about my job? My career was in full bloom, and I was on my way up. What was I to do? I had business trips starting in a week. Who was going to watch my children? Luckily, I had a friend who would help for a few days while I enrolled them in school and found a permanent day-care for my three-year-old. But how was I going to arrange my new life in that short of time?

We unpacked and tried to settle in by watching TV and making several trips to an empty refrigerator. At times, we sat in awkward silence. We tried to ignore it, but I could tell everyone was nervous about our new situation. That night I lay in bed and stared at the ceiling I was beginning to know so well. I thought about my job, my past relationship with my ex-wife, and the responsibilities that remained ahead. As I drifted into a restless sleep, I thought, “What the hell am I going to do now?” Fortunately I found this prayer. I keep it nearby and read it when fears are about to overtake me.

A Single Parent's Prayer

Lord Grant Me

*Time enough to do all the chores,
join in the games, help with the lessons,
say the night prayers, and much more.*

*Strength enough to be bread baker
and bread winner,
knee patcher and peace maker,
ball player and bill juggler.*

*Hands soft enough to hug and to hold,
to tickle and touch,
yet strong enough to pick up
and put away, and then to iron and fold.*

*Heart enough to share and to care,
to listen and to understand,
and to make this home the best
a single parent can.*

-unknown

What it Takes to Be a Dad

Ask men what it means to be a father and most reply, “It means spending time with your child.” Well, that helps a lot, but showing up is only part of it. Imagine being in a relationship with a woman and just showing up for sex, not contributing anything. Not a great return on that. The same holds true with being a father. The best rewards are from the efforts put forth.

In addition to play time, the time spent with a child should be used teaching right from wrong, instilling basic values of self-respect and pride, and living by the golden rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

In turn, the rewards are immeasurable. There's no replacement for the words, “Dad, I love you!” or the memory of “Look Dad, I caught it!” In addition, the accomplishment of raising good children is considered a noble act (especially in a woman's eyes) and adds an overwhelming boost to a father's self-esteem.

Need help being a dad? The National Fatherhood Initiative (fatherhood.org) provides the following on what it takes to be a dad:

- Read to your children.
- Keep your promises.
- Go for walks together.
- Let your child help with household projects.
- Spend time one-on-one with each child.
- Tell your children about your own childhood.
- Go to the zoo, museums and ball games as a family.
- Set a good example.
- Use good manners.
- Help your children with their homework.
- Show your children lots of warmth and affection.
- Set clear consistent limits.
- Consider how your decisions will affect your children.
- Listen to your children.
- Know your children's friends.
- Take your children to work.
- Open a savings account for college education.
- Resolve conflicts quickly.
- Take your children to your place of worship.
- Make a kite together.

Don't Be a Part of These Statistics

But the real winner in a father/child relationship is the child. Without their fathers, children face overwhelming odds against living a productive life. Imagine your child as part of these Census Bureau statistics:

- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes.
- 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes.

- 80% of rapists motivated with displaced anger come from fatherless homes.

71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.

- 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes.

85% of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in a fatherless home.

- 70% of long term prison inmates come from fatherless homes.

Teen mothers are far more likely to have grown up in fatherless homes.

Surprised? I was, especially when the role of a father has been traditionally limited to disciplinarian or banker. Common phrases from my childhood were, “Wait till your father gets home,” and “Dad, I need some money.”

Even today, many believe a father is incapable of nurturing a child. After all, how could a father understand what maternal instincts are? We don't carry the child for nine months.

But a man doesn't have to bear children to have the ability to nurture. The truth is that there is nothing a mother can do that a father can't. Okay, there is one thing, but that is why they sell formula.

Adjusting to Being a Bachelor Parent

The new challenges and adjustments that we face as bachelor parents can make us feel overwhelmed. Some bachelor parents encounter radical changes in their own personal behaviour before finally adjusting to their new life. These may include depression, eating problems, sleep disorders, smoking, and drug or alcohol abuse. Some fathers will even develop stress-related illnesses such as back pains, headaches, heart attacks, common colds and impotence. The best advice dealing with these issues comes from Dr. Whatwentwrong, “If you need help, get it. A father is absolutely no good to anyone if he is sick.”

Mike, a custodial father of three, shares another common problem fathers face with divorce. “When my wife deserted us she made more money than I did. Our dual income supported two new cars, a home and special care for my

handicapped daughter. Now, without my ex's income and the reduced hours I am able to work, I have lost my home, my cars and my savings."

