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Introduction

I have been teaching divorce recovery support groups for several years. When I first began teaching I was not divorced but separated. My parents did not approve of my marriage from the start and after 36 years of being married I did not want to hear them say, "I told you so," and because of that I was determined not to be a divorced woman.

I began to realize after a year and a half of separation I was only prolonging the pain and confusion and that I needed to go on with my life.

I want you to know what I am not; I am not a psychologist, a therapist or social worker. I have had some training in counseling, but my real education came from my experienced through

a long separation and finally a divorce, and through working with divorcees in the support groups. Some of the people that I have worked with over the years extended the time of their personal recovery from divorce because they didn't know of or weren't willing to appropriate the resources available to them for recovery and growth. This booklet is designed to help you avoid those mistakes. Relationships create the emotional content of our lives: sadness, anger, happiness and joy are associated with relationships. We are designed to live in and to have relationships.

This booklet is not merely my experience, but is a guideline to recovery and growth in good relationships. My goal for you is for you to be able to say, "Though I wouldn't wish a divorce on my worst enemy, I wouldn't trade anything for what I have learned." I would also like to see you become the person you were intended to be and live your life to the fullest. As I look back, the end was truly the beginning. This booklet is one which you will not want to browse through quickly, so please take your time, be honest with yourself, and use the personal journal sheet at the end of each section.

Chapter One

DENIAL

The death of a relationship through divorce is the first stage of a process in which the relationship is mourned and then let go to make way for self-renewal.

A new opportunity to improve on the past and create a fuller life can be achieved after picking up the pieces from a divorce. You will come to terms with the past and be willing to change it when you recognize self-defeating behavior.

The Emotional Truth of Divorce:

You are faced with many difficult tasks that were never yours. For example: women with the extra responsibility of finances, insurance, etc. And men with household duties, etc. You will sense a feeling of loneliness along with many fears and questions.

You will begin to think, "How could I end up in the predicament?" Your emotional inventory will show failure, guilt, emptiness and uncertainty when you look back.

These emotions and others are normal when the togetherness habit has been broken. This is true no matter who you are and how strong of a person you are. You do not know what it feels like until you experience a divorce. Two people became one, and were always a couple. Now the twosome has been torn in half.

The question most often asked is, who is divorce the hardest on—men or women? In most cases the question is meaningless since divorce strikes at the emotion of all people involved.

Divorce affects each of us differently, so we should not compare our situation with someone else. We need to come to terms with ourselves and where we are now by making the choice to accept us and the situation as it is. The fact of living alone does not mean living lonely. Now we begin to make choices to lay the ground work for our future and any future relationships. Another emotional upheaval is having to meet or contact your ex-spouse. This can stir up enormously conflicting feelings that can leave you shaken for several days. As you approach a meeting with your ex-spouse you are in familiar surroundings causing a bit of nostalgia for the "Good Old Days." You are caught up in the frenzy of a moment in time. You begin to think, "Maybe we have learned our lesson and maybe we could work things out now." "Maybe if I had done this differently or maybe if I had done this or that. You will work yourself up into a mixture of emotions. This causes confusion. You will be up and down like a roller-coaster.

There are times when you will feel a driving need to run away. Take this opportunity to get in touch with your feeling and to spend time in free quiet time. Let your feelings surface and don't suppress them even though they are ugly, distorted and painful. There are also times when you will feel rejected, abandoned, victimized and even hostile. Admit each one and make a choice to turn away from them. You will find this as a pull from the past. You will also recognize that the present is not the past and today is not yesterday. It is a new day and it is up to you to break the pattern. Now you are able to reach out for new friends and three things can be learned by taking this risk:

1. You will find much more warmth and acceptance than you thought.
2. You will learn to accept rejections not toward you as a person but as a single-again person (because people do not know how to relate to you as you are now.)
3. You will be rewarded with new and pleasant experiences when you place yourself with new friends, activities and interests.

DENIAL *Summary*

The Emotional Truth of Divorce

You need to remember when trouble started in your marriage.

To what extent was denial a part of your reaction?

- Did you deny there was a problem?
- Did you deny the problem was serious?
- Was denial a part of your response?
- Was denial helpful or harmful as you dealt with the crisis?

What problem or problems caused your divorce?

- alcohol
- drugs
- physical abuse
- emotional abuse
- another person
- emotional neglect

When did you finally admit and confront the problem? Answer the above questions in your personal journal.

Your Personal Journal on Denial

Chapter Two

ANGER

Anger is an intense resentment of hurts or mistreatments from a divorce. Anger is also a keen displeasure aroused by the hurts or mistreatments and is usually accompanied by a desire to punish.

Example: one lady in a recovery class described this incident, "I didn't know that came over me. I saw his car parked in the parking of some apartments and I knew he was visiting his girl friend. I got some shaving cream and completely covered the windows of the car and hung this nasty sign on the front of the car. I had never done anything like this before. Then I waited out of sight to see their reaction. I was so angry that to do this made me feel so good."

