

How to Handle the Holidays After Divorce or Separation

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The holidays are just around the corner. For those of us that are separated or divorced, it can be a tough time. I have friends that have told me, “I just wish I could hibernate – starting from Thanksgiving all the way through New Year’s Day”.

Maybe you feel that way too. There’s nothing wrong with you; it’s completely normal given what you have gone through. Although a spectrum of uncomfortable feeling inevitably come up for you,

it can’t be very enjoyable to dread an entire holiday season, right? If this is true for you, perhaps we can talk about some techniques that can help relieve some of the difficulty during this time.

Here’s the deal: As you read this article, I am going to ask you to make a commitment to yourself to

stay open. If there is a strategy that resonates with you, give it a try. If it doesn’t, that’s OK - just pass on it, and see if there is something else that may help you.”

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Let’s talk about the different areas of your life and how to undergird and strengthen those areas. These area of life can be easily remembered by the acronym STEPHEN:

They are as follows:

Spiritual
Team of Support
Emotional
Physical
Habitual
Energy
Nutritional

Spiritual: More than ever, the holidays are a great time to reignite or consider starting spiritual practices. The beauty of having a spiritual life is

that you get customize your spiritual world just for you... and you have so many choices. You can implement something as simple as a breathing technique which promotes calmness and lowers blood pressure. My favorite is breathing in deeply and slowly through your nose for five seconds and breathing out deeply and slowly through your mouth

for five seconds. Repeat four or more times. There’s also prayer, meditation, reading scripture, fasting and developing a focused awareness of the beauty of nature, which is very inspirational. Additionally, this might be a perfect season to consider visiting your local church, synagogue or temple. Many people derive a huge sense of solace by communing with those of the same faith.

“You can implement something as simple as a breathing technique...”



Team of Support: It is human nature to isolate and retreat when you are in pain. That's what I did, and I can honestly tell you that, although it felt like the right thing at the time, it was a mistake. The company and comfort of friends, family, neighbors and co-workers who understand and care for you can be a transforming experience. The best thing you can do for yourself, especially during the holidays, is to reach out to others. If you are open to it, joining some type of support group can be immensely helpful. Studies have shown that those who can talk with others who have similar challenging situations, attribute a great deal of their success to the support of a group. I'm just sayin'.

“...although it felt like the right thing at the time, it was a mistake.”

Emotional: Those of us that have gone through a tough break-up, separation or divorce know what it's like to experience the negative side of emotions, all too well. Even negative emotions require a delicate balance. Meaning, negative emotions like anger, fear, self-pity and others can be under-expressed or over-expressed. Harvest House has developed a set of questions that may help you to get an idea of where you are on the spectrum:

1. Do I feel that it's all right to express my feelings and emotions and to talk about them? Or have I learned that feelings and emotions are dangerous?
2. Do I acknowledge my emotions without trying to push them down?
3. Do I feel that I have to manufacture or make up emotions that I don't really feel in order to please others or because I think I should feel certain emotions?
4. Are there emotions that I overdo (perhaps anger, depression, self-pity)?

5. Are there emotions that I refuse to experience (attraction, hurt, enthusiasm)?
6. Do I use my emotions to control others and get them to do what I want them to do?

“...negative emotions like anger, fear, self-pity and others can be under-expressed or over-expressed.”

Physical: I am going to tell you something you've never heard before – not!

It is extremely important to start, maintain or even increase your physical activity especially when you're not feeling great amount life during the holidays. We all have probably heard that being physically active reduces hormones that cause stress, anxiety and depression. And, yes, I get it... the last thing you may feel like doing is to get up off that couch and go for a bike ride, talk a walk or go to the gym. Although feelings are important, in this case, fact is more important. The fact is that this is good for you in the moment and in the long-term. This is your time to heal, to get better and you want what's good for YOU, don't you? I remember someone who was going through a very rough time, and she started out by walking one block a day, because that's all she could do. The next week she increased it to two blocks, then four, then six. She now walks 3 miles every day! So please, for yourself, start moving every day, even if it's a small start.

“Although feelings are important, in this case, fact is more important.”

Habitual: We are creatures of habit, we get into ruts and it's hard to break out of them. It is especially difficult when it involves a past significant relationship. The area most challenging, at least for me, is in the area of our thoughts and attitudes. For me, I struggled with thoughts like, "I will never get my life back" and blaming attitudes like "this is ALL your fault!". Learning how to shift thoughts, feelings and behavior is a process, but it can be done with time and practice. Here's a strategy that my coaching mentor,

Magali Peysha came up with that I found very helpful:(I changed to event examples that might be more relevant to you)

The Three P's Strategy:

This strategy is beneficial when dealing with attending specific events like going to a holiday social, or a weekly soccer game where you see your ex with their new significant other, or attending a family function.

A. Purpose:

What is the deeper purpose of this gathering event or meeting. What do I really want as an outcome of this event, circumstance, or situation. Why am I doing this? Think of an event and repeat it a couple of times out loud as well as internally.

B. Posture:

How do you normally get in your body in this stressful environment? i.e. breath, feelings of stress in your face and neck, shoulders etc. Then create a new posture, i.e. how would I physically show up for this? What would my breathing be like, where would I put my hands to remind myself of my purpose?

C. Presence:

The only place we have total mastery is in the present. If I am feeling anxious, then I am probably thinking about the future, if I'm getting

disappointed I'm probably thinking about the past. If I am being present, I can be aligned with my purpose and my posture. Practice it every day for three minutes and do it in the car prior to your arrival.