These types of losses can certainly make adjusting to a single parent role more difficult. But it's not the end of the world. Mike has some sound advice in this situation: "Take a step back, regroup and start over. Many successful people hit rock bottom before reaching their goals. And there is nothing, except children, that can't be replaced. (This includes the ex-wife.)"

Realizing that no two situations are the same, we are all, at one time or another, bedfellows to loneliness, boredom, depression, anxiety, isolation, guilt, low self-esteem and anger. When this happens it is important to overcome these negative feelings so you can live life to the fullest. There are no secrets and no short-cuts to doing this. It takes time, energy, and a positive attitude every day — starting today! Trust me, everyday then gets easier and more enjoyable.

The reality is that some fathers will have an easier time coping than others. Paul, a father who wanted his divorce and custody of his children says, "The start of my custody ended a volatile relationship and court battle. My first day of custody was a chance to start over and live peacefully with my kids." Fathers like Paul, who perceive the end of their relationship as a positive experience, will experience increased self-esteem, blooming maturity and enhanced growth in personal relationships.

However, fathers who did not want a divorce or custody may see their children as obstacles to getting laid. That's too bad, because these fathers will miss a lot of the rewards that go along with fatherhood, and adjustment to their new situation will be difficult.

The first step to a positive outlook is cutting the strings from the ex-wife and accepting that the relationship is over. For many, letting go is difficult. Some men hold onto unrealistic expectations and at times act stupid. No doubt, breaking up is hard to do, but when ending a relationship is inevitable, make it as easy

Realizing that no two situations are the same, we are all, at one time or another, bedfellows to loneliness, boredom, depression, anxiety, isolation, guilt, low self-esteem and anger.

as possible for yourself by following these rules:

- Don't act like a weak, quivering baby. Or at least don't let her see you acting like one.
- Cut the strings! Leave her alone. Don't call, don't send cards and never attempt to reconcile.
- Accept that she is going to start a relationship that does not include you. And the sooner you get over it, the better.
- Remember the not-so wonderful parts of your relationship and use these bad times as motivation.
- Get over it!
- Control your rage and jealousy. Don't stalk, harass, threaten, hit, grab, or touch her in any way.
- Mind your own business. An ex-husband has no right to ask questions of his ex-wife, her friends, her co-workers or her family. Besides, you won't like the answers anyway.
- Do not break anything, especially if it's yours.
- Leave her friends alone, especially her boyfriend. It's not his fault.

Letting Go

My father once said, "There is a fine line between love and hate, and in order to hate someone you must love them." My advice is, don't hate her. If a father is angry and consumed with the actions of his ex-wife, he will be unable to see the positive things in his life. Not only will he be unhappy, but it will be impossible to keep the best interests of his children in mind. Letting go of the hate is just as important as letting go of the love and memories. For fathers struggling to let go, try some of the following. Force yourself if you have to:

- Laugh at something. Nothing heals like laughter.

- Stay close and rely on family and friends. They are the only ones willing to hear these kinds of problems.
- Begin a social life as soon as possible. A father needs to date and socialize to keep his sanity and to present a positive image to his children. They learn by example. Let them learn to be happy.
- Do something for yourself at least one day a week. Join a bowling league, exercise club, singles' club or church group. Start a hobby or even return to school.
- Do something on a regular basis outside the home..
- Buy something for yourself that will be seen often. I buy plants or something for our home. Clothes are a nice touch, too.
- Call someone, but don't unload on them. With the exception of a close friend or family member, no one really wants to hear your problems. (You know, family and friends may not want to hear about them either!)
- Laugh at something. Nothing heals like laughter. (Just in case you missed this one before.)
- Go party a little. Attend a singles function.
- Make a new friend, or look up an old one.
- Try dating.
- Pamper yourself. There is something about a bubble bath and a bottle of wine, especially when shared with someone.
- Spend some time alone and enjoy it.
- Consider hypnosis. Doctors often use hypnosis to help people stop smoking, lose weight, and overcome various phobias. It may be just the help you need.
- Take complete care of yourself. Just as physical health depends on a balanced diet for nourishment, mental and social needs also require nourishment. A bachelor parent is entitled to live a happy life. If not, he won't be of any use to anyone, including himself.
- Look to God, as faith can bring strength and inner peace. Spiritual health can contribute to a positive outlook on life.
- Avoid rushing into another relationship. Entering a relationship to make

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Why can't Grandma come to your apartment?" Miranda once asked me just before I dropped them off with my ex-in laws. "I want her to meet your cats!"

