

MEN'S DIVORCE GUIDE

A middle-aged man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and a patterned tie, is talking on a gold smartphone. He is looking down with a serious expression. The background is a blurred office interior with large windows.

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Men facing the challenge of divorce often struggle to find the answers, insights, and advice they need during this difficult and confusing time. In this special **Men's Divorce Guide**, you'll find hand selected articles, book excerpts, and more that focus exclusively on men's divorce issues. Use the useful and practical information in here to help you safely and successfully make it through your divorce, and into your new life.



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6 Tips *for a* Peaceful Divorce

With the right attitude and the right support, a peaceful divorce is possible.

By Josh D. Simon



At first glance, the idea of a “peaceful divorce” may be impossible to imagine. However, as destructive as divorce can be for some couples and families – in terms of psychological turmoil, financial wreckage, and lasting emotional damage to children and extended family – the fact remains that it’s both possible and feasible to have a peaceful divorce. That’s because, more than anything, the decision to take the peaceful path starts with something within your grasp: your attitude.

Your attitude will profoundly influence whether you respond wisely or react unwisely to your spouse. It will also determine your ability to look past or through the painful emotional fog that surrounds you, so that you can make clear-headed decisions that are best for you, your children, and your future.

Below, we present six tips for achieving a peaceful divorce, so that you can eventually look back upon this time with your dignity, self-respect, and mental health intact.

Tip #1: If You Can’t Forgive, then try to Accept

It’s hard for most people to forgive their spouse for the hurtful things they have done and said, or for all of the other major and minor issues that come together and “cause” a divorce. The plain truth is that divorce is often a crushing, unwanted outcome to what both spouses hoped and dreamed would be a lasting union. However, forgiving someone frees you from dragging around the heavy “baggage” of negative thoughts and energy.

If you aren't ready to forgive your spouse, then strive to accept the fact that the marriage is dissolving. And furthermore, reach deep inside and accept the role you played in this outcome. Without question, this is easier said than done, and may be too agonizing in the early stages of a divorce. However, the sooner you can accept the situation and your responsibility, the sooner you start to heal – which is a key to a peaceful divorce. You can only give what you have, and if you have inner peace, then you can share it.

Tip #2: Take the High Road – and Stay There

Your spouse, her family, friends or even new significant other may try to drag your divorce through the mud. This may come in the form of comments said to your face and behind your back. As tempting as it may be to react in-kind, resolve to take the high road and decide that you're going to control the emotional integrity of your divorce – at least as far as you can. This not only helps preserve your self-esteem and dignity, but surprisingly, it can also have a positive influence on your spouse. By modeling how someone should act during divorce, you show her “how it's done.” And, if you notice that your ex is taking the high road, acknowledge it as often as you can.

Tip #3: Don't Use Your Children as Pawns

What harms children greatly during divorce is how their parents act during divorce. In other words, your children are watching you and paying attention to your attitudes, actions and behaviors. And that means if you use them as pawns to “attack” your spouse – or worse, poison them with sordid tales about how evil and uncaring their mother is, you're not harming your spouse, you're harming your children. And in the same light, when it comes to custody negotiations with your ex, don't treat your children like “assets” that you can try and trade or withhold, depending on your mood. Unless the courts agree that your spouse

is an unfit parent, then he or she has a right to co-parent with you. Remember, it's not about you or your ex: it's about your children, and what they need to grow into healthy, happy adults with fond memories of both parents.

Tip #4: Choose a Divorce Lawyer who Views Going to Court as a Last Resort

Most divorce lawyers are skilled, compassionate professionals who sincerely want to help you make it through this challenging time in your life quickly and as painlessly as possible. However, there are a few divorce lawyers who will pour gasoline on your emotional fire, and march into litigation without striving to resolve your divorce through other means – such as negotiation, mediation, or other out-of-court settlement options. Therefore, it's critical that you choose a divorce lawyer who has the intent, experience, knowledge and attitude it takes to help you settle without going to court.

Tip #5: Choose the Issues to Dispute Wisely

Separating the emotional issues from the practical ones during divorce can seem impossible; sometimes it can seem like a battlefield with a hundred different skirmishes to fight. However, the road to a peaceful divorce isn't a battle – it's a dialogue. And that means your job is to reflect and, with a calm and level-head, decide which key issues are worth disputing, and which ones you can just let go. For example, you may place high sentimental value on a piece of furniture or the family car, but fighting for these assets will not only cost you more in legal fees, but also add needless conflict and stress to your divorce.

Tip #6: Consider Therapy or Coaching

The idea of needing therapy during divorce can be, in itself, a source of stress; as if you're somehow broken and need some professional to “put you back together.” This perception is simply

untrue. Therapy or life coaching is not for weak people: it's for people who realize, clearly and objectively, that they need professional assistance during a traumatic time. Professional athletes are not weak for needing a coach: they recognize that good coaching makes the difference between success and failure. An experienced therapist or life coach will provide you with valuable tools and strategies to help achieve a peaceful divorce. If you aren't sure of how to get in touch with a therapist or coach, ask your divorce lawyer for a referral.