Anger is a God-given emotion and should be dealt with in the following ways. The first way is to confront the problem. You have an anger inside you and you are approaching the danger of being consumed by its destruction. The possibility of much more anger is greater during the divorce process. You need also to admit where you are, divorced, and alone – nothing is the same anymore. You must come to terms with reality. It is a different kind of anger that usually hasn't been experienced before. This kind of anger can spread like wild fire and keep you from making progress. Secondly you do not need to hold a grudge toward the ex-spouse. To do so can easily turn into bitterness. Not all anger is wrong. It is a legitimate emotion and should be controlled. There is such a thing a righteous indignation. Christ became angry and drove the money changers out of the temple. Most of us were taught it's not permissible to feel anger. Now we have to relearn that it is okay after all. This may be easy to do intellectually, but is much more difficult with our emotions. Now is the time you need to practice the principal of by the act of you will you can do this by making a choice of refusing to let the anger control you. This choice is made with your intellect. Your emotions or feelings are slow to catch up. Keep in mind there is a difference between your feelings of anger and the way you express it. Your trust and the bond of your marriage has been broken so your feelings of anger are appropriate and realistic for the situation, the feeling fits the event.

Anger that is not controlled becomes aggressive, spreads like wild fire and becomes dangerous. Uncontrolled anger leads to depression and causes you to become a miserable unhappy person. One of the most destructive things to look for during a divorce is when children are being used for expressing anger at the ex-spouse. One parent makes the children sppy during the visitation. Another parent will not allow the other to see the children until child support has been paid, which also produces fiery anger.

Anger serves as a place of protection. We are either an overly nice person or a bitter person. The overly nice person or very sweet person protects themselves by not recognizing their true feelings of anger. This causes them to become a silent and closed person. The bitter person gets angry with ease and ends up complaining and blaming the ex-spouse rather than taking responsibility for themselves. You are responsible for these angry feelings because they are yours and no one else's. Taking responsibility for anger takes a long time for some people. It requires maturity and a lot of strength on your part.

Four Responses on Anger

Rage

There are four responses to anger. The first response is rage, which is very negative. Anger from a divorce is an extreme rage. This response always gets you in trouble. You become

Vindictive and overpowering. This response shows up in a very brisk walk, quick body language, anxiety and restlessness. You will react to your ex-spouse by engaging in battles instead of responding to them. You will vent anger in a manner that reinforces old patterns. One event after another seems to snowball into each other and you find yourself in a rage which starts to consume you. You will try to change the mind of the ex-spouse. This always fails because you try to exercise power over another that you don't have. You experience disappointment and begin to feel overwhelmed. Your resistance becomes lowered. You can only think, "How dare them," and you will be obsessively furious for long periods of time. It becomes difficult to rid your mind of these thoughts and emotions. You will easily attack the ex-spouse and become suspicious of them as well as other people. Threats from the ex-spouse can cause you to have a lot of mind conversations which make the situation worse than it really is. The rage reaction of screams and loss of temper can cause wear and tear on your coping system and prevent you from making intelligent decisions.

Repression

The second response to anger is repression, and is also negative. This response of anger comes from blaming your ex-spouse, friends, family, Church and God. You may be smiling on the outside but deep down you are boiling. We often repress anger because we continue to let the problem go on and do or say nothing about it. Repressed anger can cause health problems. Do not deny anger and remember it is a normal emotion.

Redirection

The third response is redirection and is a positive one. You need to direct your anger into constructive energy. Find a sport or hobby you enjoy. Do some things you have always wanted to do. Do anything that is good and productive for you.

Resolution

The fourth response is resolution and is also another positive response. You need to resolve any and all differences that are possible with your ex-spouse. Most broken marriages are not reconcilable so make every effort to be civil when possible.

Describe in your journal three things that have devastated you through your divorce. Examples: dreams you made with your ex-spouse; loss of a complete ex-family; having to start over. Now make the choice to let each of them *go by the act of your will*. You must do this in order to grow past this place in your life and become a whole person again. Your ex-spouse may have been the major cause in your divorce but you will need to stop blaming them for their actions. Don't expect family and friends to provide your happiness at this point. Let go of the anger you have for yourself for not performing will in your marriage. Accept responsibility for the mistakes which contributed to any problems. Turn loose of the responsibility of trying to change the mind of your ex-spouse. Example: You try to tell them how they think, how they should feel, how they should act in certain situations.

The following suggestions could be a turning point in your life. Learn to apply these positive principals of controlling your anger.

