

The Real Divorce: Cutting the Emotional Ties that Bind

Your divorce decree is only step one in moving into a new life after divorce. The real divorce is the cutting of the emotional, mental and physical ties that still bind you to your ex-husband. This is the real work of divorce recovery: becoming a single woman possessed of confidence, self-esteem, an enthusiasm for life and most important, a complete break from the emotional turmoil that led to your divorce in the first place.

All too often, women experience the same conflicts with their ex that originally led to divorce: constant arguments, reactive behavior leading to emotional upsets, old patterns of reliance, the barrage of destructive barbs aimed at your self-esteem and deep hurts. To truly be divorced you must put forth great effort and inner work that will sever your ties to your ex and you must build a structure that will facilitate that work.

Let me give you examples: You and your ex have children together therefore you must be in contact with one another on a regular basis. Unfortunately, your discussions with him always end in an argument. Nothing happens easily. The deep resentments and hurts suffered in your marriage and actual divorce remain intact. You each know each other's hot buttons and continue to push those buttons resulting in upsets. It's the old marriage still running the game. You continually get sucked into this abyss.

If this is the case for you know that you have not divorced on an emotional level. You are an ex-wife versus a divorced woman. Somewhere inside of you there is still an attachment of some sort to either your marriage or your ex. You need to look inside to determine where you are still tied to him.

Acceptance of your new place in life is mandatory. Acceptance comes from acknowledging that your marriage is over with no hope or wish for it to continue. Acceptance allows you to living in a way that reveals a freedom from the past. It means living in the present and the future. It takes work but before you can do this work, you must put in place new rules that will lay the groundwork for a completely new relationship with your former husband. These rules are there to protect you from any further hurts or upsets.

You must build a new structure that empowers you versus disempowering you. Take the analogy of going on a diet to lose weight. You need to create an environment that will both motivate and move you towards your goal. To do so you remove all of the temptations that lead to over-eating or eating the wrong foods. You clean out all the junk food from the cupboards and replace them with healthy and non-fattening foods. You create a support system with a friend who you can call when you feel yourself slipping into your old eating habits. You take on a partner in your exercise program. In other words, you do everything that you can to surround yourself with ways to achieve your goal.

You must do the same thing when you are working at disentangling yourself from your ex. Create an environment that will help, not hinder your progress towards true

independence. Remove all the temptations to stay connected to your ex. Within this framework you are free to do the inner work of healing.

My ex and I had a fairly amiable divorce and we have managed to move out of each other's lives albeit for the children. Or so I thought. In reading the book, *Leaving Him Behind* by Sandra Kahn, she mentioned something that set off a light for me. My ex has spent a good deal of time around my new home, as his condo has taken much longer to complete as was predicted. In order for the children to see him more often I have been extremely accommodating and have allowed him to be in my home with the kids. He knows the code to my house lock and oftentimes enters on his own. He has the tendency to walk into the house, open the refrigerator door and grabs something to eat, which is exactly what he always did when we were married. Not such a big deal you might say. But Ms. Kahn says otherwise.

Although we have a very friendly relationship for the most part, he is not my husband anymore. I have been far too accommodating to him. I should have created a scenario where it was incumbent upon him to get into his new place in order to have a place for him and the kids.

This is my house and I should have laid down the ground rules that said he is to knock on the front door just like any other houseguest. Houseguests do not help themselves to the food in my refrigerator. This is him living by the old rules as if this were his home, which it is not.

These ground rules are meant to protect you and prevent any kind of situations that could lead to an upset. Obviously the less you have to do with your ex the better. That is not to say that you cannot have a relationship with your ex but it has to be radically different from the one you had while married. There are those women who cannot have their ex in their lives for any reason other than the children. Their emotional ties to their ex are still strong and they need to isolate themselves in order to break those ties.

Set ground rules that determines the nature of this new relationship. These rules might include:

- 1) Communicate with your ex via writing and/or brief phone calls. Keep all communication limited to only what is necessary for the kids or legal matters.
- 2) When an upset is looming or when your ex starts to speak to you in inappropriate ways, stop the conversation and hang up or walk away. Let your ex know this new ground rule: you will speak to another in respectful ways and will not tolerate anything else or the conversation is over.
- 3) Ensure that your home is just that: your home. It is not a place to hang out with the kids. It is not his home. When he is in your house make certain he realizes that he is a houseguest like any other.

- 4) Keep your conversations highly impersonal and to the point. Protect your privacy. Do not discuss your fears, concerns or personal issues because that only maintains the emotional tie between the two of you. Don't talk about anything that opens the door to more connections or emotional entanglements. Keep it business-like.
- 5) Do not involve the children in any communication between the two of you. Don't send messages through the kids. Keep them protected.
- 6) Stay out of each other's lives. You don't need to know where he goes, what he does, what he is thinking or whom he is seeing...and he doesn't need to know those things about you as well.
- 7) Don't look to your ex for advice or support. This might be the hardest tie to break. I remember in the early part of my separation, I continued to treat him as my husband when I called upon him for assistance with the kids. Wrong. Handle it yourself by getting support from friends or family. You aren't married anymore and you will only be left disappointed.
- 8) Consider your child support or your alimony as your money and not a gift from him or an obligation. Your money, no matter how it is acquired, is your money. The courts determined that support and it doesn't give him the right to comment upon or berate you about finances. If you are experiencing any problems with support checks, take it to your lawyer. Never beg or put yourself in an inferior position. Keep your true financial position to yourself.
- 9) Be careful of maintaining relationships with his family. Blood is thicker than water. If you have developed a friendship with your sister-in-law, make certain it is because you two are friends, not family members. Always insist that the subject of your ex is forbidden.
- 10) You are not a wife anymore and do not exhibit any behavior that mimics that role. All too often women continue to do things or relate in ways to their ex that were part of their former marriage. If he needs support or someone to talk to about personal matters, he needs to call a friend and not you. You are not there to assist him as you did when you were his wife. You are not his wife anymore and not his friend either, at least not right now.

Perhaps in the future, when you have cut all of the psychological ties to your ex that held you back from creating a new life for yourself, you might be able to ease these rules. I doubt it. What's done is done and what is past is past. Let go of anything that does not serve you well.

You will be much more successful in healing yourself and moving on if you have adopted rules and created an environment that keep you physically and mentally separate from your ex. The work of healing your emotional wounds and of learning acceptance

and forgiveness for yourself and him demands all your attention. Don't squander your time and effort on him. It's all about you now, you as a single woman with an exciting and wonderful future in front of you.