

You Can Handle This Divorce!

**10 Powerful Secrets
to Coping with Divorce**

By

Shelley Stile

Divorce Recovery Life Coach

www.changecoachshelley.com

You Can Handle This Divorce!

10 Powerful Secrets to Coping with Divorce

These are some of the toughest times you will ever experience but I promise you that there are highly specific things that you can do to effectively handle the emotional overwhelm of divorce.

I have given you **10 powerful tools** to utilize so that not only will you survive this life transition, but do so in a way that will move you forward and empower you to take charge.

Divorce, one of life's greatest challenges, will reveal itself to be an experience that will gift you with new strength, knowledge and wisdom that will evolve you as a human being. It might not feel like that right now, but as time passes, these invaluable life lessons will reveal themselves to you.

For now, read on and use these skills and tools to support and guide you to coping with your divorce:

1. Taming Mind Chatter

Let's call a spade a spade, shall we? The mind chatter that is running on a permanent repeat loop in your head is your gremlin. To get a better idea of what a Gremlin does, let's look at what a gremlin might look like:



Ugly little devil, wreaking havoc. The great self-saboteur, telling you everything you do wrong, how life won't work out and what a fool you are...on and on and on. I know you know exactly what I am talking about because we all have our own customized Gremlin within. It is the voice inside our head that does not know when to stop, the voice that will limit what we can do in life and keeps us stuck in fear and unable to move forward. It's time to tame that critter.

Name your gremlin. Mine is Angelika, the little brat from the children's television show Rug rats. Naming your gremlin reinforces the fact that your mind chatter is not you. It really isn't. Your gremlin is part of your wounded ego. It is responding to the pain of your divorce. All the emotional baggage you've been schlepping around all your life intensifies it. This is baggage you brought into your marriage. Simply observe your gremlin yapping away and notice that you are not the gremlin but the person doing the observing.

Notice your Gremlin and you are on the way to taming it. Simply in the act of noticing, you begin to dis-empower it. You see that you are a separate entity from the chatter. You notice that what is being said is not necessarily true and based on fear. A gremlin thrives on your fears. It wants to use those fears to hold you back and keep you stuck in the pain of the past. You get to choose whether you will listen to that ugly little sucker or simply notice it, thank it for sharing and move on. Practice makes perfect. Be on the lookout for your gremlin!

2. Be Aware



You'll tame that Gremlin if you are living in a state of awareness. Most of us are not truly connected to what is happening within. As a result, we tend to react to situations and end up regretting what we have said and done. There is a good reason for this: the right side of our brain that controls our emotions reacts much faster than the left side, our center of rational thinking. Basically that translates into our emotions running the show. We react much faster emotionally than rationally and oftentimes we aren't even aware that we are on our way to upset.

Be aware of your body because it will offer you clues as to your emotional state. When I am heading for upset I get highly specific clues: my stomach gets butterflies, my heart races and my muscles tense. If I am conscious of these clues, I can stop the upset by taking a step back, removing myself from the situation and giving myself a time-out.

Let me give you an exercise to practice:

The Time-Out:

When you notice yourself getting upset, stop and remove yourself from the upsetting or stressful situation. Go sit somewhere quiet and take about 5 deep breaths, with each inhale and exhale lasting about 4 seconds. Be fully focused on the physical sensations of your breath. Notice it hitting the back of your throat and how you belly expands and contracts.

Then visualize a time when you were experiencing joy or a deep sense of peace. Perhaps it is the face of your child sleeping your arms or a beautiful sunset. Reconnect with how you were feeling and just sit with that for a minute or so. Then come back to now and ask yourself how you want to handle the stressful situation.

Another benefit of awareness is noticing what make you feel good and what makes you feel bad; what empowers you and what dis-empowers you. You drink 5 cups of coffee before lunchtime and you become jittery and cranky. Notice that and resolve not to do it anymore because it is working against you. You blow up at your ex, he/she says some very hurtful things in response and you end up feeling horrible. In the future, notice you are heading for upset and stop yourself. Get the idea.

