

Communities *ties*

A Newsletter for Families Parenting Apart

Starting Over

It can be challenging to start over after a divorce or separation. In order to move on with our lives we have to be willing to take steps forward.

Starting over often includes creating a new social life. A divorce or separation may generate reactions within ourselves and others that can make reaching out very difficult.

There are a lot of reasons people might give for not reaching out to others socially. Rebuilding can be challenging. Take small steps and don't get stuck in these excuses.

1. *"I'm too busy."* Do you tell yourself you don't have the time and energy to reach out to others socially? *Give yourself permission* to get involved with social activities slowly and do so in ways that fit with other parts of your life.
2. *"I don't know where to look."* As one member of a couple, you were part of a circle of friends. In order to meet new friends you may need to develop new interests or try doing the things you enjoy with new people.
3. *"I don't want to give up my new independence."* That's smart and you don't have to. You can have a

rich life with new friends and activities without looking for a new partner. There's nothing that says all your social outings should lead to "couple hood." It may be too soon for you to move into another relationship. Remember, starting over doesn't just mean finding a new partner.

4. *"I'm too old to start over."* Yes, you are older, and you're also wiser. You have something to offer other people as a friend or as a partner.
5. *"It's too risky."* Many people fear social rejection. It can be scary to reach out socially to others. Unless you take the risk you'll never know what could result.
6. *"My children need me."* Taking care of your own needs is very important. If you're doing well you will be better able to take care of your children. If you are feeling overwhelmed, take some time for yourself. If that doesn't work, don't be afraid to seek counseling or outside help.

It's not easy but you can move forward. Celebrate each step you take.

Cooperative Extension -University of Wisconsin-Extension



"Do what you can; with what you have; where you are."

-Theodore Roosevelt

READ MORE ABOUT IT:

For the kids...



Levins, S. (2006). Was it the Chocolate Pudding? A story for little kids about divorce. A comforting story that teaches children divorce is about grown-up problems while answering their questions. Includes a section for parents about helping their children through divorce.

Stern, Zoe & Evan. (2008). Divorce is not the end of the world. A teenage brother and sister whose parents are divorced discuss topics related to this situation and offer tips based on their experience .

For you...

Fisher, B. and Alberti, R. (2000). Rebuilding when your relationship ends (3rd edition). This book is used as the basis for a workshop with adults on the topic of post-divorce life.

Cooperative Parenting: Working Together

Separating parents know it's important to make decisions in their child's best interests. However, co-parents don't always agree about what is in the child's best interest and how the child's needs should be met.

Try not to let feelings of anger or hurt get in the way of making decisions as parents. Remember that your goal as parents is to create a healthy living environment for your children.

Creating a business-like relationship with the other parent will help you reduce conflict. Business-like means you focus on making decisions and solving problems in an emotionally-neutral way, the way you do with a store

clerk or bank teller.

Outline the needs of your child and review what you have done together as parents in the past and what you will each do in the future. This will assure your child's needs are met.

You and your co-parent will find it helpful to create a parenting plan that outlines how life will move forward for your child. This will reduce conflict and tension as you make decisions about your child.

Working together models important behaviors for your child. When parents work together children feel more loved and secure.



Grieving the Loss of the Relationship

The end of a committed relationship may be a crisis similar to losing a partner by death. Dr. Kubler-Ross has identified several stages of grief that you may experience. While these stages are often experienced in the order listed, it's not unusual to go in and out of them over time.

Denial: Denying that the divorce/separation is happening provides temporary relief from a painful reality.

Anger: Realizing that your expectations have not been met in the relationship may make you angry. Anger may be directed at your self or others.

Bargaining: Thoughts may surface about how the relationship might be saved. Change is hard but you can move forward.

Depression: Admitting that the relationship is over brings sadness. You may feel insignificant and unimportant and may cry easily. If these feelings don't pass in time, it's important to seek help.

Acceptance: Over time, adjustment to your new way of life will lead you to feel better. Life is more stable and hope emerges.



Don't forget your children grieve too. Love them...



Resilience in Tough Times



What experts say: Resilient families view crisis as something to share and not something each person has to go through by themselves. They see hardship as manageable and believe it contributes to growth and change across the life cycle of the family. (Walsh, F. 2006 *Strengthening Family Resilience*. New York: The Guilford Press)

In other words: When you're faced with a crisis you can look at the situation and see lots of different things. You might see defeat or helplessness. Perhaps you see fear. Maybe you see an opportunity to strengthen your bonds with others in your family. Hopefully you will see yourself as a stronger person on "the other side" of the crisis. There's a lot you may not be able to control, but you can control the way you choose to see and think about the situation. Your choices will make a big difference in how you come through the hard times.

What you can do: Think about how you are viewing your situation. Write down the first words that come to mind and look at what you've written. Is your view one that will move you forward or will it keep you stuck? List some positive things that could come out of this challenging situation. You may have to think awhile or talk with others, but see if you can change your perspective just a bit. Look at your list every day to remind yourself that some good can come out of this very tough time.

Provide the Building Blocks

The Search Institute has identified what young people need to be healthy, strong and resilient. These can be thought of as 40 building blocks for positive growth. Having these assets helps children get through tough times.

You can provide many of the building blocks your children need. Positive relationships are key. Here's a few ways you can help.

Make this pledge to your child:

- I will give you a lot of love and support.
- You can come to me for advice and support.
- I will value and support your efforts in school.
- I will give you clear rules and consequences for behavior.

- I will model positive responsible behavior and encourage other adults in your life to do so as well.
- I will encourage you to do well as you follow your passions.

Keeping your pledge increases the chances your child will:

- Feel good about himself/herself.
- Feel positive about his/her future.
- Make and keep good friends.
- Want to do well in school.
- Be good at planning ahead and making decision.



TAKE AWAY TIPS:

What parents can do for their children



- **Model healthy self-care.**
- **Promote a positive relationship with the other parent.**
- **Recognize that children grieve.**
- **Communicate with the other parent in a business-like manner**
- **See difficult times as manageable times of family growth.**



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Other Resources:

The following resources can be found on the national Extension website, extension.org

Many types of loss cause grief

<http://www.extension.org/pages/30356/many-types-of-loss-cause-grief>

Ways child care providers can help children deal with grief and loss

<http://www.extension.org/pages/59556/ways-child-care-providers-can-help-children-deal-with-grief-and-loss>