

DATING AFTER DIVORCE

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There are many adjustments to make after being in a long term committed relationship. One of them, of course, is adapting to life again as a single person. For most people the thought of dating again is overwhelming and many admit that their dating skills feel quite rusty.

One of the most difficult things newly divorced people often comment on is the tension between wanting to take time out after a divorce to make sense of their lives and avoid relationships, but at the same time feeling the loneliness, loss and confusion that often goes with divorce.

Many would advise against getting involved in a serious relationship for about the first two years after a divorce, simply because emotional healing and resolution has to take place. Initially relationship decisions may be made on intense emotional needs and less on sound judgement. It's a time when you are more needing of affirmation that you are okay and more in need of reassurance and connection.

The less you have resolved your issues from the divorce, the more your new relationships will be contaminated by them.

There is a very high divorce rate amongst second marriages, often because people rush into living together or remarrying to prevent loneliness, rather than healing first and going into new relationships in a more integrated way.

However, it is more likely that given the chance of a good enough relationship vs a period of reflection and healing, most people will go for the relationship as a source of healing. This sometimes does not work as unresolved issues get played out in the new relationship. In this case it is important to work on your issues while being in the relationship.

Some people consciously choose not to date again. Others however avoid it because they simply do not know how to overcome negative thoughts or fears about themselves or the opposite sex. The fear of being involved and running the risk of being hurt or rejected can devastate some people who are very proficient in many other areas of their life according to Michael Broder in "The Art of Living Single". The resultant fear of dating can make them stay alone or pine for the old relationship for a long time.

It is easy then to find obstacles to dating if the opportunity arises.

David Andes and Rosemary Clandos write about the importance of setting personal standards. They refer to what you have to offer in a relationship and your ability to attract desirable traits in others (e.g. inner strength, kindness, intelligence, affection) as your "social price".

Their research indicates that singles seeking relationships assess unseen qualities in others based on social price as it is reflected in actions, body language and verbal communication. They concluded that those who were seen to have high dating standards were seen by others to hold an increased promise of marriage (this is whether you are looking for it or not!!) Conversely those who appear insecure and desperate, call their love interest excessively and engage in sexual activity too soon send signals that they hold inferior traits i.e. that their social price is low.

All this seems quite obvious really doesn't it – it is about how we in different ways communicate our self worth and invite others to respond to us.

Some quick ideas:-

1. **Don't look to a relationship to heal you.**
2. Try not to get involved with someone who is newly divorced or going through the process and looking to you to heal them.
3. See dating initially as a time to find out how others respond to you and you to them. It is a time where you recreate an identity as a single person and this may evolve over time.
4. Don't imagine that each person who takes you out is going to rescue you. You are probably not ready for a relationship if this is the case.
5. Do not see dating as a means to replacing your marriage. See it as dating – that is all for now.
6. Do not compare your dates to your ex partner. See each person as a unique person for who they are.
7. However trust your intuition.
8. Try and see this as an adventure or an opportunity to build up your confidence, rather than a terrifying ordeal that you have to get through to avoid being alone.
9. Accept all invitations within reason to start getting out there i.e. be prepared to move out of your comfort zone - but **be discriminating**.
10. Do not let people know where you live and meet in well known places until you know more about them.
11. Give people the benefit of the doubt of more than one date unless you really do not like them. Many people are as nervous as you are.
12. Don't discuss your messy divorce, bad mouth your ex or over- disclose. Keep it general at first.
13. Think about not involving children until you have got to know the person and decided that you are going to spend a lot of time with them.
14. If you decide to be sexually active – be vigilant about your safety. Know who this person is and think about what message you put across. Read the above section on social price!
15. Recognize that nobody comes empty handed. Be aware of what emotional and physical baggage your date comes with. Respect it but ask yourself honestly if you are willing or capable of taking it on if the relationship develops.