

Tips for coping with the end of a marriage

Kenya McCullum, June 24, 2014



(Photo: dictionary Page, broken heart and spying woman: iStockphoto/thinkstock)

Ending a marriage can be an agonizing experience for anyone, but the way you respond to it emotionally generally depends on the circumstances of the divorce. Although no one is clicking their heels when that wedding ring comes off, the feelings people sort through can differ based on who initiated the split.

“In general, when you are leaving a marriage, you are in a more powerful place because you made that choice,” said Friedemann Schaub, author of “The Fear + Anxiety Solution.” “You’re saying ‘my direction is to go forward, to leave this relationship behind.’ But when you are left, you often feel disempowered and passive because the choice has been made for you. For many people, that’s really hard to handle.”

Either way, you’re still going to need to move past your feelings and move on. The following tips can help you get on the road to emotional recovery after a divorce.

Give yourself time. Although you probably want nothing more than for the pain to just go away — and to go away as quickly as possible — you can’t rush the healing process, no matter how much you’d like to.

“A lot of people have unrealistic expectations. They think they should be feeling better more quickly than they’re going to,” said Daniel Watter of the Morris Psychological Group. “For a lot of people, ending a marriage is a huge disappointment. It’s very sad. It hurts to let go of the dreams of a future that didn’t turn out the way you thought it would.”

Resist the urge to spy. Most people would never even consider going to their ex’s house and hiding in the bushes to get a glimpse of what they’re doing. But thanks to the Internet, you don’t have to. But this kind of sleuthing is not healthy because when you find out how your ex is moving on — and whom he’s moving on with — it will only exacerbate your pain.

When you feel the urge to digitally spy on your ex, back away from the keyboard and do something to get your mind off of it.

Pamper yourself. Although you may not feel like having a lot of fun in the immediate wake of your divorce, it’s important to regularly take care of yourself. “Little things may only make you feel better in the moment, but that’s really the way you have to take it — moment to moment,” said Watter. “It’s really recovery by inches. In the beginning, it’s a series of very little things that will produce very little soothing right away, but you try and get used to the idea of doing the kinds of things that help bring you just a little bit of peace.”

Figure out what you really want. It may take a long time, several years even, for you to be ready to get back into the dating game after your divorce. But when you do, it will make it easier if you have a clear idea of what you really want in a new relationship. Take the time after your divorce to evaluate what went wrong in your marriage and what you want from your next relationship.

What if there was no ring?

You were in a long-term relationship, but you never got around to going down the aisle. Does that mean your feelings will be easier to handle? Though you may think your grief shouldn’t be as great after ending a long-term relationship that wasn’t a marriage, Schaub actually says that the pain can be just the same — if not worse. In fact, because many people don’t want to go through the hassle of a divorce, they may be more likely than unmarried couples to disconnect from each other emotionally long before the split.

“You can be really emotionally connected, or maybe enmeshed, without a wedding ring and that can be much more devastating because you feel like a part of you is missing — your whole life routine and your foundation of life is gone,” he said. “I don’t think the marriage license really makes it harder or easier.”