Remember, this Too Shall Pass

When you marched down the wedding aisle, the idea that you might one day divorce was the furthest thing from your mind. Now that you're facing divorce, the idea that one day you'll laugh and, yes, even love again, may be even further from your mind. Use this thought, and the tips offered above, to keep you committed to the peaceful divorce that you want, need and deserve. ■

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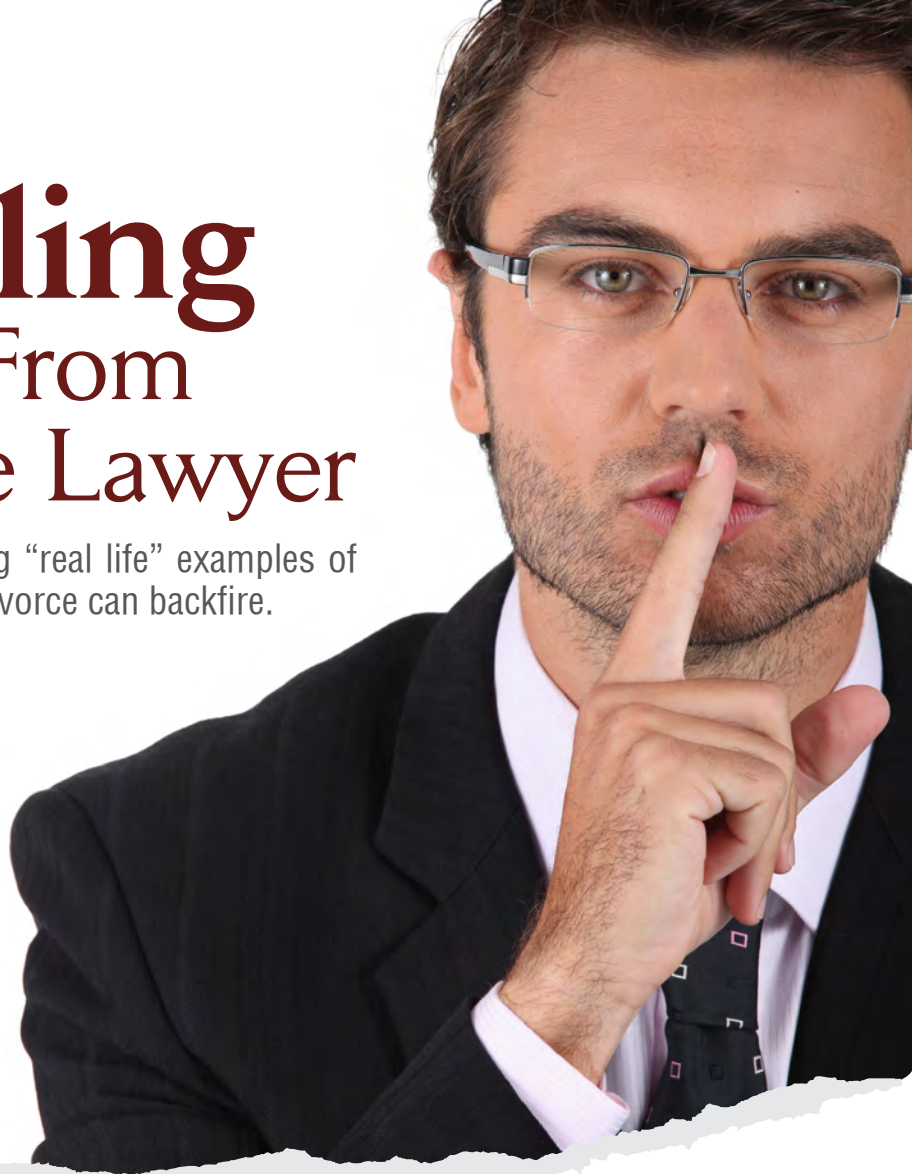
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Concealing Information From Your Divorce Lawyer

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

By Joseph Cordell



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 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. Furthermore, 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

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.

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 he 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 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

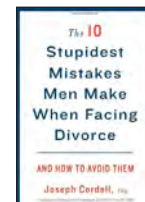
less interested in the emotional side of divorce and more and more focused solely on the contractual aspects. If that client had been running the case, he probably would have shown himself to be angry and irrational; his wife might have won full custody. Instead, we finally got him to focus a little 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 sulky, 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.

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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



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.

of getting a divorce. 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 them. 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.
- 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 actually 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, or with an unbiased third party, to work out some of the logistics of the divorce.
- Talk with someone 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.

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.

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. ■



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. Diana S. Dodson has spent many years working as a counselor and mental health consultant for children, adolescents, and adult schizophrenics.

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BETRAYED

Allow yourself to heal from the trauma, stress, grief, and betrayal of infidelity before deciding whether your next step is marriage counseling – or divorce.

By Sheri Meyers

“I got ‘punched’ again today. I thought I was doing really well, handling things better and not thinking about the betrayal, and then suddenly a whole deluge of emotions came flooding in as I remembered the texts and love letters my wife sent to her so-called ‘friend’. I feel betrayed all over again. Will I ever get over this?”

Betrayal smashes your world to the very core, throwing you into the depths of despair. Added to this, you can feel totally alone and isolated since the one person in the world you were building a

life with has completely trashed your feelings and emotions.

Your precise reactions – your thoughts and feelings – will depend somewhat on whether your discovery of the

infidelity was a total shock or you had been suspicious for some time.

The trust you might have once shared is now on life support. The fact that you were betrayed, the fact that you let this

go unnoticed for however long it was may lead to you start doubting yourself. Betrayal is tied into abandonment and loss. You may want to hurt your spouse, get even, or walk away.