The first principal is to wait. This gives you time to formulate an active rather than a re-active response. (Active being positive, reactive being negative). Focus on the positive action of making the choice to let go of all thoughts and statements that were made by the ex-spouse. Taking a positive action can prevent you from returning to a state of anger again. The second principal is to communicate. Do not use sly remarks, poisonous or hateful words or gossip for protection. We have words available for negotiation. Verbal withdrawal on your part leads into one-sided conversations with no end. Speak honestly and frankly with your ex-spouse and let them know how you feel and what you have been through *without* the emotion of anger or rage. The third principal is to become active when you are faced with an enraging situation over which

you have no immediate control. Do something constructive. Exercise, swim, paint, etc. until you are so tired and relaxed that the rage has passed.

Constructive anger is an emotion that gives us strength to get through the situation of divorce or to face an otherwise intolerable situation. You need to get angry enough to take the necessary action in some situations. Taking action when you need to will pull you up from any type of depression. When you are a passive person, self-pity will start to set in and everything will be “poor me, why did this have to happen to me,” “Maybe everything would have worked out” or “it really wasn’t so bad.” These kinds of thoughts will lead to depression. Anger that is constructive and not destructive must be dealt with openly and quickly. It is important to let your ex-spouse know how they have hurt you. You must not take responsibility for their actions. You need to exercise forgiveness and not be accusing. This is done by the choice of the act of your will. When this principal is followed through correctly your ex-spouse will not be able to strip you of your self-esteem. You need to realize that the experience of anger is a result of the experiences of intimacy. The moment we permit ourselves to get close to another person we become emotionally dependent. You also need to be aware that when you confront your ex-spouse you expose yourself to disappointment, but at the same time you also expose yourself to growth. When you grow in the experience of a divorce you receive benefits from them. One of the benefits is being clear in your thinking of how to handle yourself with your ex-spouse. What you need to say and do not need to say. You are now better equipped to make wise decisions that perhaps you were not able to make before. Example: one participant in the recovery program was a passive person, but once they confronted the ex-spouse as to how hurt they were through the divorce they were able to sleep in the bedroom they once shared again. She also was able to discuss the issues at hand. This is what we mean by growth. Constructive anger is also the kind of anger that leads you to take positive action and become a balanced person again.

ANGER *Summary*

1. What is anger?

Anger is an intense resentment of hurts or mistreatments. Anger is also a keen displeasure aroused by hurts or mistreatments.

2. Is anger wrong?

Anger is a God-given emotion. Not all anger is wrong. Anger is a legitimate feeling but must be controlled. Anger serves as a place of protection.

3. There are four basic attitudes of anger.

*Rage *Repression *Redirection *Resolution

4. Were you the active or the passive person in the divorce?

The passive one is when the divorce happened to them. They hang on hoping the ex-spouse will return, and when confronted they are shocked and then the grief starts. They are confused and bothered by the attitudes of the ex-spouse.

The active person is one who instigates the divorce. They began the grieving process long before the marriage was over. After the grieving process is over, the active one seems carefree and has already reached the point of acceptance.

Describe in your journal the forms your anger took.

Your Personal Journal on Anger

Chapter Three

BARGAINING

Bargaining can best be explained as trying to find a simple solution to a complex problem. You want a change to take place now!!! There are times when you feel like you would do almost anything to make things different and to make the pain go away. You start to think, "Maybe it would be alright if we go back and try again." "Other people had it worse than I did." "Things weren't so bad after all." Your mind will start the conversation games that everything will work out and we will all be happy again.

Some of the effective or in-effective ways of bargaining:

Perhaps you contact the ex-spouse and make an offer to try again making all these promised, or maybe the ex-spouse called you to come back and made some promises such as: "I promise it will never happen again." "I promise I will not drink, run around on you or do drugs if you will come back or take me back. Will the bargaining work out or fall apart? The following can and perhaps will happen. You and your ex-spouse have gone back together in the hopes of reconciling and you find that each of you are no longer the same person. Changes took place in you as it did with your ex-spouse. You discovered trust is no longer there. You each want to know the whereabouts of the other when one of you is the least bit late.

Shouldn't you work for reconciliation at any cost? You need to realize at this point you just can't walk back into each other's lives and move back in together as though you are the same people. You cannot pick up where you left off. You cannot pretend things and feelings did not happen. You need to meet each other on a different level and build from there, if there is a chance of reconciliation. At this point you need to take time to be able to trust again and find respect for each other. Bargaining is still a stage of the non-acceptance of the divorce and can be one last attempt to change circum-stances so as to avoid pain. There will be also times that you can't work out anything with your ex-spouse. Bargaining can get ugly if your ex-spouse starts to take action to try to control and head off the process of divorce. Example: one party did not want to live with the other one, and each time they went to sign the papers he either would not show up or cause a problem. There are threats from the ex-spouse as to what steps they will take to prevent the divorce from taking place. You or your ex-spouse cannot continue to live in a world of fantasy. For example, if your ex-spouse continues to say they want a divorce, it is a fantasy to suggest counseling to them. The plea here is merely a ploy to avoid dealing with reality.

