

RELATIVE



EVOLUTIONS

reimagining separation & divorce

Divorcing With Dignity

10
Ten tips for a
better breakup

Provided by Tara Eisenhard



Dear Evolver,

When I look at the shame, blame and animosity that our culture precipitates in the name of divorce, I feel sick with sadness. I know there's a better way to break up, because I've experienced it. I know families can evolve and individuals can thrive outside the binds of matrimony. I do what I do because I believe in a better world, and it's up to all of us to bring that world forth. I hope the following helps you on your journey and equips you to be a positive role model for those that follow.

Best wishes as you give birth to a new life.

~Tara



Stop the Shame Train

We live in a culture that prizes marriage and despises divorce. This, unfortunately, breeds a lot of shame. You might wonder if you're a bad person, a bad partner or a bad parent. This kind of personal shame ignites blame, because the best way to feel better is to blame someone else and make them feel worse. This Shame-and-Blame Cycle fuels nasty and expensive divorces. You can stop the shame train by shifting your attitude and language around this issue. Ban the following from your vocabulary:

- Failed Marriage
- Broken Home/Broken Family
- Single Parent (although "single" effectively describes one's marital status, the term can be confusing and even offensive for children who continue to cultivate relationships with both parents)

Replace those terms with the following:

- Completed Partnership
- BiNuclear Family
- CoParent
- (insert whatever works for you)

Researcher, Brene Brown, tells us "Shame cannot survive empathy." This means you'll need a support system comprised of those who listen and empathize while encouraging you to move forward in a positive and productive manner. Note: I'm not talking about simply trash-talking your ex. Hating isn't healing.

Do what you can to nurture your self-confidence as you accept the current state of affairs and create a new story for your life. Coaches and therapists can be excellent allies in this process.



Set Goals

"If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else." –Yogi Berra

Setting Goals is the first step in my GOOD Divorce™ Principles, and for good reason. You're embarking on a huge adventure, which will result in a radically new life for yourself and your family. Do you really want to surrender all outcomes without input?

You can set goals for the divorce process itself, as well as goals for what you want your new life to look like. Some goals are best constructed with your soon-to-be-ex, while others are up to you, you and you. Consider...

- **Relationship Goals:** What kind of relationship do you want to have with your ex? What kind of relationship do you want to cultivate with your children? Are you committed to not using your children as messengers between you and your ex? Will you maintain civility with your in-laws? Or cut ties with them completely? What kind of qualities will you look for in your next partner?
- **Financial Goals:** How much are you willing to spend on the divorce process? Are you prepared to spend what's in your savings account and also dip into the kids' college fund? What does your new budget look like? Do you intend to pay off your debt by a certain date? How much do you want to save for vacation next year? Would you like to downsize your home and move closer to your job? Now is also a good time to revisit your retirement plan.
- **Personal Goals:** Is it time to gain or lose weight? Run a marathon? Learn to ski? Do you want to make new friends? Switch careers? Go back to school?

The process of setting goals can take you out of your current scenario and open your mind to new and exciting possibilities. You might even choose to create a vision board to serve as daily inspiration. Goals also help you remain disciplined to make appropriate choices as you move through the process. When presented with an opportunity for action, you can ask yourself "would this get me closer to my goal?"



Respect Yourself

The end of a long-term relationship is a heavy thing to deal with. You can expect to move through the stages of grief. You can expect high highs and low lows. You might find yourself embracing life in a radical new way. Or, you might find yourself quietly crying in a public bathroom.

That's OK.
It's normal.
It's part of the process.

Go ahead and let yourself feel. If necessary, set aside time each day to connect with your emotions and untangle your heartstrings. Keep a journal and write whatever comes to mind. Allow yourself time to grieve, and then enjoy the rebound process. Honor your needs.

And trust this:
the roller coaster ride won't always be so intense.

Remember, also, to respect your body. There's a time to indulge in chocolate cake, and there's a time for vitamin shakes. Be sure to rest and rejuvenate in a way that contributes to your health goals. If it's appropriate, consult with your doctor about how to best manage your stress, rest and dietary needs.



Protect Yourself

Remember skinned knees? The rawness... the pain... Remember cleaning the wound and then covering it with a bandage so it wouldn't get infected?

The same logic applies to the wounds left by a separation.

First, you should keep things as clean as possible. In other words, don't fight dirty. Take the high road so you won't say or do anything to cause a deeper inflammation.

Second, erect a barrier to protect your wounded self. This means knowing where your personal boundaries fall, and doing what's necessary to respect those boundaries. It might mean you only communicate via text because the sound of your ex's voice sends you off the rails. It might mean you discontinue conversations that involve loud voices and name calling. Or, and this is a big one, it could mean you refrain from gathering information about what your ex is up to in his/her personal life. No social stalking, no casually asking mutual friends for updates, no grilling the kids. If it's possible and appropriate, you can consider going No Contact.

Remember:

wounds heal more quickly when they're protected against further infection. Keep a stock of bandages and apply as needed.



Invest in Yourself

Go back and look at your goals. What items can be considered Self Improvement?