The physical and mental state you are in might be overwhelming. Your body shakes and shivers, your heart pounds, your stomach aches. Your mind races with feelings of anger and shock, disappointment and hurt, confusion and despair, shame and disbelief. Your self-esteem and your sense of relationship continuity, emotional safety, and trust may be completely rattled to the core.

These feelings are real signs of the pain and hurt within and do need to be faced rather than suppressed. However, try not to act on feelings alone.

Right now is a really bad time to make life-changing decisions. Initially surviving infidelity means nothing more than letting the fog rise. Give yourself some time to calm down a bit, feel your feelings, get your thoughts straight, and take care of yourself. Only when you start to feel a little better can you begin to consider what your next step should be.

Knowing What to Expect Makes the Passage Easier

Life is always easier to handle when you have some idea of what you may be subjected to at any given moment. Once you have experienced a deep betrayal such as this, it is not unusual to:

- Cry at the drop of a hat.
- Experience a deep sense of loss.

- Feel irritated and angry with trivial things.
- Feel like everything is too much of an effort.
- Evade people whom you do not want to inform.
- Not have the energy to consider how to get over the affair.
- Have difficulty thinking, concentrating, and retaining information.
- Be consumed by a sense of hurt and anger and even vengeance.
- Feel tired all the time and have sleep problems (too little or too much).
- Experience physical reactions such as nausea, diarrhea, shakiness, binge eating, or not wanting to eat.
- Feel overwhelmed with strong emotions – uncertainty, fear, rejection, shame, loss of hope, disappointment, agitation, irritation, anger, frustration, sadness, despair, amongst others.

I have never met anyone who hasn't experienced these emotions (in some blend) after the discovery of an affair – the journey to healing is often like a roller-coaster ride. At times you may feel like you're progressing quite well, only to be confronted with a reminder and whoosh, the pain is back as if it just happened. Don't be disheartened. It doesn't mean you aren't healing: it means you're normal.

Feel your feelings, do not ignore them. Left alone and unhealed, they will only make you calloused and afraid. Here are some tips for handling your emotions:

- **Deal with your feelings head on,** the sooner the better. Take a strong, proactive stance.

- **Write down your thoughts and feelings.** In a private journal, try putting your emotions to the page. A 2003 British Psychological Society study indicated that writing about emotions might even speed the healing of physical wounds. If journaling about pain can heal a physical injury, think about what writing might do for your broken heart. Write down your thoughts and feelings about your partner's unfaithfulness.

- **Tears are healthy.** If they aren't coming naturally, put on some blues-type music or watch a sad movie.

- **It's okay and healthy to laugh.** Watch some funny movies or TV shows. Spend some time with people who make you smile. Life goes on in spite of heartache and unfaithful partners.

- **Ask all the questions you want.** Talk with your partner about the infidelity. Ask the questions you need to ask and be understanding that your partner may not have all the answers just yet as to why the infidelity took place. Keep dialoguing, sharing, expressing, inviting, and listening.

- **See a counselor.** Talking to an objective third party will help you process the situation and will stop you from being too hard on yourself.

- **Avoid the blame game over who or what caused the infidelity.** It's just wasted energy. That includes blaming the third party. It won't change anything.

- **Transform your anxiety into gratitude.** Gratitude transforms fear and pain into something else. When you're in angst over loss, filled with fear...name five things you're grateful for. It's a way to become present with yourself and

Allow yourself time to concentrate on what is good and right in your life - there is something in your life to be thankful for. Relish those things with regularity



connected. Allow yourself time to concentrate on what is good and right in your life - there is something in your life to be thankful for. Relish those things with regularity. This strategy works miracles for bringing a person out of any gloomy mood.

- **Take a break from your worries.** Make time for some feel-good activities – anything from having a cup of coffee with a friend to taking the kids to the zoo, getting a massage or playing a round of golf. Get out and about, break the routine and enjoy the adventures without relationship woes or discussions to contend with.
- **Learn how to relax.** Just thinking about relaxing is a good thing. Saying the word ‘relax’ to yourself is a great thing. Actually relaxing is the best thing. Remember, it’s one breath away. Tell yourself, “I am calm,” “I am safe,” “I can handle this,” over and over again.
- **Learn the art of taking minute vacations.** Anything from smelling

a flower to petting an animal can help take you away for even a minute, which starts the process of feeling free.

- **Give to others.** Kindness and charity, no matter what you feel like inside, is a win/win. Doing good feels good. Studies show that the happiest people are ones who give the most happiness to others. When you’re depressed, anxious or stressed, there is a high degree of focus on the self. Focusing on the needs of others literally helps shift your thinking and your mood from victimhood to empowerment.
- **Get an ego boost.** To move on from the psychological self-hatred, try some retail therapy, get a new haircut, buy some new clothes. Move on from the doldrums and make yourself feel special.
- **The sounds of silence.** After you have done a chore, run an errand or completed a call, take some time to sit and be – no noise, no music, nothing. Silence. It is amazing how rejuvenating this is, and also how

inspiring. You never know what solution might pop into your head when you have a moment of silence to yourself.

Manage your Thoughts and Thinking

Clarify your priorities. Write a list of what you need to get done and then do it. Remember that some things can wait, and if they can’t, then get them done as soon as you can – but be gentle with yourself.

Do the least amount of work possible to meet your priorities. Whether it’s cooking dinner for the kids or getting a report done for work, choose the simple meal and get the report done so it covers only what is needed. Neither of these needs to be perfect, they just need to be completed.

