



REDUCING THE CHAOS CREATED BY A DIVORCE

Divorce creates chaos. The chaos is caused by changes in residences, self perceptions, finances, social relationships, parenting, and more.

Essentially, the rule book by which you have been playing has been destroyed. When this happens, your behavior can become odd. You may find yourself reverting to the lifestyle of your single days, even though it conflicts with your current maturity. You may participate in self-destructive activities involving drugs and alcohol. You might develop unwise relationships with members of the opposite sex.

The advice which follows is designed to protect you during your transition period. These rules of behavior during your divorce will help you weather the storm that is about to engulf you.

The rules fall into 3 categories:

1. Limit change. If it isn't broken, don't fix it. If it doesn't have to be changed, don't change it.
2. Protect people. Protect children first, you second, and yes, spouse third.
3. Protect financial positions. Provide for necessities, preserve assets, and pay bills.

1. LIMIT CHANGE

DON'T MAKE ANY MAJOR CHANGES FOR A YEAR

People often react to a divorce by deciding that since their marriage is ending, everything has to be changed. They change jobs, residences, cash in retirement accounts, or join a commune. You have enough changes in your life right now. If something in your life doesn't absolutely have to be changed, leave it alone. The guideline of one year after the divorce for not making any major changes is a good average time period. Admittedly, some people don't need any time and for others, no amount of time will be enough.

STAY OUT OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS FOR AT LEAST A YEAR

You are at your most vulnerable right now. You are also seeking to redefine the new you. You will very likely be a very different person in a year than you are right now, and odds are you will not ultimately fit with anyone you become involved with now. Any relationship you enter into right now will be based on panic, need, or simply grief, which is a bad way to start a relationship. Of all the good advice provided here, this recommendation is the one least likely to be followed.

2. PROTECT PEOPLE

TAKE CARE OF YOUR CHILDREN

Your most important task during your divorce is protecting your children. Make sure they have what they need. Shelter them from the divorce. Keep stress away from them. Maintain a positive attitude around your children. In addition to protecting the children, focusing on the needs of your children takes the focus away from you. This keeps you from dwelling on your problems while you are developing a new rule book for yourself.

GIVE YOURSELF TIME

You are going through a lot, and it is going to take time to recover from it. Don't let anybody tell you to get over it. You will get over it in your own time. Most people start to recover in about a year or so. Some people require longer. If you find yourself stuck or can't function at your job or as a parent, it is time to get help.

KEEP YOUR FRIENDS

Some of your friends will feel awkward associating with you after your separation. Some will not and will be supportive. Keep them close. Friends can help in tough times. However, be careful about taking any advice they might give you. You can listen to them, but before you make any decisions, get advice from someone who knows what's going on. If you have a friend of the same sex, that is a good thing. If you have a friend of the opposite sex, it will likely complicate things during this period in your life.

KEEP YOUR FAMILY

Members of your family can be your greatest allies. Don't alienate them. Any unhappiness you may feel toward them right now may simply be a reflection of how you feel about the divorce process. It is possible that your family will want to defend you at all costs. Be very careful; letting them defend you at all costs may not be the best approach. Any advice they give you, or actions they want you to take, may not be in your best interests or what is best for your children. Talk it over with the experts you have hired before acting on any advice that family members give you.

TREAT YOUR SPOUSE WITH RESPECT

If you had never had any children together, then it would not matter what you did to your spouse during the divorce. You could spend every dime the two of you have making him or her miserable. But you and your spouse are going to be parents forever. That means you are going to have a relationship forever. Do you want your spouse as an enemy forever? Put your anger aside and give him or her credit for being a good parent.

3. PROTECT FINANCIAL POSITIONS

PROTECT YOUR JOB

Your job is more important than it ever has been; don't do anything to jeopardize it. Level with your employer. Tell your boss what is going on and be sure to make up time if you have to. Do whatever is necessary to keep the relationship sound. If you are unhappy with your job, be careful. The unhappiness could be a reaction to the divorce more than anything else. If after a year you are still unhappy, begin a systematic search for a new position. Do it right: give proper notice and don't burn any bridges on your way out.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR FINANCES

Don't spend money on luxuries. Make the note payment on your car. You can't get to work if you don't have a car. Make the payment on the house if you can. If you can't, make sure your spouse knows about it; then whether or not the house can be protected will be a joint problem. Same goes for your other bills. However, the necessities of life for you and your children come first. Any money you have goes to protect people first, then assets, and finally your credit rating.