Try keeping a notebook with you during the course of one day and mark down what makes you feel good and what makes you bad, what empowers you and what dis-empowers you, what moves you forward and what moves you backwards. Then look over the list and commit to removing the things that don't serve you well and emphasizing those things that make you feel better.

3. Take Care of Yourself



Exactly how are you treating yourself these days? What are you doing to take care of yourself under these extraordinarily stressful times? If you don't think self-care and self-nurturing are important, you are dead wrong. Not taking care of yourself at this point in your life only adds to the pain of your divorce.

If you feel like hell and can't think straight there is a scientifically proven reason: stress breaks us down both physically and mentally...literally. The stress hormone cortisol has been shown to not only suppress our immune system but to also affect our cognitive functioning. Of the top ten stressful life events one will ever face in their lifetime, divorce is #2 only behind the death of a spouse! Guess what #3 is? Marital separation.

It is absolutely imperative that you pay close attention to your self-care regimen. Here are some tips to help combat depression, anxiety, stress and anger:

- Are you getting enough sleep? If you are experiencing insomnia then see your doctor and perhaps think about some sort of sleep aid for a period of time. Sleep deprivation is like adding fuel to the fire of stress. Take long hot baths before you go to bed, drink a glass of milk, and look for natural herbs to help you fall asleep. Exercise also helps you sleep better. Get adequate rest.

- Are you exercising to burn off anxiety and depression? The Mayo Clinic suggests that exercise raises the levels of certain mood enhancing neurotransmitters in the brain. It boosts feel-good endorphins, reduces sleep better...need I go on? It also boosts your confidence, serves as a distraction and is a great coping activity.
- Take up something you really enjoy doing and get out there and do it. Start off with small steps and then build up. Try walking 10 minutes a day and then increase it incrementally until you can spend an hour out there. Go back to tennis if you had played previously. Enlist a friend in an activity. Anything to get you out and moving at a brisk pace.
- Consider yoga. Not only will you get a great workout but you will also start to access yoga's restorative benefits on a mental and spiritual level.
- Meditation works wonders and if you are like me and can't seem to focus for long, don't worry. Meditative practices can be done in less than 5 minutes and still works wonders! I have already given you the Time-Out exercise. Use it whenever need be.
- Practice gratitude. Think of what you have versus what you don't. List all the things that you have to be grateful for in your life. Be appreciative. This practice will make you feel better. Look for what is right in your life instead of everything that is wrong. I promise you that if you are looking for everything that is wrong in your life, you will find it!
- Pamper and nurture yourself. Give yourself the love and compassion that you deserve instead of beating yourself up all the time. We are our own worst enemy but we can also choose to be our own personal nanny! Take long, hot baths. Get a manicure and pedicure. Splurge on a massage and if you cannot afford one, get the kids to you give you one! Read a book that you have been putting off. Take off for 24 hours. Think of the things that make you feel better and do them for yourself.
- Don't isolate yourself. Seek the support of family and good friends. Check out a local divorce support group in your area so you can talk to other people experiencing the same emotions as you. No one said you had to go it alone. Get the help of a therapist or coach. Give yourself what you need. You have one precious life to live and you get to choose how to live it.

4. Set Boundaries



We are defined by what we say no to. Say for example you are on the phone with your ex and he or she begins to verbally abuse you. Do you stay and listen or do you set a boundary to protect yourself? How about using a little Pavlovian conditioning? Remember the Russian scientist who trained dogs through the use of electro-shock therapy? Now I am not suggesting you use a cattle prod (although I'll bet you are thinking that is an enticing idea) but I am suggesting that you set boundaries and enforce them consistently.

"I want you to know that I will not accept verbal abuse from you and in the future when you go there, I am simply getting off the phone." And back it up with action. Or how about not even allowing phone conversations period? "If you want to communicate with me, please do it through e-mail", and once again if you get abusive verbiage via an e-mail, set a new boundary.