How do you feel about yourself or your situation now?

Angry...humble...confused...doubting...sympathetic...mistrusting...hopeful...cynical...
Describe any other in your journal.

When you realize you can't bargain your way back into the marriage, you will probably go up and down the slippery slopes of your emotions, from denial to anger, then eventually into depression. At this point you will realize all of your efforts are futile. True reconciliation requires changes in attitudes and behavior. It's not merely a matter of moving back in together.

BARGAINING

Summary

What is bargaining?

Bargaining is denial of feelings. Bargaining is manipulation.

How can bargaining be effective?

Bargaining can be effective when you learn to come to terms with reality.

How can bargaining be in-effective?

Bargaining can be in-effective when you try to change the ex-spouse. Recall ways that you bargained with your ex-spouse. Examples: promises, it will never happen again, things will be different. I will never drink or see any one else again, if you will come back to me or take me back.

All the bargaining falls apart when:

- Your plea was denied.
- You discovered trust was no longer there.

Describe in your journal any bargaining tactics which you have used.

Your Personal Journal on Bargaining

Chapter Four

DEPRESSION

Divorce depression is a poor self-image turned inward. Depression can be living in the valley of death. The ex-spouse is a walking corpse. All is fear, sadness and hurt. You realize that the arrow has struck and taken away the joy. You also realize you can no longer deny the reality of the impending divorce. Your anger makes you feel worse most of the time. Bargaining proved that you couldn't maneuver your way out of the problem. You are now left with the conclusion that you can do nothing to make a difference. You want to give up on everything. You will never see anyone else or be happy again. During this stage it is not unusual for a person to withdraw into a personal emotional cocoon and suspend most of not all social relationships and activities. Some people cease caring about their appearance. Depression is a common response in divorce and probably the most unbearable stage. It is also the first stage of real acceptance to rebuilding your new life. It is a busy time internally as you start to understand that you are alone now and single. The marriage is over. Facing those facts is a challenge and may require all the mental discipline you have. Now is the time to examine yourself and see where your focus really is.

If my ex-spouse hadn't done or said _; if God has only answered my prayer-; if my friends weren't so judgmental of me-; my in-laws started this-; which one of these could you find yourself in?

What kind of a communicator were you? One spouse was involved with someone else for about six months before the party knew there was a problem. There were signs after she looked back over the marriage. An example, when the ex-spouse becomes very generous and buying expensive gifts or doing more for you than usual, (this is from guilt). Were you in tune with your ex-spouse's actions and needs? This is not meant to put guilt but to admit an area of personal responsibility within ourselves. This is the first step out of depression. The second step out of depression is to take time to cry if you need to, and a time to talk without someone giving advice. You also need to be careful of dwelling on past events and current problems in your quiet time. Being alone too much can become a comfort zone. This is a place where you will not want to deal with reality. Depression is often the other side of anger. You swing back and forth between despair and rage. You need to work on moving through depression. There can be positive aspects of depression. Quiet time could be a pause to give you some rest and peace of mind. Depression doesn't make you feel good, but it plays an important part in the divorce process. It has caused you to look honestly at yourself and to admit and assume your part of the blame instead of laying it all on your ex-spouse. Depression is not a sign of weakness but is a normal healthy emotion. The numbing effect of depression helps you to cope with the loss. When you deny the depression you only prolong the healing or recovery.

Divorce-connected depression is different from other depressions. This kind of depression is accompanied by sadness and loneliness which you can overcome. The core of divorce-depression is low self-esteem. Some people experience depression during their marriage, only to find relief through divorce. If you are either the divorce seeker or the divorce opposer, you will naturally feel like a failure. For the time being, you don't like the person you have become. When something goes wrong you think it's your fault. Example, one party was in a car accident and the other one felt it was their fault because they were no longer there. A very important principal here is to try to keep the emotional task of divorce away from your self-esteem. All too often failure becomes a self-fulfilling thing. You begin to think you are no good, and with each set back your self-esteem drops down a little more.

Depression is the critical stage in the divorce process. You make the choice of either living through the sadness and the loneliness or get stuck in despair. Remember, it's your choice by the act of your will.

The whole theme of depression is guilt. You feel guilty about your ex-spouse, their family members, your family members and your friends. A little bit of guilt is okay, because you want to do right by your ex-spouse and their family members.

The next time you feel like you feel like you are slipping into depression, stop and take a positive action such as:

- Call some friends and talk
- Take a walk
- Go shopping/window shopping
- Get involved in sports or something active

Depression

A test to help you determine your present state.

Which symptoms have you experienced?

*trouble sleeping

*boredom

*working too hard or long hours

*inability to concentrate

*loneliness

*inability to talk with other people

*need to be with others all the time

*ulcer, digestion problems

*addictive / compulsive behavior

*sudden weight gain

*sudden weight loss

Describe further in your journal.

