

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Rebuilding after separation and divorce

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

We're all feeling anxious about COVID-19 as we're dealing with major changes to our lives and routines.

Divorce recovery or a separation journey may be further impacted by financial security worries or not being able to easily reach out to friends.

Here are some tips to help you manage through this time:

- **Take things day by day, hour by hour**

Going through a separation or divorce is a personal challenge, but we are all now faced with a crisis that threatens our sense of identity, of who we are, especially if we have not only become single, but perhaps also lost work.

Our usual defence mechanisms, such as keeping busy with stuff may be restricted, and maybe this increases our frustrations with kids in the house, or friends and family on the phone. The everyday language we use matters, so now is the time to consider (take a breath!) what we say before we say it.

- **Don't be tempted to go back to your former love partner**

You are simply prolonging the recovery process. The temptation is you know them. They know you. You have habits that may reassure each other. It's not helpful for your rebuilding journey. Distract yourself when you have those urges. Phone a friend or other family member, or even experiment with connecting online if you haven't already tried.

- **Develop your emotion intimacy**

Being limited to only catching up with one other person at a time may provide greater opportunities to share and be vulnerable. In other words, you might have deeper and more meaningful conversations! Not getting caught up with group dynamics offers an increase in the potential of emotional intimacy, that is, to truly be ourselves with another, and understand more about your own needs that may have been hidden during your former love relationship.

- **Normalise your feelings – it's ok to feel what you are feeling**

Things ARE weird. Crazy. Strange. We may even find ourselves feeling more guilt at this time. In fact guilt, anger and fear may all come up as the health consequences of prolonged loneliness.

As a remedy - ask yourself if it's 'appropriate' guilt or 'excessive' guilt and find a ritualised way to 'park' your unhelpful guilt. For example: choose an object that is associated with your prior relationship and when you experience guilt such as "*I didn't do enough to save the relationship*" then you 'hand over' that thought to the object, thus 'parking' your guilt.

- **Explore your love language**

Love languages are the five primary ways people communicate love - you will find lots about love languages online. If your separation or divorce showed you and your former partner used very different love languages, then this may have caused conflicts and mis-communication. Now you could start to practise showing love in a way that is receptive to another.

- **Re-align your purpose and find productive things to do**

Work on a hobby you've always wanted to start or do some online studying. Perhaps there are things your former partner discouraged you from doing, even though they linked to your real passions? Now you may have the time! Other ideas include focusing on your garden, setting yourself a reading list, grabbing a book buddy to keep you on track, tidying up your kitchen shelves or giving more time to your pets.

- **Explore where your grief coming from**

Grieving, according to some researchers, may be linked to our attachment experiences at a young age, so attachment styles may be worth exploring as we go through a period of grieving. This can include grief for our former carefree lives, our easy contact with friends, our capacity to participate in cultural events and our communities, our jobs, **as well as** grieving the loss of our former relationship and the hopes and dreams associated with it.

- **Focus on things you can control**

However we should also acknowledge that there will be some emotional roller coaster rides. There is much uncertainty, everything is in flux. Take heart from a compassionate politician who, when he asked residents to stay home, also said "*it's okay to cry, there's been a lot of fear and it's okay to be afraid.*"

Embrace this as a hard time in your life, particularly if you are on your own, rather than pretending you are fine. Now is a good time to start or continue with counselling or one on one therapy so you don't feel unsupported with your anxiety or grieving.

- **Acknowledge the silver lining**

In this time of physical distancing, we are all re-discovering how meaningful human relationships are to our well-being and sanity. As a recently separated or divorced person, now is the time to commit to making any future relationships you might embark upon be ones that are healthy, safe, fruitful and mutually beneficial.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team will continue to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face once government guidelines allow. You might like to like us on Facebook to keep up to date with support information and details of services we can offer during this time.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on ***Rebuilding After Separation and Divorce*** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.