"Miranda," I asked, "Do you know how we talked about your having a home with me and a home with Mommy?"

She nodded.

"Well, you have homes in those places as well as homes in the homes of all of your grandparents."

She nodded again.

"Thing is..." I began, my brain only a few words ahead of my mouth, "my home is my apartment with Anne, but not mommy's home anymore. Anne's home is with me, but not your home with mommy. Mommy's home is the home you spend most of your time in, but she doesn't have a home in my home like you have a home in my home and just about everyone else's home..."

I checked Miranda to see if she was any less confused than I was.

"Being in a home that's not your own is... well, it feels a little weird," I said. "Right?"

She nodded in a way that told me she was simply going to drop the issue, complexities digested or not. As I put away my coach's whiteboard and Venn diagrams, I was struck by a memory. During the pre-cell phone era, when I was just a little older than Miranda is now, my dad once dropped me off at my guitar teacher's house as he'd done every week for a year. He didn't stay to watch me go inside, which was a mistake, because the place was empty and locked up tight.

I sat on the front steps for a few minutes, then just picked up my guitar and



The Way Home

A father's insight helps him see divorce through his child's eyes.

By Joel Schwartzberg

proceeded to walk the four or so miles home. I skirted the unpaved side of the road and crossed two large intersections. I must have looked odd to passing motorists: an intense-looking seven-year-old traveling by himself, carrying a guitar nearly as tall as he was.

By the time I got home, my dad had already left to pick me up from the lesson, and it took a few minutes for my mother to piece the facts together. She couldn't understand why I didn't use a neighbor's phone. I knew the way home from the weekly drive. I'd just never traveled it alone before.

This is how I see my kids dealing with the divorce: navigating their own paths home by whatever routes seem most familiar and comfortable. There's no rush for them to fully grasp the collateral fallout of a broken marriage, or the way it marks the passports of everyone linked to it. It's enough to know that the road they've been traveling hasn't fallen away beneath their feet. It's merely been repaved. ■

This article has been edited and excerpted from the book The 40-Year-Old Version, Humoirs of a Divorced Dad by Joel Schwartzberg. Copyright © 2009 and published by Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing, Inc. Joel Schwartzberg is an award-winning essayist and screenwriter, national champion orator, public speaking instructor, law school drop-out and a divorced father. His essays have been published widely in North America. For more information, visit www.bookfordad.com and www.jest-totkill.com

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Popular Myths about Shared Parenting

By Jill Burrett and Michael Green



Sometimes separated or divorced parents are keen to work out a good shared parenting arrangement but are discouraged by the prejudices of friends or professionals. We will unravel some common myths about shared parenting in order to help those parents get past such objections.

Myth: Kids Need to Spend Most of Their Time in One Home

Reality: This is an understandable leftover from hopes that our marriage would thrive and our kids would be in

A silver lining to the disappointment of separating is children get the chance to develop a closer relationship with parents who are committed to shared parenting but who weren't very available before, and who can therefore develop their parenting skills more effectively.

one happy home and an unquestioned presumption of many lawyers and counselors. It's a view that seriously underestimates the adaptability of children and fails to appreciate what is really important for them. The stability that children need is more than geographical. It is emotional stability — the stability of meaningful, continuing relationships. The emotional stability that's critical for a child's healthy development comes not only from ongoing relationships with parents, but also from their community. The child's world is those relationships that arise from associations and the sense of belonging that these important connections bring.

Myth: Kids Need to Know Where They Live and Not be Going Back and Forth

Reality: A clear, simple parenting plan plus goodwill from both parents will quickly get children into a routine. Breaking up a week into smaller chunks may mean that parents don't go long without seeing their children, but it may also mean children are constantly changing over. Changeovers are often the hardest time, so lean toward a pattern that has the fewest changeovers, except for very small children.

Q: No sooner are my children settled with me than they have to gear up to change again. Is it better if the children stay in one place and the parents rotate?