Give yourself permission to not make any important decisions right now. Most decisions can wait until you have sorted through the emotional mess. The relationship might be shaky, it might be over, but you do not have to decide what to do about it just yet. If you’ve already temporarily separated from your partner and you’re worried about financial issues, then you may need to hire an attorney to get a temporary order forbidding disposal of any marital assets along with a support order if you are financially dependent. However, if you must take this route be firm with your lawyer – tell him or her that this is just for your peace of mind and that you do not plan to make any decisions soon.

Take Care of Yourself

If someone you loved was traumatized, how would you take care of them? How would you hold them? What would you be telling them? This is the time to take the energy you’ve invested into your now traumatized relationship and put some

of that energy back into nurturing yourself.

Rebuild yourself from the ground up. Be very kind and gentle with yourself. Balance is the key to getting through this experience of betrayal. Practice Self-love CPR: Care, Protect, and Resuscitate your body, mind, and spirit. Looking after your body will look after your mind. Here are five tips for you to try:

- 1. Do not abuse substances or medications.** Substances (drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, coffee) are devastating to your body and mind. Medications should only ever be taken in accordance with the dosage recommended. In times of stress it may be tempting to over medicate or abuse, but this will only impair your sleep patterns and cause you to spiral downward into depression.
- 2. Eat healthily and regularly.** Eating well and drinking water are essential to your body receiving the nutrients it needs to function properly. Treat yourself as if you were your own child – eat good, wholesome meals that are balanced and freshly-made.
- 3. Get plenty of sleep.** Sleep is essential for you to function in an optimum fashion – both mentally and physically. If you are having trouble going to sleep, because of punishing, pain-producing thoughts, try this: keep a journal by your bed, write down your anxieties, and imagine them flowing OUT of YOU and onto the paper. Say, “I fully release you and let you go. I give myself permission to peacefully sleep.”
- 4. Let yourself laugh.** The simple things can make you smile – time with friends or even a child you enjoy, a movie, a massage, a picnic in the park or a snowball fight. Do whatever you can do to get you

out of your zone and put a smile on your face. One smile leads to another, and then to another.

- 5. Exercise.** Exercise is the enemy of stress, depression, and anxiety. It is the natural way to calm your body and alleviate the negative emotions that you may be feeling. Do something physical for your body every day: park far away from the entrance to the supermarket, take the stairs instead of the elevator, walk to work. Try to get in 30 minutes a day to raise your temperature and lift your mood.

Your Relationship with Others

Surround yourself with friends. Don't try to get through coping with unfaithfulness unaided.

Friends are your life support system, your allies, and your outlet. Do not try to cope with this alone. Spend time with friends and talk about everyday stuff, not just this stuff.

Don't be mistrustful of everyone. Just because one person let you down does not mean everyone will. Do not let this upset cause you to become a bitter and angry person.

Set boundaries with friends and family. It's okay to say, “No.” Even the most well-intentioned person can become an irritation if you do not speak up. If your best friend is too forceful in their opinions and they won't listen when you say, “I really don't want to talk about this now,” then assign them another chore; perhaps taking care of the kids for a few hours while you spend some time alone. They want to help, but they might not know how to – so tell them!

Do not hang around sad people. Misery might love company, but that doesn't do you any favors right now. You will only end up absorbing their sadness and distress, and you have enough to deal with on your own.

Be sure to surround yourself with people that will uplift you.

- As much as you may feel alone right now, it is imperative that you are not.
- Make wise choices about whom you surround yourself with and be firm.
- Ask for help or talk to a friend who is good at listening.
- Friends are there to help, even if they don't know it.
- Look for the silver lining, not the cloud. ■



This article was adapted with permission from Chatting or Cheating: How to Detect Infidelity, Rebuild Love, and Affair-Proof Your Relationship, © 2012 Sheri Meyers, Psy. D.

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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

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.

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 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. Why can't she let it go?" Ragers don't understand the level of destruction caused when they call their partner a name. (To the recipient it could be like 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.

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:

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.

"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.

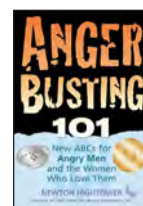
15. Stop Criticizing and Stop Lecturing.

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 short-comings. 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.

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A photograph of a man with grey hair, wearing a light blue polo shirt and khaki shorts, sitting on a large rock by a river. He is holding a fishing rod and looking down at the water. The river has a small waterfall or rapids, and the water is a golden-brown color. The background shows green trees and foliage.

Living in the Present

Is your mind living in the past, present, or future? The present moment is the only place you have true power and choice; here are some strategies to get you back into the present moment.

By Carolyn Ellis

Divorce is a painful experience, even if it was your choice to end the relationship. Being able to thrive after divorce is determined in large part by where you live, but I'm not talking about your physical address. Where does your mindset predominantly live – in the past, present, or future? Are you living in the present, the here-and-now? The present moment is the only place you have true power and choice.

It's very tempting to try to escape the reality of your present moment. After all, you're likely feeling hurt, guilt, shame, fear or anger, or some combination of all of these emotions. It can make it hard to heal from a relationship breakdown when you didn't initiate the break-up, or if you feel blindsided by your partner's decision to end it. Often, partners are at different stages in their

level of acceptance of the fact that the relationship is over.

The big question that can be so hard to answer is "Why?" Why did my spouse cheat on me? Why did I fall out of love with my partner? Asking "Why?" can seem like a very important question but it draws your awareness back to re-evaluating the past instead of noticing what is happening for you right now.