Limit exposure to your home by your ex or stop it completely. Do what you need to do to create a safe and secure environment for yourself. Your home is now your home and that means your ex can no longer come and go as if things were the way they were. They aren't. You are no longer married.

Ask your friends not to discuss your ex with you anymore as it only ends up making you feel bad. If you have children, set up ways to communicate and to handle custody so that you will not be upset every time you have to have an interaction. If that means you dropping the children off, so be it. Notice what your emotional triggers are: the buttons that get pushed and set you off. Once you have identified them, remove them as best you can from your life.

I always encourage people to utilize their divorce attorneys as much as possible if financially feasible. Billable hours build up so you must be cognizant of that but all too often our ex attempts to discuss things that are best handled by the lawyers. Don't get bullied and don't allow yourself to get upset.

Remove those situations from your life that are making you feel bad. Being keenly aware and conscious of what causes you upset is the key. I note that many of my clients are extremely upset after speaking with their ex. That brings to mind the story of the patient who complains to their Doctor that their arm hurts when they move it in a certain way. What does the Doctor say? Don't move it that way! So if you cannot speak with your ex without getting upset, don't speak to them!

If you are attempting to cut the emotional cord between you and your ex, I assure you that continuing to keep your ex in your life will maintain and even strengthen that cord. Cutting yourself off from your ex as much as possible gives you the room to heal.

5. Watch Out for Interpretations



All too often, it is not so much the events of our life that keep us in pain but our interpretations of those events. Let me give you a perfect example. Let's say that when you were a child you had a Mother who was very negative. She only told you what you did wrong and never what you did right. As a child, how might you have interpreted that?

Perhaps you decided that you weren't good enough or not lovable. Because you were just a child, your interpretation is understandable but therein lies the problem: you go on to internalize that core belief about yourself and live your entire life as if you weren't good enough.... all based on a child's interpretation that is not necessarily true. The truth is you had a Mother who was negative. It was her issue. It does not mean you were unlovable, it means that you had a Mother who couldn't give you the positive reinforcement every child needs. You interpreted her behavior as meaning that you were not good enough. Your interpretation is not a fact.

It happens the same way in marriage and divorce. We create meanings or interpretations about ourselves as a result of the events of our relationships. You may have heard a friend bemoan the fact she is a failure because her marriage ended. Again, that is her interpretation and one that is based on the pain she is experiencing. Common meanings we attach to a divorce are I am not lovable, I am a failure, I am stupid, I will be lonely the rest of my life and I'm not good enough... just to name a few.

To complicate matters even more, our divorce only reinforces the emotional baggage and core beliefs we adopted about ourselves from our childhood. If for example you felt unloved as child, you may hold a core belief about yourself that you are unlovable and your divorce only confirms that belief.

Here's the point: you need to recognize that your meanings or interpretations are not facts. They are meanings that you and you alone created. You chose them. You are confusing meanings from unarguable facts, which is dangerous because it is feeling like a failure that is holding you back now. What have you made your divorce mean about you? What negative interpretations do you hold about yourself right now? Are they true?

You might 'feel' like a failure but I'll bet that it's only a feeling and not a fact. Start separating what is an unarguable fact from the meanings you have created about yourself. Examine your divorce. Is your 'divorce story' factual? Are there elements of your divorce story that are just meanings that your wounded ego has created? How do those meanings make you feel? Probably terrible, right?

Try looking back over your marriage and start to differentiate between the cold, hard facts and your personal interpretations. Remember, when we are in pain we filter everything through that perspective. Your filter dictates the meanings you attach to the events of your divorce.

Write out your divorce story in all its gory detail and hold nothing back, really let loose. Then go back and identify the facts, things that cannot be argued otherwise. My husband left me, fact. It must be because he never loved me. Interpretation. Got it? Once you take a look at how much of the pain you are experiencing is due to things that are not necessarily the truth, you will not only be amazed but will also begin to see that you can let go much easier. Letting go leads to moving on.