DEPRESSION

Summary

What is depression?

Depression is low self-esteem turned inward. Do a self-examination of your depression. What kind of a communicator were you? Were you in touch with your feelings or needs as well as that of your ex-spouse? When you became stressed through depression what action did you take? Did you determine what percentage was your fault? Did you take action to improve wrong attitudes on your part? Answer the above questions in your personal journal.

become willing to make restitution when necessary. We become willing to be honest and forgiving. We try to build a civil relationship. At this point, you need to stop and think back in your mind where the guilt lies. Would you have done things differently? If so, you have no real guilt. You need to realize that you are a different person now and you even think differently.

GUILT *Summary*

Discover if guilt feelings are natural or false. True guilt – the good or bad contribution you made to the marriage. False guilt – words of others, action of others. Recognize the guilt games: defeated attitude, an attitude of rebellion, acknowledging your superficial faults.

Describe in your journal what kind of guilt you had and how you have dealt with it.

Your Personal Journal on Guilt

Chapter Six

ACCEPTANCE OF SELF

Self-acceptance is a stage of rebuilding and a turning point in your life. Self-acceptance is liking yourself and becoming content with who you are and where you are in life. Self-acceptance is refusing to let another person affect you. For more of us self-acceptance is easier said than done because we often claim to be in the self-acceptance stage long before we actually are. Then something will come along and throw us a couple of steps backward. A lack of self-acceptance is when you choose not to get involved in activities. You find yourself thinking, “Those people have already been divorced” or “They are going through a divorce” or “they are hurting too much” and “I am past that now.” One way of checking your self-acceptance is when you no longer say, “Look what they did to me.” You are able to start going on with your life by doing normal things again such as routine tasks. You are beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. Another check point is being able to accept what your ex-spouse did to you. The harboring of the feelings of animosity, bitterness, and resentment is a way of holding on to your past life. Your ex-spouse can not only ruin your day but continue to push your buttons and ruin the rest of your life. Your decision to continue to harbor these feelings will block your progress

of self-acceptance. Abnormal grief prevents a true acceptance of yourself. Abnormal grief usually begins with under-reaction. This is when someone is very quiet and calm and seems to be preoccupied with little or no feelings. This type person is fearful of losing control. They have a personality that has been crushed by an abusive mate. They have an intense anger level and fear they will over react. They also have a need to show the ex-spouse they are not hurting and will make it.

Self-acceptance is a freedom found in a kind of indifference. It is necessary for divorced people to free themselves from the emotional ties to their ex-spouse or they will find themselves avoiding going to certain places for fear of running into them. Your identity is no longer connected with them but who you are. They do not have the ability to upset your life. Reaching this stage could be the focal point of difficulty if children are involved. Children sometimes become a struggle between former spouses which could turn into a battle ground. Their battle schemes and your mind conversations start to run rampant. Example: Your ex-spouse is totally irresponsible or they are totally inflexible. Once you have reached the point of self-acceptance, you won't continue to have negative mind conversations. Your relationship has now changed with your ex-spouse so that your identity is no longer connected with them, and their personality flaws are not your problem anymore. Self acceptance can be best summarized by, "I will be content in whatever state I am in." That is a great survival strategy to learn and means taking one day at a time. Once you reach the point of self-acceptance, you will no longer wait for the damage to be undone. You will no longer feel rage at them or feel desperation for things to change. You will begin to hope for and expect future happiness.

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Summary

Definition of self-acceptance: Knowing who you are. Being comfortable with you own identity.

Ways of checking self-acceptance: Being normal – being abnormal.

Summarizing acceptance: Being content, reaching a point of acceptance.

Self-Image: How has divorce effected you? Place yourself in your new life as a single person.

Dealing with rejection: Which of the following have you felt? Refused, rebuffed, turned down, denied. Describe in your journal answers to the above questions.