Teacher and author Debbie Ford used to say, "Knowing why is the booby prize." The brain loves to have reasons and explanations. Often we use that as an excuse to distract ourselves or not make a decision about what we need to do to move forward. Knowing why is the red herring. It may be somewhat interesting, but it is a distraction from the main point of the story. Staying stuck

on understanding someone else's "why" doesn't allow you to move to a deeper spiritual understanding of how you co-created this relationship. It hinders your ability to mine the wisdom that your divorce has for you.

Sometimes, people re-live the past and play the "coulda-woulda-shoulda" game. They replay past events and imagine how things might have been different if only they had said or done something differently. When trying to make sense of a relationship breakdown that seems inexplicable, people can start to obsess about what they did wrong, what they could have done better, and what might have changed the outcome. Some people are filled with regret, thinking that if only something in the past hadn't happened, their current reality would be different.

But the fact is, what happened did happen. Until we invent time machines to undo the past, time and energy spent wishing the past was different is futile.

Another common preoccupation is to live in the future and play the “What if...” game. The mind has a field-day figuring out possible future scenarios that have yet to actually happen. “What if I don’t have enough child support?” or “What if she decides she wants to reconcile and come back to me?” or “What if I’m never able to truly love someone else again and end up being on my own?” The brain loves questions and will immediately set to work at trying to find an answer.

There is a degree to which imagining potential future scenarios can be helpful in motivating you to find the support, resources, and decisiveness you need to move through your divorce journey. However, too often people play the “What if...” game as a way to scare themselves or avoid paying closer attention to what is happening in the here-and-now.

But the future is ultimately the result of the choices you make today – in this moment and the next and the next. Becoming obsessed in fantasizing about future outcomes or getting stuck in repeated thoughts about past events while ignoring your present reality is a recipe for delusion.

Here are some strategies to get you back into the present moment.

1. Be Here Now

Awareness is the key to transforming challenges into opportunities. Start to become aware of your thoughts. If you notice your thoughts are wandering into the past or the future, stop. Get yourself grounded by taking a deep breath and bring your focus back to this moment. Use “Be Here Now” as a mantra. Mindfulness practices such as yoga and meditation or even going out for a walk in nature can help cultivate greater present- moment awareness for you.

2. Empty the Trash

People have approximately 60,000 thoughts per day, of which 95% are the same ones they had yesterday and the day before. Of those thoughts, 80% are negative ones! Instead of recycling these thoughts, find a way to release them. Grab a journal or paper and write them down. Speak them out loud to yourself or to another. If you notice you’re having repetitive thoughts, it’s likely time to empty your psychic trash bin.

3. Get Physical

Find some physical action you can take to break the trance of your thoughts. Changing your physical position alone loosens the grip of the mind. Do jumping jacks, or put on a tune and sing along to it. Bringing some kind of physicality into those moments when your thoughts are running like a hamster on a wheel can help you feel more energized and prepared to take action.

4. Set a Limit

Sometimes you might just find yourself in a funk and feel unmotivated and unclear about your situation. Find some patience and compassion for yourself in those moments and that will help to get you recentered. If you’re feeling like you need to “stew” about something, set a timer and give yourself five or ten minutes to mull it over. Give yourself to that experience fully, and when the timer goes off, give yourself permission to let it go and move on.

5. Make a Choice in this Moment

By developing a habit of self-reflection and awareness, you’ll be able to make conscious and empowering choices in each moment. Once you get grounded and centered, ask yourself, “What will I choose to do now?”

Keep your choices simple and actionable. Even if you make a decision about what you need to do or how you want to be for the next five minutes, that’s better than letting yourself spin out in worry or anxiety for the next five hours. Remember, the future you’re longing to

create for yourself starts in this present moment. ■

This article originally appeared on www.ThriveAfterDivorce.com and has been reprinted with permission.



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Keep in Contact with your Ex about the Children

By Douglas C. McKee

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 them. 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 them first. The two of you need to meet in the middle on this matter.

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 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 them.

As long as the children see that their parents are working together on their behalf and that 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 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 this 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, you will be seen by the judge as a concerned and honorable father. This voluntary support impresses judges because many fathers fail to pay

[../CONTINUED ON PAGE 30](#)

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 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 (Wyatt-MacKenzie, 2009), by Joel Schwartzberg.

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.



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 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: You need 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

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.

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 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

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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25 Tips for Divorced Dads

How to create special memories and strengthen your bonds with your children.

By Tommy Maloney



I was five years old when my parents divorced; coincidentally, my son was also five when his mother and I split up. While going through my divorce and travelling for work, I created the following tips from firsthand experience to help divorced parents stay connected with their kids – and to forge a positive bond in each other's lives.

1 Talk to your kids every day

It does not matter if it is just a phone call, long or short. Kids need to hear their parents' voices daily because it reassures them they still have a connection with you.

Tip: Don't be afraid to ask them personal questions.

2 Send your kids postcards or letters

Do this even if you live in the same town. If they are just learning how to read, written notes to your kids are even better. Think about when you were a kid and received mail and how special you felt.

Tip: Have them write to you.

3 Purchase a webcam for yourself and your kids

This is very important if you live far away and cannot spend time with them on a regular basis.

Tip: Flip Cam for the kid(s).

4 Tell them EVERY DAY that you LOVE them

Do I really need to explain this one?