A: It needs a dependable communication system to assist with smooth changeovers and a high degree of dedication and positive spirit. If they are staying in the family home where they have been living, this may only be possible for a time as the home may have to

be sold for your financial settlement. Maybe you should initially consider two- or three-week blocks of time to allow for a proper settling-in before the children have to uproot themselves again.

Myth: Infants Under Three Shouldn't Spend Nights Away from Mom

Reality: This view was based on outdated theory and is contrary to recent research. Attachment theory tended to emphasize the exclusivity of the maternal bond and its continuity as being crucial to healthy development. There is no consistent evidence that a night with their father is going to cause harm. If children are well attached to the other caretaker (Dad), they should soon become used to him coming at night if needed, for example. There is growing evidence that overnight stays in infancy form a meaningful basis for parent-child relations.

At times, Mom's own attachment to her child interferes with developing a suitable parenting arrangement. Maternal anxiety is a very powerful protector of young infants and therefore deserves respect. Overnight contact with babies and infants (approximately up to eighteen months) is not crucial for cementing parent-child bonds; daytime contact periods are the building blocks.

Myth: The More Homier, Hands-On Parent is Better Equipped for Childcare

Reality: Not necessarily, though this parent will have confidence and experience. Emotional bonds are created and strengthened by parents being available and doing things with and for children,

but it's not just this. It's listening and talking empathically with your children, hanging out together, sharing parts of your life with them, and helping them learn to discover independently that creates bonds.

Q: It can't be right for our twelve-month-old to be away from me for long periods even though he knows his dad?

A: If he has had time with Dad, then he will have an attachment, meaning he's okay for increasingly long periods without you in Dad's care. Keep Dad informed about established routines so he can have a settled baby to bring back to you, which will enhance your confidence in his care. Some dads aren't that good with babies on their own — let his relatives help if they're local.

A silver lining to the disappointment of separating is children get the chance to develop a closer relationship with parents who are committed to shared parenting but who weren't very available before, and who can therefore develop their parenting skills more effectively. A parent who appeared to contribute little to family life deserves the chance to become a more involved parent.

Myth: Where There's Conflict Between Parents, There Should be Little or No Contact

Reality: Lawyers and counselors sometimes suggest that the only solutions to conflict between separated parents are: to reduce or eliminate contact between the parents or between father and children, or to have supervised pick-ups and drop-offs. This is inconsistent with

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It's Your Life, Take Charge!

Here are some practical suggestions on how to make your divorce easier and less adversarial — so you and your children can move on with dignity and respect.

By Diana S. Dodson



We need to learn how to have a more amenable divorce, especially when there are children involved. It is very difficult to get a divorce without feeling or doing some of the following:

- Anger.
- Getting even with our ex-spouse.
- Blaming your spouse for the problems.
- Not accepting your responsibility for the marriage breaking up.
- Denying the problems exist.
- Putting the children in the middle.
- Feeling like a failure.
- Feeling rejected.

Don't Try to Get Even with Your Spouse

These are some of the things we do and feel when we are in the middle of getting. We may feel we aren't to blame and we don't know how the marriage went wrong. Because we have so many feelings, one of our first desires may be to get even with our soon to be ex-spouse. We want them to feel as badly as we do. We do things that we know will hurt them.

Getting even is only a temporary fix and can hurt the children. We really don't want to set a bad example for our children. Please remember our children are the most precious things in our lives. We want them to respect us and we need to set a good example no matter how we feel.

When one or the other spouse is feeling negative, or does not love their spouse anymore, they often set up negative situations, hoping the other one will leave the marriage. It's harder to say, "I don't love you anymore," than to create a miserable marriage. Try to at least be honest with your spouse and let them know how you're feeling.

Honesty can at least decrease some of the anger and frustrations that you helped create.

Even if you feel some anger, frustration, or rejection or are just plain devastated, there are ways to feel better about the divorce.

Ideas and Examples to Try

- Try to remember if both of you aren't happy in the marriage, then it really isn't a good marriage.

You must tell each other the truth and stop lying. Don't distort and manipulate your feelings. If you aren't honest with your feelings, then that is a form of a lie.

A Few Parenting Tips

If parents can accept the divorce and come to terms with themselves and each other, the divorce will be much easier on the children. The children will then have a better chance to adjust. Accept that it is over, learn, and grow from the experience and become a better parent.

IF parents can accept the divorce and come to terms with themselves and each other, the divorce will be much easier on the children. The children will then have a better chance to adjust.