Your Personal Journal on Self-Acceptance

Chapter Seven

LONLINESS

The dimension of loneliness goes deep inside of us. It is the most difficult part of the grief process to work through... simply because we are so vulnerable and are still hurting. We feel the loss of a deep sense of belonging to another person. We miss the presence of a familiar face, voice or surrounding and we need for someone to be there. We are experiencing social alienation on a couple-oriented society. We try to reach deep and meet this need through single groups and with sexual and other relationships. Single groups are good and they are needed, but most often you will use this to try to fill a void. You do not want to become dependent on any one thing. The trauma of loneliness is isolation from others. A time of quietness is good and is needed but not for long periods. Long periods of sleeping and crying spells that linger are harmful. However, crying is sometimes necessary. We continue to depend on our ex-spouse for our validation as a worth-while person. The loss or absence of a significant person in our life raises a question about our value and worth. Women get their self worth from the man in their life. Men get their self worth from their job. When we get our self worth from another person it is a mistake. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, and who you are should make you feel worthy. You are an important person and there is a plan for you to accomplish and a purpose for your life. Loneliness starts when we are unable to share ourselves with someone else, either because we are afraid to be ourselves for fear or rejection, or because there is simply no other person we can talk with. The way to end loneliness is by building new and strong friendships with people you can talk honestly with, and with people you can trust. Once you have learned to trust you will be able to listen to your friends and to people you trust. You can then be yourself with them and feel accepted unconditionally. Learn to be sensitive to them and they in turn will be available for you. Learn to have a true affection for another person, without just sharing a common interest. Learn to have empathy for others. Learn to develop a self-love. When you do this, your loneliness will end. Make contact with who you are and where you are headed in the future. You can not love another person and not love yourself. If you need to build your self worth do so with positive activities that will help you feel good about you. Learn not to depend on others. Do things that you like and enjoy in your own company. Make the choice to accept yourself and what you were created to become. The cure for loneliness must begin with you. It is natural to be fearful at first, but start to think positive about yourself. Fear becomes unmanageable only when you run from and deny it. Conquer this fear with healthy action. You must remove all negative thoughts and people. These are blocks which will hinder your progress.

LONLINESS

Summary

The dimension of loneliness goes deep inside of us.
Discover the positive aspect of loneliness through quiet time.
Find ways to end loneliness.

The trauma or loneliness

- isolation from loneliness
- absence of your significance
- loss of your self-worth

Describe in your journal your experience of loneliness.

Your Personal Journal on Loneliness

Chapter Eight

HOW TO GET PAST YOUR PAST

The only reason you need to go back into your past is to forgive. Learn to overcome your thoughts of failure. We are not perfect people. We did contribute something to the marriage both good and bad. The bad or wrong attitudes and reactions are the issues to think about here. They are in the past and they do not need to be pushed aside or they will flair up later on with other people. You need to admit each bad attitude or wrong action. Doing this will give you strength and healing. Your reputation as a failure is caused from reacting and having a bad attitude with everyone. It takes self examination to change these habits, but this is necessary for your growth and healing. It may be hard to resist old friends but this will also be necessary. Sometimes your old friends will try to keep you in your former lifestyle (still married). They will not understand your need to make a change and start a new life for yourself. Remember they are well meaning, but the old patterns are what you want to break. Restructure your thoughts and make a self examination so you can change your way of thinking. Example: “I will not respond in that manner or loose my temper.” Start to think more positive and less negative. Time is working on your side as you become a more mature and fulfilled person.

The three vital factors here are: omit – quit – forgive. Recognize what you did so you can omit the things you did wrong in your past. Quit your old ways because they carry pain. Forget the past and go forward with your life.

Working through forgiveness plays a major part in putting your past behind you. This principal is discussed at length under the heading of Forgiveness. Take a look at this principal. You are now dealing with yourself. Do not excuse your ex-spouse for their actions and attitudes. You have no need to understand your ex-spouse. The problems that you encountered in the divorce were not all bad. They may seem so, but the results from overcoming these problems will mean more growth and strength for you. Hard work and planning ahead is always reasonable for you to do. This shows that you are making a new start for yourself. Some of your plans may involve a move to a new location. This does not mean you will not encounter problems. Remember problems can work for you.

The truth about most adverse situations involving difficult people is that it builds character in you. It is the way we respond not react. Example: the ex-spouse will pose a problem to you and you react to the person instead of responding to the problem. When you react, this allows them to become the controller and keeps you weak. On the other hand, when you respond to the problem and deal with it, this builds character and you become the stronger person. Sometimes the problems can overpower your thoughts and dim your focus. You need to keep remembering your future is ahead and not behind you or even in the present. You will need to put all blame

behind you. This included yours and that of your ex-spouse. Keep practicing the principal of forgiving in order to complete your healing. Seek new directions by looking for and learning different activities such as sports and hobbies or something you have always wanted to do. Try new social events with new friends. Choose to be around positive people that you have something in common with.

Another key to getting your past behind you is putting your former spouse in focus. Your feelings can go from love to hate and then to revenge very rapidly. This is caused by negative conditions and situations. Divorce is not like death. In death the other person is full removed from your existence. The ex-spouse often hovers about the edge of the broken relationship and causes havoc with the other mate's life.

There are six different causes that are directly linked with divorce.

1. *The victim.* The ex-spouse leaves the home for someone else. One person wants the divorce and the other one does not. The one left has to deal with feelings such as rejection, guilt, worthlessness, despair, hostility and revenge.
2. *The problem.* The ex-spouse had a problem with alcohol, gambling, money or sex. The one left has feelings of sympathy and regret. These problems are usually brought into the marriage. The one left has to deal with abandonment.
3. *The child-like attitude.* The ex-spouse doesn't want the responsibility of being married anymore, they want to be free to be with their friends.
4. *The "I was snowed".* The ex-spouse pretended to be someone they were not. They did not have the ability to be honest about themselves. The one left had to deal with feelings of disillusionment and distrust.
5. *The mid-life crisis.* The ex-spouse felt like they needed time for themselves. This is caused by traumatic changes in their personality and sometimes general confusion. The one left had to deal with feelings of abandonment.
6. *The no-fault.* The ex-spouse became tired of being married and living with someone and wanted to go their separate way. The one left had felt the same way and had to deal with feelings that were neutral.

