

Divorce Recovery: Acceptance Of What Was and What Is

The clients who come to me for help in letting go and moving on after their divorces discover that acceptance, a mandatory step in divorce recovery, comes in two stages. First we work to be in acceptance of the end of our marriage and then we move on to accept what our life is now, in the present. This second step in the acceptance process seems to be the more difficult hurdle to overcome but it can be overcome successfully.

Acceptance of the undeniable fact that our marriage is over must be fully integrated into our psyche for us to be able to create a new life. We need to look back over our marriage and see exactly where we have confused what actually happened with our own personal interpretation. All too often our interpretations of the events of our marriage are simply not true, not factual. Our deep hurts have a tendency to cloud our thinking and limit our perspective.

Separating the facts from our biased interpretations will allow us to stop blaming our ex as well as ease our resentments. We also learn how to see that any marriage, no matter what may have occurred, is a product of two people, a mutual creation. Even if one of the partners was unfaithful or deceptive, we must begin to see our part in the collapse of our marriage because only when we can stop blaming and take responsibility for our part, do we take back our power and our ability to move forward. If we are honest with ourselves, we know where we could have done things differently.

Now comes the even more challenging step in acceptance: acceptance of our new life. Once the fact that we are divorced sinks in, reality rears its so-called ugly head. We start to really understand what our life is now that we do not have a partner. All too often, we react with fear, anger and resentment.

There are many common issues that arise amongst my clients. The number one item seems to be the day-to-day responsibilities for the children. Why am I the one who has to handle everything and he gets to play with them every other weekend? I have to do it all: school, homework, discipline, doctors, dentists, conferences, carpooling, groceries, cooking, cleaning...you name it! Then Dad shows up once a week and every other weekend and it seems like its all fun and games. This is unfair.

The list goes on and on and on. No more regular outings on Saturday nights. There is no one to share household maintenance. Your finances now are solely under your control and for many of us that seems daunting. No more extended family. The holidays loom before us and we are lost. Mutual friends fall by the wayside. Need I go on?

This is where the real challenges arise and this is where we learn about our hidden reserves of strength and how much we have learned and grown from the entire experience. There is no doubt that it is hard and seemingly unfair. But guess what? That is the true nature of life. Life is not always a bowl of cherries, quite the opposite. Life is chaotic and there is constant change, oftentimes not to our liking. Life is not always fair. Life just is and we simply cannot control what life throws out way...we can only control how we choose to handle it. This is a fact of life that we must accept in the depths of our very being.

What to do? There are real choices in front of you. You can continue to fight against reality, a reality that you cannot change. You can resist what is for what you think should be and suffer immeasurably. You can remain rooted in your past, a past that no longer exists, and within that past you will continue to be in pain, blame and resentment. Just envision banging your head against a brick wall because that is exactly what you will be doing.

Either you resist what is or you accept this new landscape. You can surrender to the flow of your life's direction instead of swimming against the current. You can let go of all the things that keep you stuck and chained to your past. You can choose acceptance and with that choice, new possibilities will begin to open for you. You can choose to look for what might be right and what might be opportunities in this new world.

Take for instance the overwhelming responsibilities you now have. Perhaps you are one of the women out there who work and have kids. As an aside, I know that in most cases, you had the bulk of the responsibility during your marriage so things are not that much different. But that being said, start to prioritize. The house is no longer going to be sparkling clean. The kids may have to learn to do their own laundry. There won't be home cooked meals every night and guess what? Everyone will still survive and thrive. What is really important? The love and closeness of this new family unit.

The opportunities abound although it might be hard to see them. I know that when I divorced my kids took on more responsibility around the house and they not only rose to the occasion but they are the better for it. I marvel at how they adjusted and simply went on with their lives. Mind you, my ex and I made a pact to get along and do whatever we had to for the kid's benefit.

Our meals together were chances to bond. I learned to not sweat all the small stuff: I let go of my to do list and learned what was really important, which turned out to be one of the greatest gifts of my divorce. Our vacations together were wonderful and I have phenomenal relationships with my kids. I found a new career. I discovered who my true friends are and have made many new ones. I discovered reservoirs of strength that I did not know existed.

Of course, it isn't a bed of roses but neither is life in general, no matter whether you are married or divorced. I could go on about all the things within this new life that I am still wrestling with but hey, I wrestled with life when I was married! Life changes and you either go with the flow or drown in self-pity. It remains a matter of choice. It may take years, tons of effort and struggle but anything worthwhile in life takes time and effort.

You must drop unrealistic expectations that life should be a certain way and go with the way that life is. You must learn to change your perspective, embrace what is and choose to look at what the possibilities and opportunities are in this new world of yours. Remember that your perspective will not only change the way you think but it will actually change your reality.