Not only that, you can begin to choose meanings that will empower you. If you are going to interpret things, interpret them in such a way that empowers you! If you are getting divorced, don't make it mean you are a failure. What other interpretation could you choose that empowers you? Perhaps that this was meant to be? Perhaps that it was not you but both of you who were the co-creators of your relationship that led to the ending of your marriage? Perhaps that you did the best you could given the resources at hand at the time? Perhaps that there is a world of possibility in front of you now that didn't exist before

6. Drop Unenforceable Expectations



This is a really big one! Apply this concept not only to your divorce but life overall. So, you are getting divorced and the proverbial s--t has hit the fan. You are tremendously upset because your ex is behaving badly, giving you a hard time, not showing up on time for the kids and not wanting to give you adequate financial support. Duh? Exactly what did you expect? No really, think about it. Either consciously or subconsciously, I submit to you that you did expect all of the above, even if you knew instinctively that it was silly to have those expectations.

Unenforceable expectations are just that: expectations we have that are completely out of our control, unenforceable. So your ex never shows up on time to pick up the kids on his weekends and it throws off your plans. It is aggravating and you burn with resentment. Somehow you continue to expect this behavior to change. Can you possibly control your ex? Were you ever able to control his/her behavior? Are your expectations of timeliness on his part enforceable? What do you do?

Drop the expectation because you are just setting yourself up for continued aggravation, disappointment and resentment which will eat you up, not him! Accept the situation as it is and ask yourself how you can do things differently so that you can still adhere to your own timeline and plans. What other options are available for you? Can you have a babysitter wait with the kids? Can you drop the kids off at a friend's or neighbors? Can the lawyers do anything about it? Can you make your plans about an hour later to save you the upset?

The point is we must differentiate between what we can control and what we cannot. In other words, what we can enforce and what we cannot.

Expectations are premeditated routes to disappointment and resentment. We also have these same unenforceable expectations about life in general.

For instance, when you complain that life isn't fair and you can't seem to catch a break, what you are really saying is that you expect life to be fair. Well, what has your entire life experience shown you to be true? Is life fair? Is it sometimes fair and sometimes not? How about joy? Is life one big bowl of cherries? Nope. Sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't and that my friend is life.

I would suggest that when you get upset you take a look inside and inquire as to the existence of an expectation that might be hiding. It might be as simple as this personal experience of mine: I get upset when I walk into my daughter's room and it is messy. Sometimes I even take it as a personal affront! What has my experience of living with my daughter shown me to be true? That she lives in a messy room and it doesn't faze her in the least. Why in the world would I expect anything different? Now I am not suggesting that I accept the pigsty and never say another word to her, but I am saying that I can bypass emotional upset by not being surprised by the mess. I can choose another way of handling it, which by the way I have. I have eased up on the standards I foolishly attempt to impose as they are totally unrealistic and I have set down a law that if the room is not cleaned every few days, there will be explicit repercussions.

Take out a journal and make a list of all the expectations that you might be living with. Take this exercise seriously because it can free you from so much upset in your life. Check out whether those expectations are realistic or not, enforceable or not. If you can't control the expectation, drop it and look for a different way of handling the situation.

7. Give up Being a Victim



This step is all about empowering yourself which gives you the wherewithal to take back control of your life. If you are blaming your ex, you are handing over control of your life to them. Think about this.

For instance, you are experiencing feelings of self-doubt, fear and deep sadness. You blame your ex for how you are feeling saying that the way you feel is his/her fault because they initiated the divorce. Therefore, the way you feel is not your responsibility but theirs. They are the one who makes you feel bad. It is their fault you feel like crap and can't cope or let go or whatever your grievance might be.

By taking the onus of how you feel off your own shoulders and transferring it to them you have made yourself a victim and hence powerless. You tell yourself he/she is to blame which means that only he/she can make you feel better. You are off the hook.