- Don't try to hurt the other person. This is very immature. You may think this will make you feel better, but you will probably feel ashamed of yourself when you start to feel better. You will probably feel that your ex-spouse wasn't worth the emotional turmoil you put yourself through.
- Don't blame the other one entirely. Accept your part in the breakup.
- Try to sit down quietly, maybe with an unbiased third party, to work out some of the logistics of the divorce.
- Talk with someone about the divorce to get a reality check. "Am I doing the right thing?" "Am I overreacting?"
- You may want to try a trial separation. Step back from the marriage to see the relationship from a different point of view.

Might the Marriage Still Work Out?

Go to marriage counseling, even if you feel finished with the marriage. Things may still be worked out.

If you truly would like to get back with your spouse, try not to do the same kinds of things that got you into the troubled marriage. If there was an affair, by all means, get that person out of your life.

If you drink or do drugs too much, get yourself into treatment so you can show your spouse you're willing to change your behavior. You will never have a successful relationship if drugs or alcohol are a major part of the marriage. These chemicals distort reality and help to create an attitude of not caring about what happens in the relationship.

Never put the children in the middle. Don't use them to get even. Don't say bad things about the other parent to your children. This could come back to haunt you as the children get older and are able to see you for who you really are.

Set some rules that are the same at both houses. If the child is acting out at school, stealing, cutting school, getting a speeding ticket, or not getting good grades you should have certain rules that apply to them no matter if they're with their mom or their dad. ■



Diana S. Dodson has spent many years working as a counselor and mental health consultant for children, adolescents, and adult schizophrenics. This article has been edited and excerpted from It's Your Life, Take Charge! (Authorhouse, 2008). Read more about how you can understand yourself to a greater extent and be your own guide to your happiness.

For more articles on relationships and excerpts from *It's Your Life, Take Charge!*, visit www.divorcemag.com/articles/Relationships.

In order for you to be considered for custody or even joint custody you need to show that you are willing to put aside your differences with your ex when it comes to your children. You must be willing to work together with regard to the children. No matter what it takes and no matter how many times you fail, you must continue to try to work together.

Even if you are the only one that is willing to put your differences aside you must continue to work together at all costs. A judge will see your willingness to cooperate with your ex when it comes to the children. If your ex refuses to cooperate with you this will only work against her. Remember that your main concern is for the children, so lose your pride and put your children first. The two of you need to meet in the middle for the sake of the children.

You need to speak with your ex often about the children. You need information on their behavior when they are with her. This information is important to you because you need to make sure that their behavior guidance is consistent between the two of you. You also need to coordinate your discipline with your ex to ensure that you are both enforcing the same rules. This will not only make the visitations easier for the both of you but it will eliminate any confusion on your children's part as to how they are supposed to behave. This ensures further stability for the children.

As long as the children see that their parents are working together on their behalf and that the both of you hold similar standards for them, they will feel more at ease with the new arrangement. Above everything else, your children's stability is your main concern and solid communication between the two of you is imperative to limit the confusion that they are most likely feeling.

Keeping a log of every single payment or support effort is vital to your case. Keep receipts of groceries that you may purchase, receipts from the utility companies, daycare centers, etc. Write down the date, the form of relief and the amount in the log. Never, ever give cash. Cash payments can easily be



Keep in contact with your ex about the children

By Douglas C. McKee

denied because they leave no trail. If you do not have a checking account, then get a cashier's check from a bank, supermarket or Post Office money order, keeping the receipt portion for your records. If you are using a personal check, make a notation on the check in the "memo" section that says "Child support January" or "Children/electric bill January" or something similar so that you can prove that a check was issued for a specific purpose. When your ex cashes or deposits the check the cancelled check becomes your receipt. If you are consistent with your relief, your log, receipts and cancelled checks will prove it. And rather than being ridiculed by your ex's attorney for financially abandoning your children the judge will see you as a concerned and honorable father. This voluntary support impresses judges because many fathers fail to pay anything until it is ordered.

The log is a must. I was fortunate enough to keep a log of my own. My big mistake was that sometimes I gave my ex cash. When we went to court for the emergency hearing, my ex's attorney questioned her on the stand and she stated that I had given her very little in the way of financial support since the day I had left the house. Her attorney used the phrase that "support payments had been very small and inconsistent at best." During his cross examination, my attorney was able to enter into evidence my log which showed every single cash

payment and every single check that I had issued her for the past year. The log, coupled with her bank statements that showed deposits of checks and cash deposits that coincided within a day or two of my entries in the log, provided proof that I had, in fact, paid support since day one. Despite the fact that the first judge allowed her to relocate to the East Coast, she did make a point of commending me for making these voluntary payments when so many fathers fail to do so.

