

# 10 Tips for a Sane Divorce

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Maintaining sanity during divorce, while large waves of unpredictable and conflicting emotions rise and fall, is an enormous personal challenge. Remaining sane and grounded, however, is our adult responsibility regardless of the temptation to think and act otherwise. Children need their parents more than ever and work responsibilities continue.

The definition of, and suggestions for maintaining sanity during a divorce differ, depending on whether you are the initiator of the divorce or the one who is left. The emotional state and perspectives are quite different. Here are some suggestions for each perspective...

## **FOR THE INITIATOR**

1. Realize that you are further along emotionally than your spouse. Usually the initiating spouse has considered this decision for some time before the announcement is made to his or her spouse.
2. Remember that rejection is always a negative experience. Even though there may have been discussion about the marriage not working well, hope for future improvement is usually present and the initial announcement of divorce is experienced as a shock.
3. Anticipate change. Your spouse will have his or her own needs, so no one gets everything she or he wants. The expectation that life will be the same after divorce, with the exception of your spouse being gone, is unrealistic. For longer marriages, property will be divided and the children's time will be shared with the other parent. Children will have their own surprising reactions.
4. Expect conflicting emotions. Divorce is a huge life transition with surprises all along the way. Even if you are the one who wants the divorce, feelings of loss are inevitable. Those who are already seeing another person may not realize this at first but unraveling a significant relationship is painful.
5. Allow your children to adjust to the separation for at least a year before introducing them to a new partner. Introducing someone new before the separation agreement is signed can wreak havoc in divorce negotiations and will be painful for the children. Your happiness about the new person *does not* mean the kids will be happy about it.

## **FOR THE NON-INITIATOR**

6. Understand that your spouse has had time to adjust to the idea of divorce, having thought about it long before the announcement was made. You may wonder how he or she could be okay when you feel so badly. You will improve in time too.
7. Be aware that men and women do divorce differently. Men are pragmatic. They are usually bottom-line focused and go for the best deal they can get. Women experience

the settlement as an indication of their worth to their husband or partner. They are often shocked and hurt by their partner's proposals. Women are naturally more communal and their instinct is usually inclusive, while in the case of divorce, men can be exclusive.

8. Focus on yourself and avoid (as much as you can) getting wrapped up in wondering about how your mate is doing, what she's saying, who he's with, etc. This will lead to feelings of victimization and depression. Focus instead on what you can do for yourself and your children. Read a book, listen to music, exercise, read stories to your kids, volunteer for an organization, Don't isolate yourself. Join groups that interest you. Gain independent experience, try new things.
9. Remember that your children need you. They still need a functional parent even if you are very upset. Tell them your upset is temporary and you will feel better soon. That will give them hope that the future will be better. Take care of yourself and find support. Call your local churches to find a divorce support group. Read supportive literature.
10. Try not to speak badly of the parent who left. A common misconception is that the one who left the home left both the spouse and the children. That's not usually an accurate interpretation and hurts the children. He or she has left the marriage, not the kids and in fact, not their spouse entirely. The relationship has changed but a co-parenting relationship will go on forever.