Pick one... or, set one, and get to work!

Maybe you'll take class to learn something new. Or, perhaps you'll start training for that marathon. Whatever you choose, realize that you're worth it. You're an awesome, amazing, strong person and you're not even finished growing yet. Look ahead... imagine the person you want to be in five years, and take a step forward.

YOU'RE
WORTH IT
INVEST IN YOU!



Work as a Team

Our cultural prescription for divorce tends to be, “get a lawyer and go to battle.” Ugh. Beyond our shame-and-blame tendencies, how does this model serve us?

Divorce, like marriage, is a human process with a legal document attached to it. Can you imagine hiring attorneys to plan your wedding? Probably not, because people typically want to retain control over such important life events.

Why such a different attitude when it comes to divorce?

I like to think of divorce as a shared goal. If the relationship isn't serving its participants, it's time to end it, right? Although not ideal, divorce is a solution to a problem. It's something both parties can look forward to and work toward—together, as a team.

The first step is to find common ground. For many couples, the first thing they agree on is the idea of a separation. And if you dig deeper, there's probably more (again, revisit your goals). To help you communicate most productively, you can employ a mediator to assist you in making plans for the future.

Remember, if you have children, you'll be tied to your ex for decades to come. And you won't always want attorneys to make decisions for your family. If it's possible to work together, take that route. You'll probably save a lot of time, money and stress.



Cultivate an Attitude of Gratitude

If you've traded caviar in a mansion for cereal in a tent, it's easy to feel angry about your circumstances. Yet, there's still reason to feel grateful. For instance, many years ago a friend of my mom's wrote this little poem:

It's better to live
In a tent if you must
Than to live in a mansion With
a man you can't trust
(B. Bowman, circa 1989)

Add Gratitude helps you look on the bright side, it keeps you focused on what you do have, instead of what you don't. And feeling grateful raises your vibration, allowing you to attract even more to be grateful for.

I recommend a daily practice of writing that which you're grateful for. You might set a goal to list five or ten items each day, or you can just let it flow from your fingertips.

As I'm typing this, I'm grateful for my laptop, the chair I'm sitting in, my quiet office, my ability to remember the above poem and my comfy clothes.

OK... now it's your turn!



Thank Your Ex

I could've rolled this into the above step, but I think it deserves its own consideration. Your ex might be your least favorite person on the planet, but if not for the relationship you shared, you wouldn't be who you are right now. And, hopefully, you like yourself enough to appreciate that.

Think about it:

You and your ex shared some happy memories. There are experiences, both good and bad, that you never would have known if not for him/her. Your ex accompanied you to new places, introduced you to new people, and taught you new things

You don't have to directly communicate your gratitude to your ex. You could instead write your feelings in a letter, which you could burn... or, tuck it away in your journal. Whatever you want, as long as you realize It Wasn't Wasted Time.



Notice Nature

Nature whispers her wisdom to us all the time. Let's look at a few examples:

- **Deciduous Trees:** In the spring, they sprout green buds. In the summer, they shade us with luscious leafy canopies. When autumn arrives, the trees instinctually know it's necessary to conserve energy for the coming winter. Thus, leaves are released to the floor of the forest, where they insulate and later feed the roots of that from which they were born. The trees grow stronger because they can let go.
- **Dandelions:** These yellow flowers are my favorite. Though some fight them with shovels, blades and poison, the dandelion will not be stopped. She plants herself in even the most unlikely places, throws open her petals and shines without shame. We can all learn a lot from a dandelion.
- **Frogs:** These aquatic amphibians start out small and sperm-like (incomplete beings, perhaps?), but they change into strong creatures that hop on land, swim underwater and sing a song that is both loved and loathed. Unlike the butterfly, which also undergoes a massive metamorphosis, the tadpole isn't awarded the luxury of a cocoon. Their changes take place out in the open, for all to see. It's a change similar to what happens to us when we leave a relationship and are forced to grow into newer, stronger versions of ourselves. This is why I chose the frog as the mascot for Relative Evolutions.

The Earth and her inhabitants cycle through seasons of hot and cold, growth and release, abundance and scarcity... not unlike our relationships. When you feel distressed, look out the window and trust in the infinite wisdom of the world we live in.



Hold a Ceremony

Our society has rituals to recognize all kinds of life events between conception and death. We have baby showers, graduations, weddings, retirement celebrations and funerals. Yet, we have nothing to recognize divorce. Is it any wonder so many fall victim to the Shame-and-Blame Cycle, thus destroying their families?

To initiate closure, I recommend a simple ceremony—a cross between a wedding and a funeral. Ideally, it's an event including both partners and their children, but that's not always possible.

The intention is to honor the relationship that's being laid to rest. Acknowledge that it happened, good things came from it and now it's time to move on. Then open a new chapter with vows to each other or oneself. They can be vows of appreciation, respect or continued commitment to the greater good. It should be intimate, personal and sacred.

Divorce is the end of one thing. But it's also the beginning to something else. What better way to commemorate this crossroads?