The bottom line here is: pay the support for your children because they deserve it and keep a log of it to use in court because you will need it. ■

This excerpt from "A Father's Journey To Custody" by Douglas C. McKee is re-printed in DivorceMag.com with permission. Douglas C. McKee, a father of five beautiful children; two of whom he was awarded primary physical custody from a previous marriage, knows first hand, the heartache of a divorce that involves children and the benefits of maintaining ongoing contact with them during this rough time. The book is available at the author's website, www.fathersseekingcustody.com.

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family members. In my clinical practice, I have had the privilege of facilitating this process for many clients.

At this point I must add a cautionary statement. It is tempting for many individuals who are going through the divorce process, especially one that evolves around infidelity, to reach out only to non-professionals for emotional assistance. Friends, family members and lawyers can act as good sounding boards and reliable sources of support. A trained psychotherapist, however, possesses the professional and objective skills needed to help individuals tackle their emotional obstacles in a deeper and more fundamental way.

The disclosure of infidelity in a marriage is a traumatic event for most individuals. Both the “betrayed” and the “betrayer” are frequently challenged on deep emotional levels. If reconciliation is chosen by both partners, these emotions can be addressed and resolved in couple therapy, and the marriage can be saved. On the other hand, if the choice is to dissolve the marriage and these emotions are left unresolved, they can easily motivate individuals to pursue unhealthy and high-conflict divorces. All family members will be injured. Seeking professional help through psychotherapy can prevent these painful consequences. ■

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For more information on infidelity and divorce, please visit:

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life easier, or because you need a physical relationship in your life, will fail. These reasons make for brief relationships and contribute to the 80 percent divorce rate for second-time marriages.

- Stop asking negative questions that deserve self-pity. If you ask, “Why me?” or “Why doesn’t she love me?” your mind will find the answer, and you won’t like it.
- Ask questions that result in positive actions or answers, such as, “What can I do to help myself adjust?” or “What can I do to improve my life?”
- Stop thinking of reconciliation. Any time this happens, hit your hand with a hammer until the desire is gone.
- Give yourself time to adjust. Tomorrow will be better, and before you know it, you’re over it.

Make sure both you and your children are adjusting. Do not let depression last for a long period of time. If you need help, get it.

Go at your own pace, stay comfortable, and prepare for the fact that the first six months to a year are the hardest. Don’t expect perfection from yourself or your children. If you make a mistake, try again. ■

This article has been edited and excerpted with permission from the book The Ultimate Survival Guide for the Single Father by Thomas J. Hoerner, published by Harbinger Press. © 2004. Thomas J. Hoerner is the custodial father of three and the Executive Liaison for Fathers for Equal Rights in Dallas, Texas. He specializes in balancing a career, home, family and social calendar, defiantly living a fully functional life. You can purchase the book at amazon.com.

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research, which shows that good contact results in reduced conflict between parents. Rather than seeing hostility as a disincentive to shared parenting, it’s better to view it as an indicator of needing a better parenting plan.

In the face of parental tensions, children tend to align themselves with one parent, implying that the other parent is at fault. This is a potentially misguided assumption as to what the child’s behavior means: it confuses the picture for parents and their advisers, and should not be the basis for alterations in the arrangement.

Key Messages

- Myths need to be challenged and realities need to be faced.
- Children need two homes when they have two separated parents.
- Organize the program to suit your circumstances, not vice versa.
- Infants require special consideration when making a shared parenting arrangement.
- Shared parenting allows both parents to be hands on.
- Both quality and quantity are important in parenting. ■

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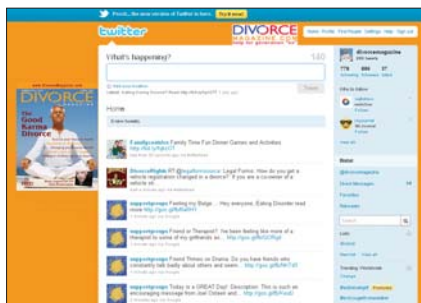
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