Tip: Find out what makes them feel loved – then do it.

5 Make Quality vs. Quantity time with them

You do not need to create an "event". Just being with and talking to them is more vital than you will ever know.

Tip: Make a Gingerbread house together.

6 Read to one another

Find out what they like to read and buy a few books at the bookstore. Read them one of your books, even if it does not have pictures.

Tip: Go to the bookstore together.

7 Embrace their interests no matter what they are

You need to get yourself out of your comfort zone and learn to embrace their interests – even if that means riding a roller-coaster.

Tip: Research their interests to be able to ask them questions – and understand the answers.

8 Volunteer at their school

You get to see them in their environment, which can sometimes be both shocking and embarrassing. I have learned that teachers love when a parent comes to school and lends a helping hand.

Tip: If you can't volunteer at their school, find another one of their activities to become involved in.

9 Honesty IS the best policy

This is most important when your kids tell you they wish all of you were still a family. Explain to them they will always be loved and that you are still a family.

Tip: You may need to show it and say it several times.

10 Create traditions together

Think of things that make your time together special and create your own customs separate from standard holidays.

Tip: What traditions did you have as a kid?

11 You are not the victim

I advise you to see a trusted counselor to help you work through your emotions. Do not use your kids for this!

Tip: Take control of your own healing.

12 Respect the rules

Teach them there are rules in your house just like at the other parent's house.

Tip: Have your own rules, but try to respect the other household's rules as well.

13 Two words: Road Trip

Take vacations – even if it is just a weekend in a hotel down the street. Kids love to be in a hotel with a pool.

Tip: Try setting up a tent in the living room once in a while.

14 Understand that they will miss their mom or dad – and that that is okay

The bond between kids and their other parent may be different than the one they will have with you. Focus on strengthening your bond with them and try not to compare yours with the other parent's.

Tip: Kids will naturally cycle from one parent to another. Be patient – your turn will come.

15 Let your kids see that you are not perfect

It is okay to admit to your kids that you try your best but can't be perfect.

Tip: This will teach them how to handle their own mistakes.

16 Teach them the importance of being physically active

Encourage your kids to ride their bikes alongside you as you run, or go biking together. Being a role model is tough, but suck it up.

Tip: Your kids want you to be around for a long time.

17 Be in contact with their teachers

Try not to be a pain, but do be an involved parent. Though you won't always get a solid answer, ask your kids how school is going and contact their teachers for updates.

Tip: Kids need both of their parents to be involved.

18 Respect that your favorite sports team is not always going to be theirs

Heck, they might not like the same sports you do or even like sports at all! Enjoy what they do like and embrace those things with them.

Tip: You can always watch your sports when they are back at the other parent's house.

19 When you ask them to make their beds, you also need to do the same

Kids want discipline and you need to set the example. When they are at your place, have chores for them to do just as they do at the other parent's house.

Tip: Kids need normalcy between the two houses.

20 Fast food is too easy

Doing things such as cooking together is a great learning experience for both of you. Make the fast food runs only on special occasions.

Tip: Home cooking is less expensive and healthier, too.

21 Have sleepovers with their friends

When possible, have their friends over for playdates and sleepovers. It is a special feeling for your kids to show off their bedroom.

Tip: It's a great way to learn about their friends.

22 Take the high road

If your former spouse is not being reasonable, or if you are being hard-headed, remember it is not about winning disagreements – it's about successful co-parenting. Co-parenting is about the kids.

Tip: You won't regret taking the high road in the long run.

23 You need to be a positive role model

Though actors, musicians, and sports stars are modern role models, the bottom line is to fill that role yourself and be there for them.

Tip: Do your best to be involved with and a positive influence on their lives.

24 Don't be hung up on dating right away after a divorce

Work on yourself before bringing someone new into the equation. Kids need to know they are your highest priority.

Tip: There is someone out there for you, but just make sure they are the right one for you and your kids.

25 Help make your house a home for all of you

Kids need to have some of their own "treasures" around to be comfortable at your place.

Tip: Take the time to learn from your past mistakes so you don't repeat them. ■



This article has been adapted with permission from 25 Tips for Divorced Dads by Tommy Maloney © 2011. Tommy Maloney is a speaker, consultant and author. He is a member of the National Speakers Association and the Colorado Speakers Association.

BODY WORK

Taking care of your body during and after divorce is essential to your emotional, mental, and physical health.

By Diana Shepherd



Your teenager has “borrowed” your car – again – without permission, so now you can’t drive your daughter to Brownies, and she’s throwing a huge hissy fit in the middle of the kitchen. There’s a message on your answering machine from your ex saying you have to take the kids for an

extra week because she got a fabulous deal on airfare to Florida and is leaving tomorrow for 10 days of sun and sand with her new boyfriend. Your savings account is down to (low) double-digits, but your son says he “just has to have” that new pair of \$150 running shoes or he’ll be branded as a “loser” at school.

Suddenly, you don’t feel so good: your stomach is upset, your chest feels tight, and you can feel a wicked migraine/backache/cold coming on. “This is so unfair!” you think. “My life is so difficult, and now I have to deal with illness on top of everything else!”

The stress in your life has risen beyond your ability to cope with it, and your body will respond with a “breakdown” wherever it’s weakest: if you tend to catch a cold easily, you’ll come down with a cold or flu; if you have a “bad back,” it will get worse; otherwise mild allergies will become moderate to severe – you get the picture.