Energy:

When we approach the holidays, our energy level has a tendency to be low, sometimes very low. When I refer to energy it could be vibration ally, mentally, emotionally, spiritually or all of the above. There are many exercises and techniques to increase these levels, but one of my favorites is practicing gratitude. It could be as simple as reminding yourself 3 things you're grateful while you're brushing your teeth every morning. Or, perhaps starting a gratitude journal, like I did. Whatever you choose, it is a practice that can enhance your life in more ways than you can ever imagine.

EckhartTolle said,

“It is through gratitude for the present moment that the spiritual dimension of life opens up.”

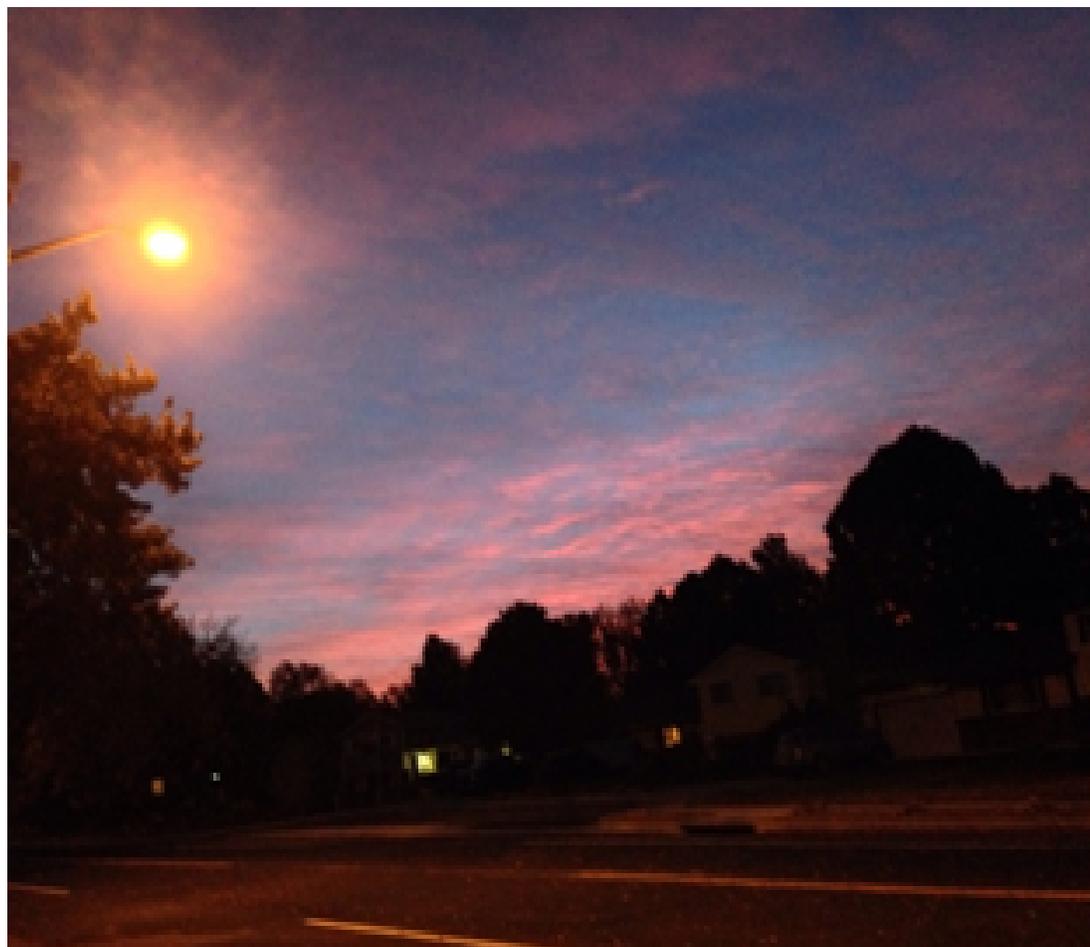
In the presence of your current difficulty, what is the good that you can be grateful for today? Today, among other things, I was grateful for the beautiful sunrise with gorgeous pink clouds, as I walked my adorable Rat Terrier, Ricky:

Nutrition: as you know, is also key to getting better as a whole person. And, sadly we use food for non-nutritional issues like comfort. I've done it too. With the holidays approaching, it's not easy. However, would you consider making small changes? How about smaller portions, cutting down on the carbs, or the sugar? Or, throwing in a salad there somewhere? You could do that, right?

Lastly, supplement can be a real booster for you during this time. For example, **St. John's Wort** is one of the most commonly recommended herbs for depression, it has a reputation of reducing anxiety and calming moods. Also, Vitamin B5, otherwise known as pantothenic

acid, is considered a good supplement for depression. Deficiency in pantothenic acid may cause fatigue and depression. Vitamin B6, otherwise known as pyridoxine, is a source of serotonin, melatonin, and dopamine. Its deficiency can cause mental confusion.

As you enter to holiday season, on the heels of a break-up, separation or divorce, remember that this is your time to bring healing to every aspect of your being. So pick a strategy or two mentioned above and give it all you've got because YOU are worth the effort!



Shan White, a certified life coach, specializes in working with women in preventing or recovering from the heartache of divorce.

Sign up for a complimentary "Divorce Prevention or Divorce Recovery Strategy Session" at:

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