

'Emotional Divorce' and Separation

'Emotional Divorce' is a term used to describe what can happen to couples in a relationship, whether they are married or not, and are going through the process of separation. Often it is a partner who has already separated themselves emotionally from the relationship wants the separation. That partner has gone through an "emotional divorce" and now needs to be separated legally and physically from their partner. Often a partner may struggle for a long time with the feelings of emotional distance before they come to the decision that separation is the solution to the relationship problems or an answer for the way they are feeling emotionally.

Emotional divorce usually comes before the physical separation or legal divorce for the partner who has initiated the separation. A partner who initiates a separation may become emotionally detached for a variety of reasons. Most commonly detaching emotionally from the relationship and partner is a mentally assertive way of allowing the partner to establish and maintain new boundaries when they feel they are being hurt, emotional needs not being met, or the relationship has become insecure for them. Emotionally divorcing a partner helps a person maintain a sense of psychological integrity if faced with what they feel is an emotionally demanding situation.

Whether you are the partner who initiated or the partner who was left, you must come to terms with the end of your relationship and begin to view yourself as a separate individual, no longer with your partner.

Either gender can initiate an emotional divorce from the relationship and separation. However, it is more common that women instigate separation. In fact, more than 80% of separations are instigated by the woman.

Characteristics of a Partner Who Initiated the Separation

- Uncommunicative after spending a long time trying to communicate frustrations.
- Cold and distant. Finally given up, no longer interested in working on the relationship.
- Spends large amounts of time away from home to escape an unhappy relationship.
- Irritable and impatient. Resents partner's attempts to save the relationship.
- Wants things to move along quickly.

Characteristics of the Left Partner

- Anxious and becomes fearful about the future and being single again.
- Bargaining, looking for ways to save the relationship often pleading for another chance.
- Controlling behaviour, including stalking and harassing.
- Delays the separation process and tries to cling to their relationship and partner.
- Emotionally distressed, tearful and sad about the thought of the future.

Exerting Control Over Your Emotions

The basic instinct of a left partner is to control the situation and get things back to the way they were. They failed to see the warning signs that the relationship was in trouble and don't know how to respond effectively. As a result, they respond in ways that pushed the instigating partner further away emotionally.

They want to do or say something that will draw their partner back to the relationship emotionally. Due to the fear and emotional pain that comes along with losing someone they love; the left partner often causes conflict during the separation process that is needless. This is when children often get drawn into the conflict unnecessarily.

Sometimes the frustration and not having any control turns to anger and the desire to punish a former partner for the end of the relationship. This can apply to both the partner that initiated the separation and the partner who was left. A 'tit-for-tat' strategy can then quickly escalate into a high conflict separation.

It is important to understand that a partner who has emotionally divorced themselves from the relationship is not an evil person. They are not carrying an agenda of hurt and pain towards anyone. They are looking for an escape from a situation that is causing them hurt and pain. This can cause them to respond to their partner's shock and hurt in what appears to be a cold and calculating manner.

Equally, it is important to understand that a partner who was left is not an evil person. They too are looking for an escape from a situation that is causing them hurt and pain.

The best thing a left partner can do is come to terms with the fact that, they only have control over their own emotions. They cannot control their former partner. The same applies to the partner who has instigated a separation, they are responsible for their own emotions, they have no control or responsibility for their former partner and their emotions.

The only person's emotions you have control over are your own. If you feel your former partner has upset you, made you angry, made you sad or made you jealous, you are the one that is 'letting them live rent-free in your head'. You are the one who is choosing to let them control your emotions. It is your choice. Grieving the loss of the relationship in a healthy way is important for you and your children.

Focusing on managing and dealing with your own emotions will help you move smoothly through the process of emotionally detaching from your former partner. In turn, you will find it easier to find your way through the legal and physical aspects of divorce. The legal and physical aspects can include the care arrangements for children and a division of property.

Moving On

One of the first steps to take on that journey of separation is to think about your former partner, not as an "Ex-partner", but as the 'the other parent', either 'the mother of your children', or 'father of your children'. Keep in mind; your 'Ex' is not your children's 'Ex'. Building a new 'business-like relationship' with the other parent is important for your children.

It is important to be mindful of the impact of the separation on your children. Your children will also be going through the loss and grief and fears of not having both parents there for them. They may also fear that they were the cause of the separation.

The stress and emotions of a relationship breakdown will reduce, the trauma will pass, and emotional stability will return. Make a commitment to end any pattern of behaviour that is detrimental for your children and you. Seek the support of positive people that can assist you through the trauma of separation.

*Be a parent that is:
Bigger, Stronger,
Wiser and Kind.*

See the information sheets; **Emotional Divorce, The Journey of Separation, A New Ways of Relating and Take the High Road**