Only by taking responsibility for your own feelings and your own life will you be able to cope with this divorce and reclaim your power to let go and move on. Being responsible for yourself means that you acknowledge that only you can make a difference in your life. Claiming responsibility for your life also means claiming responsibility for 'what was' as well as 'what is' now.

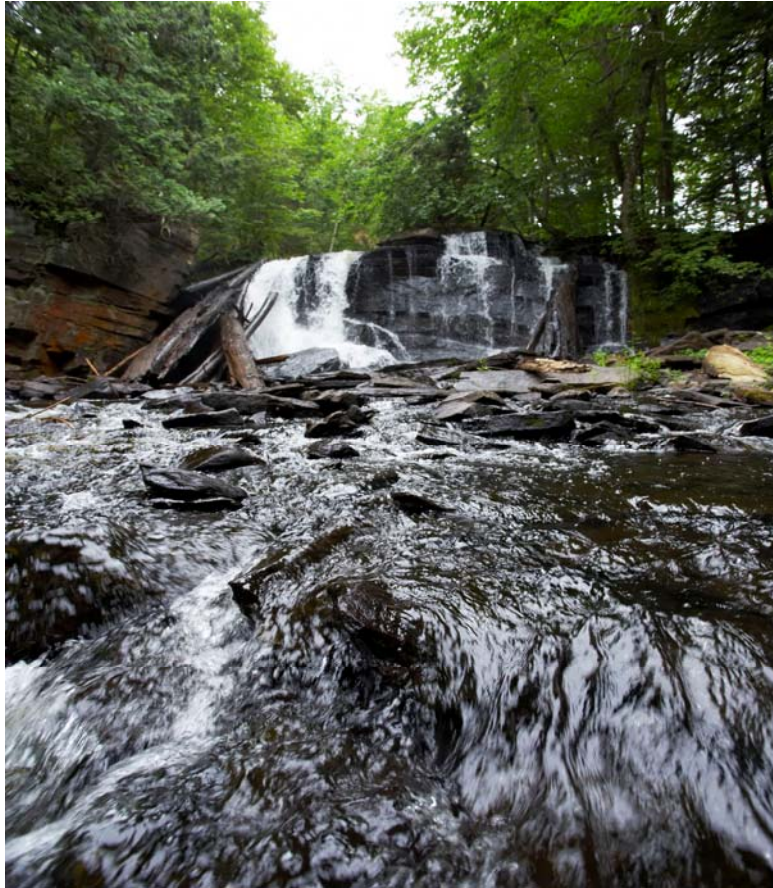
Our marriages and divorce are co-creations. A marriage is made up of two people and both of those individuals are equally responsible for their relationship. Even if your spouse betrayed and left you, you had a part in the end of your marriage.

You may not see that but it is true. Perhaps you were an enabler, allowing your spouse to treat you poorly without making a stand for yourself. Perhaps you ignored the warning signs of trouble all along, not wanting to confront the truth. There are innumerable ways that we contribute to the demise of our marriage but we have to be honest enough with ourselves order to see them.

Taking responsibility for yourself and your part in the divorce gives you the freedom to stop blaming. When you stop blaming and take back responsibility for your life, you take back your power from your ex and begin determining how your life will unfold.

To cope with the myriad tasks of your divorce, you need to be pro-active, confident and powerful. Those qualities are totally absent in a victim. Being a victim allows you to be manipulated and controlled. Is that how you want to live your life? Will that allow you to effectively cope with this divorce? Not!

8. Go with your Life's New Direction



You face a river that is running swiftly downstream. Do you swim against the current or go with the direction of the river's flow? It is the same with your life right now. Resisting reality and living in 'should be's' is a guarantee of staying stuck in the pain of your divorce.

You must be able to consciously see your new reality and acknowledge that this is what your life is now. The past cannot be changed. It is gone, never to return. Attempting to undo the past is not only utterly futile but it is insane. It is like trying to put a square cap on a round container. Cannot be done.