According to the noted Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), except for the death of a spouse or child, divorce produces more stress than any other life event. If you ignore or deny your feelings of stress, you’ll end up sick or injured (clumsiness often goes along with stress) – and then you’ll feel even more stressed at having to cope with your disability in addition to all the other challenges you’re facing. Divorce-related stress is unavoidable, but you can learn to manage your stress so that it doesn’t seriously damage your body and spirit.

The only thing that’s required of you is a genuine willingness to change – everything else will grow out of your commitment to health and happiness. Without that commitment, however, any steps you take towards better health will be severely limited in scope and efficacy. Purchase a health-club membership or a piece of exercise equipment, and you’ll stop using it after a month because you “just can’t find the time”; or start purchasing wholesome, fresh ingredients to prepare nutritious meals and you’ll be back to fast food in a matter of days; try to quit smoking or drinking and you’ll fall off the wagon as soon as the going gets tough.

What’s your motivation?

The secret to long-term success seems to boil down to two main elements: motivation and support. Fear can sometimes be very motivating – for instance, your uncle dies of lung cancer and you quit smoking – but it often isn’t enough to effect permanent change. According to Dr. Andrew Weil, a world-renowned leader and



pioneer in the field of integrative medicine, you first have to identify the pay-offs as well as the costs of a specific behavior in order to change it.

For instance, let’s say you love rich, high-fat foods. You know that your father – who ate the same way you do now – died of a heart attack at 50, and that you have high blood pressure and bad knees from the 40 extra pounds you’re carrying. Obviously, you should change your eating habits. But still you can’t quite resist a double helping of fettuccine alfredo and that fourth beer. “I’ve had a rough day,” you think. “This will help me relax.” So the satisfaction of eating the foods you love outweighs the fear of dying of a heart attack like your father. As long as the rewards are greater than the costs, you won’t be able to change your eating habits.

Now, let’s look at another scenario. You’re offered the opportunity to spend a year living rent-free in a gorgeous beach-house in Hawaii. All you have to do in return is to take tourists on snorkeling and SCUBA dive trips – which requires a high level of physical fitness. Now, it’s always been your dream to spend a year in Hawaii, and you’ve always loved being in the ocean – suddenly, you’re excited about starting a diet and exercise regimen. Why? Because the cost of remaining fat and sedentary has now risen to include missing out on your dream year abroad – and just like that, the rewards of overindulging in rich foods are no longer greater than the costs.

“Even though I recognize the efficacy of fear in facilitating behavioral change, I feel that seeking positive reinforcement (a reward you can enjoy) is better than pursuing negative reinforcement (avoidance of something you do not want to experience), because research shows that positive reinforcement is better at maintaining new behavior,” writes Dr. Weil in *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* (Ballantine Books, 2007). “If fear is your motivator, when fear subsides, so does motivation. Fear can also paralyze you, preventing you from moving at all,” he continues.

So find a “rewarding” reason – one that really inspires you – to make positive lifestyle changes, and you’re just about assured of success. And if you can enroll people in supporting you to meet your goals – your friends, family, or a support group designed for your specific needs – you’re home-free.

Managing stress

If you’re facing the challenges of divorce right now, it’s probably safe to say that stress is your constant companion. Researchers at Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, D.C., have found that emotions can cause chemical reactions in our cells. This means that negative emotions (such as fear, anger, or even fretting) can have a detrimental impact on every part of your body – including the organs that support your immune system. If stressful thoughts and feelings can actually damage your physical health, you can see why managing stress properly – and

taking better care of your body – is so vital at this stage of your life.

So how do you relax and de-stress? If you're like most people, what leaps immediately to mind are "treat" behaviors: smoking, drinking, taking drugs (prescription or "recreational"), eating a carton of chocolate ice-cream – whatever gives you feelings of pleasure and well-being, no matter how transitory. Unfortunately, all of these are band-aid solutions – they temporarily ameliorate some of the symptoms without addressing the root of the problem – and none of them contribute to health and vitality.

Scanning for tension

A good place to start an effective stress-reduction program is to find out where you hold stress in your body. The first time you try the following exercise, you should probably be lying down with your eyes closed. Take the phone off the hook, and tell your kids or housemates that you don't want to be disturbed for at least half an hour. In this exercise, you'll be scanning your body from the tips of your toes to the top of your head, looking for places where you hold tension then consciously letting that tension go.

Focus your attention exclusively on one part of your body at a time, starting with your feet. Wiggle your toes. Rotate your ankles, and flex your feet so your toes are pointing up towards the ceiling, then down and away from you. Is there any tension in your feet or lower legs? If so, intentionally increase the tension for a few seconds, then exhale deeply and relax that part of your body, imagining the tension flowing out of you with your breath. Move your attention upwards to your thighs, buttocks, and hips. Flex each muscle in turn, checking for tension and discomfort, then let it go with a deep exhalation. Repeat for your stomach, chest, and shoulders. Pull your shoulders up towards your ears, hold them there tightly for a few seconds, then drop them down as far as they will comfortably go while you exhale. Now

examine your throat, mouth, cheeks, eyes, forehead, and scalp. Notice any tension, exaggerate then release it.

The benefits of this exercise are two-fold: first, you'll discover where you hold stress in your body; and two, you'll give your body a break by releasing tense areas.