Take the detachment one day at a time. Break all ties as soon as possible. Some people make opportunities to see their former mate, such as at family gatherings. Some people use this as an opportunity to secretly hold on to the other person. You will find yourself wanting to assume responsibility for them by thinking, "Can they make it?" or "Will they eat right?" or "Are they lonely?" etc. This is why detachment is necessary. You will need to forget the painful past and remember the good. It is not possible to rebuild a new life while cling to the past.

HOW TO GET PAST THE PAST

Summary

Overcome your thoughts of failure.
Overcome resistance from friends.
Recognize your need to start over.
You need to restructure your thoughts
Omit – quit – forget
Be forgiving

Deal with the problems of wrong beliefs
Place your ex-spouse in focus
There are six basic causes of divorce – discover where you fit.
Describe which of them was the cause of your divorce in your journal

Your Personal Journal on How to Get Past the Past

Chapter Nine

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is the one principle that cannot be dealt with by feelings. You must make a willful choice to forgive. Forgiveness is also the principal that is most often overlooked or misunderstood. Forgiveness doesn't come easy. It is foreign to us and unnatural to our normal feelings. It is such an expensive thing to do. The cost is always borne by the one who does the forgiving. When you have made the choice to forgive you must be willing to release the other person from the payment of the debt of emotional damage. It is necessary to free your ex-spouse from any obligation to you and from any wrong they have done to you. Example: if you lose something of mine that is valuable and I forgive you, I must suffer the loss and let it go. If you spread slanderous remarks about me and ruin my reputation and I choose to forgive you, I must bear the hurt and grant you full pardon. Forgiveness is canceling out the debt of the emotional pain that the ex-spouse has caused. The damage of divorce is so widespread that walls have been built in our lives instead of bridges. You feel at this point that to forgive your ex-spouse would be wrong because they have taken something from you and they should suffer too. You will begin to drown yourself unless you make a deliberate choice *by the act of your will* to forgive your ex-spouse. They will continue to keep you in bondage unless you do that. The amount of forgiveness that you extend is in direct proportion to your personal loss. Forgiveness eliminates the strong feelings of hate from your life. You may need to practice the principal of "by the act of your will" many times but eventually it will work. Forgiveness is the willingness to forfeit your right to use the tool of anger, bitterness and resentment to punish your ex-spouse. Forgiveness doesn't re-place the feelings that you were cheated and betrayed, nor does it repair the damage done through a divorce. The principal of forgiveness one has applied will begin to restore and strengthen you. You will soon realize you are beginning to experience a new freedom in your life.

This remark was made by a woman attending one of the group sessions, "I don't feel like forgiving my ex-spouse. They did me wrong." We will never forgive the offender if we wait for the feeling of forgiveness to come to us. This woman had a choice. She could choose to forgive or hold on to her feelings.

Another person who came into the group session was very closed – unreachable – and would not talk. His first words were, "I hate my ex-spouse." We listened to the story of his relationship from start to finish, and felt he was justified by not wanting to forgive his ex-spouse. Finally he came to the place where he could ask the question, "What can I do to rid myself of the

strong feelings of hate, should I call or send a card or apologize?" There were several things that took place here. First, he admitted his true feelings. This is very important. Second, he became honest about taking action. The action he mentioned would not solve the problem, they would act only as a band-aid covering up a serious problem. The attitude of unforgiveness keeps your emotions unstable. When you talk with your ex-spouse or run into them, you will continue to feel anger, bitterness or other negative emotions. Failure to forgive causes you to retain these emotions as baggage and you will continue to be the loser. Unforgiveness prevents you from trusting another person. Your negative emotions will spill over into other relationships. Unforgiveness also creates an attitude of "take me or leave me." This is best described as "this is the way I am and I will not change." Feelings of rejection are responsible for this attitude. Forgiveness will free you from the past. We should never bring the past into the present except to forgive. Many divorced people have a tendency for scheming to get even with their ex-spouse for past wrongs. This is done by using family members and friends in their schemes. They will keep a court battle going or they will host family affairs with the knowledge you will attend out of a sense of guilt. Forgiveness enables you to gain personal dignity by being able to say, "You can't hurt me anymore because I have moved beyond that." There is strength and growth in being able to move away from your ex-spouse's control. Moving away sometimes can be difficult at first because once you were close to that person. This is a healthy step and must be done by choice. The principal of forgiveness is by choice. You can say, "I can't forgive." Or "I should forgive them." But those are the wrong words. The choice you make forgiving your ex-spouse isn't a matter of can or cannot. Forgiveness is a choice of will. We will or we will not choose to forgive. The decision to forgive or not to forgive is one that you and only you along can make. To forgive is to release all of your feelings of misery and despair toward your ex-spouse. Whether to extend forgiveness poses the question: Do you want to forgive, or continue to practice vengeance? Would vengeance be worth continuing the pain or would you prefer to forgive and experience a true freedom and piece of mind. You need to get to the place where you can forgive your ex-spouse without the expectation of receiving anything in return. You must take the responsibility of forgiving your ex-spouse. You are obligated to go to your ex-spouse and confront them with the wrong action done to you and things that were said to you. You will need to do this with caution. Have your facts straight and be civil in how you present them. Wait for a reasonable explanation.