Your life is moving in a new direction and you get to choose to accept that new direction, embrace it and discover what it has to offer you in the way of new possibilities and opportunities. Even if you cannot see that right now, they are there. You are caught in the binding snowstorm of negative emotions and they are cutting you off from your future.

I mentioned choice earlier on and that is a powerful key to divorce recovery. You are a human being blessed with the gifts of free will, I.E. choice. You get to choose. If you choose to resist you will reap the results of that choice... staying stuck in the pain of your past and unable to be free to move on with your life. If you choose to let go of the past that is dead and go with your life's flow, you will reap the benefits of that choice... true freedom to let go of anything that is blocking your way to a new and vibrant life after divorce. Your choices will define your life.

I believe we resist our new reality because of our fear of the unknown. The future is scary and uncertain. It is that uncertainty; the prospect of not knowing what will be that scares us and keeps us grounded in the past and in resistance. The truth is that no one can predict the future. The future is always unknown. We can either fear it or have faith that everything will work out in our best interest. What if our life is unfolding just as it is meant to? What if everything happens for a good reason? What if this is the threshold to something bigger and better than before?

Again it comes down to choice. You can choose to live in fear of the future, which seems silly to me given the fact that you don't even know what your future might hold. You can also choose to accept what is and have a belief that your life is unfolding just as it should and holds great possibilities for you. You decide.

9. Change Your Attitude



Your attitude not only changes the way you look at life but it actually changes life itself. If you are looking at life through a negative filter and everything looks wrong, then chances are very good that everything will be wrong. If you look at life through a positive filter, then possibilities will appear in your life all the time. It may sound Pollyannaish but it is true.

You are having a bad day at work and you walk out of the office in an ugly mood. You get in your car and your bad mood only makes the traffic even more frustrating, which causes your mood to spiral downward. Now you are really pissed. You walk into the house and the kids are watching TV and given how you are feeling, that sets off yet another emotional trigger. You lose it. Your attitude or perspective is like a mutant virus that affects everything.

It is the same with your perspective on your life during or after divorce if you are angry, bitter and fearful that becomes your prevalent perspective on life, which in turn colors every single area of your being.

Notice what your prevalent perspective is right now. Try replacing fear with hope; what's wrong with what's right and what might be possible versus what seems impossible. Try on some rose colored glasses for a change. Remind yourself of what you have to be grateful for instead of what you are lacking. Practice gratitude because it has a powerful effect on perspective. Consider that your life is actually heading in the right direction versus the wrong. Imagine that this is all happening for a very good reason: to evolve you into a bigger and better person.

10. Choose Wisely



Throughout these steps I have used the word choice over and over and for a very good reason. You make hundreds of choices during the course of a few days, from what to have for breakfast to how to speak to your ex. Every choice you make has repercussions.

I have mentioned that our choices define us. You must get how important that statement is for you. What we choose to say no to carries huge significance. Saying no to a bad marriage that has kept you stuck in pain and unhappiness will move you forward into a better life. Saying no to accepting emotional abuse is honoring and respecting you. Conversely, what we choose to say yes to also defines us. When we say yes to taking care of ourselves, we are making a choice that will serve us well.

Say you choose to stay out late on a work night. What are the repercussions? Will that choice serve you or harm you? Say you choose to give into feelings of blame and resentment? Will that choice move you forward or keep you stuck in the past? We must stop and think before we make choices and fully consider what those choices will mean to our lives.

Use the time-out practice when you are faced with situation that demands you think before you act. It will work wonders in your behalf.

In Closing....

Read and re-read these 10 Secrets to Coping with Your Divorce and turn them into habits. It takes about 90 days to change our habits with concerted effort so practice, practice, and practice.

Not only will these ten areas help you cope with the trauma of divorce, they will also place you on the road to letting go and moving on after your divorce. What you put in is what you will get out. I promise you that you will feel better and be able to handle the events of your life much more effectively if you take all these suggestions to heart and set them in action.

I invite you to visit me at www.changecoachshelley.com for additional information and resources on Divorce Recovery and Life after Divorce.

Shelley