Food for thought

At its most basic level, food is fuel for the body. Whether you're in training for the Boston Marathon, someone who goes for daily brisk walks, a skinny couch potato, or a chubby couch potato, the food you eat has a lot to do with your mood, energy levels, stamina, and ability to fend off disease. Your diet has a lot to do with the way you live your life – and how long that life is going to last. Even if you look slender on the outside, your diet could be setting you up for a whole host of medical problems: from indigestion to clogged arteries to cancer. Your food choices can put you on the road to wellness and vitality, or chronic fatigue and disease.

The first thing you need to do for yourself is get a little education about nutrition in general, and your nutritional needs in particular. Visit your family doctor; ask for a referral to a nutritionist; go to a health spa; read a great book on the subject. Discuss possible nutritional plans with your doctor to make sure they won't exacerbate existing health problems, and exercise some common-sense when choosing a new diet regimen: steer clear of anything that promises miraculous results in days, or advises you to eat from only a single food group (e.g., grapefruit three times a day).

And then – and this is key – listen to what your body is telling you about the food you're putting in your mouth. How you feel after eating certain foods: happy and energetic, or grumpy and tired? How do you feel after eating a double cheeseburger, large fries,

and a milkshake? An apple? A piece of cheesecake? A spinach salad?

Recognize that every body is different – what suits your best friend's body might be anathema to yours, so finding the ideal diet for you will be a case of trial and error.

Here are some suggestions on using food to improve your mood:

- **Cut back on caffeine**, including coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate. Women take note: caffeine has been found to play a huge role in PMS, from breast pain to mood swings. For some people, one cup a day is too much; you'll need to experiment to determine your threshold.
- **Drink pure water**. Ideally, you should be drinking about two liters of filtered water every day. This is one of the simplest, and yet most vital, steps you can take to improve your health.
- **Go low-fat**. Aside from improving your general health, some studies suggest that a low-fat diet may help stabilize your mood. Some easy ways to reduce your fat intake include avoiding fried foods, choosing leaner cuts of meat, and removing the skin from poultry before cooking it. Increase your consumption of fresh fruits, vegetables, and products made from whole grains (your body will thank you for the extra fiber, too).
- **Take your vitamins**. A deficiency in B vitamins – particularly thiamin, riboflavin, folate (the naturally occurring form of folic acid), and B6 – can exacerbate depression. Taking vitamin C is probably a good idea, too. It boosts your immune system, which probably isn't in tip-top shape right now.
- **Butt out**. Aside from increasing your risk of lung cancer and

heart disease, smoking triggers the release of stress hormones in the body.

- **Avoid sugar.** They'll give you a short-term boost but a long-term crash.

Exercise your options

Adopting a nutritional program that suits your individual metabolism and caloric requirements can clear up a lot of physical ailments. But if you really want to look and feel great – and help minimize the negative effects of divorce-related stress on your body – you need to do more than just eat right. You need to exercise.

What's the best form of exercise? The one you'll do. The best exercise equipment in the world won't do you a bit of good if you can't bring yourself to use it more than once a month.

If you've been sedentary for the last few years, you must see your physician before you start to exercise. If you haven't had a full physical examination in the last year, now's a great time to have one. Please be aware that pushing your body too hard too fast is a recipe for disaster – at the very least, you'll probably sprain or tear a muscle; at worst, you'll have a heart attack.

Unless your doctor vetoes the idea, a good place to start is by taking daily walks, slowly increasing the speed, distance, and duration. If you can't stand the idea of walking "aimlessly," give yourself errands to accomplish on your walks: instead of driving, walk to the bank/post office/milk store. Arrange to go for walks in scenic areas with friends so you can enjoy their company as well as the surroundings while you walk.

If your lifestyle can accommodate it, consider getting a dog: you're guaranteed daily exercise, and it's nice to come home to a happy, enthusiastic welcome instead of an empty house.

(Also, you've probably heard of the therapeutic side-effects of pet ownership: that stroking an animal lowers your blood pressure and decreases tension.) If owning a dog is out of the question, you could always "borrow" one: your neighbor would probably be thrilled if you offered to take her dog for a daily walk in the park.

Walking can also help you sleep better at night – good news for those suffering from divorce-related insomnia. In a study involving more than 700 men and women, researchers discovered that people who walked at least six blocks a day at a normal pace experienced fewer sleep-related problems such as nightmares, or trouble getting to or staying asleep; in fact, they were one-third less likely to have trouble sleeping until their wake-up time than people who didn't walk at all. And those who walked the same distance at an aerobic pace were 50% less likely to suffer sleep problems than non-walkers.

Seeing results

If you invest the time, energy, and commitment into caring for your body properly, it will repay you generously. But as an impatient North American, you're probably wondering when the rewards will start to show up.

"Both from observing the effects of natural therapies and from watching people try to make lasting changes in how they live, I have concluded that two months ... is the critical time for you see effects of therapeutic regimens as well as to replace old habits with new," says Dr. Weil. "If you can follow a program of healthy living for two months, you will have made the commitment of time and energy necessary for it to work."

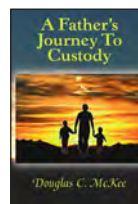
The information in this article is for information-purposes only. Do not begin any diet or exercise regimen without checking with your doctor first. ■

CHILDREN / CONT'D FROM PAGE 21

anything until it is ordered.

The log is a must. I was fortunate enough to keep one 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 that coincided (within a day or two) with 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 children; two of whom he was awarded primary physical custody of 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.