Keeping in mind *you* will probably have to forgive. Forgiveness is based on choice, the act of your will and not with your feelings, which isn't an instant occurrence, but a process. There are times we don't want to forgive because it will mean we need to change and we don't like change. We need to understand that by forgiving our ex-spouse, the offender, we are letting them off the hook. We are releasing them from the obligation to repay what they owe us and from the need to return what they have stolen from us. We are releasing them also from the need to apologize to us for hurts they caused and from the need to make good the breach of promises. Forgiveness is a clear and deliberate choice which doesn't mean we feel any better, nor does it mean the damage wasn't real. Never deny that. Healing begins once we take the first step of making a choice to forgive. The moment you make the choice not to forgive, you become the slave of your ex-spouse. But the moment you choose to forgive, you become free.

FORGIVENESS

Summary

What is forgiveness? The act of pardoning another.

How do we deal with forgiveness? With feelings or with choice?

What forgiveness is not:

- *Overlooking the wrong done to you.
- *Excusing and whitewashing
- *Psychoanalyzing the wrong doers.
- *Putting the blame on yourself.
- *Understanding yourself, the other person and the situation.

Describe in your journal what you plan to forgive.

Your Personal Journal on Forgiveness

Chapter Ten

ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY

Broken relationships can cause us to experience defeat for some time. Divorce, as hard as it can be, can be an opportunity for us to learn personal responsibility. We can either choose to grow from this experience or become stagnant people. We all want to choose victory instead of defeat. Let us look at this experience as an opportunity to be victorious. Now you have the right to make choices that are good for you. Before this you had the ex-spouse to consider. Now is the time to evaluate yourself and set goals. Learn to always choose positive attitudes, thoughts and directions. Refuse anything negative. Learn to recognize the pit falls, such as the time your ex-spouse set you up by using words, kids, or situations to control you. You need to evade them in the future. Remember, you are becoming a stronger person and keep thinking this. This is the most positive attitude you can have to overcome this bad experience. You may have experienced loneliness and low self-esteem which put you in a very vulnerable state. When you are able to rise and overcome both of these, you can finally have compassion for yourself. You need to get past the idea that you can find happiness in another person. You find compassion, compatibility, joy and contentment with other people. Thinking that happiness comes from someone else will cause you to lose track of who you really are and who you were intended to become. This point of view causes you to lose your identity. You become a non-person. Your thoughts and actions are centered around the other person and therefore you are never considered. You had become a dependent person so many of your rights had been taken away without you realizing it. Use this time through the divorce as an opportunity to become independent. You are the one who is best for you from now on. Do not hesitate to acknowledge your part in the failure of the marriage. It is very important to be honest. It helps you to build your self esteem for the future. Refuse to accept total blame. No one ever wins at the blame game.

Every action in a marriage causes a reaction. This builds up for years until one person explodes. Your ex-spouse will often initiate an action which will cause you to react rather than respond. Reacting is when you lose control and fight back. Responding is where you think first and try to talk about the problem. Accepting responsibility for yourself is a personal matter. It is your future that is at stake here and you have to make the right choice. You did not divorce a situation, but a person who either created the situation or failed to take responsibility for the situation. You can start now by not going back into the past, but by putting it into perspective with the present and moving to the next step, the future. Begin by making a list of what you

want to change – your habits, looks, friends, your social life, etc. You are the only one who can make this happen.

ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY

Summary

We can choose to grow or be stagnant.

Happiness cannot be found in another person.

Refuse to accept total blame.

Respond rather than react.

Put the past in perspective and assume responsibility for the present and future.

Describe in you journal how you intend to begin taking control of your life – by accepting total responsibility for what happened to you.

Your Personal Journal on Assuming Responsibility

About the Author

Barbara is the mother of four girls and grandmother of six grandchildren. She has been teaching and helping people most of her adult life and has been involved in leading divorce recovery support groups for the last five years. She has helped and enabled hundreds of people to put their lives back together and to lead even happier lives than before.