

## **Divorce-Specific Psychotherapy**

Divorce is most often an extremely difficult experience for everyone involved, from parents to children to family members to friends. It is a time of confusion, anxiety, sadness, anger, depression, insecurity, uncertainty, stress, and instability. It is a time of loss or, more accurately, losses including but not limited to the loss of a partner, family relationships as they have been, one's identity as a married person, one's previous standard of living, and sometimes one's home.

Divorce is a time of crisis. Very significant changes occur in a relatively short period of time which can prove to be overwhelming. Someone has to leave the marital home; if there are children in the family, relationships must be redefined and schedules must be developed to allow for those relationships; and if there are disputes regarding financial or child-related issues, a decision must be made regarding how to resolve them.

Adding to the stress of divorce are parental concerns about the well-being of their children who are also experiencing intense emotions and may be acting out behaviorally in ways that are concerning.

It can be difficult for parents to meet their children's needs at such a stressful time, particularly when they are emotionally overwhelmed and/or engaged in a divorce that is highly conflicted.

When the children's needs are not met, they tend to become more demanding and act out which, in turn, adds even more to the burden of the already compromised parenting abilities of their folks. Divorce can be a very draining process.

The fact that divorce is a time of crisis is not entirely a bad thing. With each crisis comes opportunity. In the case of divorce, the opportunities are numerous.

For example, a person going through a divorce has the opportunity to master the process of grieving. Although this may sound like looking for a silver lining in an otherwise dark cloud, allowing oneself to grieve is also allowing oneself to heal. The more that one understands about the grieving process, the better one is able to resolve his or her feelings of loss and not carry them into the future where they can become an impediment to feeling happy and satisfied. Furthermore, a parent's knowing how to grieve successfully can place them in a better position to help the children with the grieving that they, too, must do.

Another opportunity that the crisis of divorce brings is that of creating a situation that by its nature encourages people to look at themselves psychologically. Pain is generally a strong motivator for change, such as the pain of loss. For the pain of loss to end, one must grieve.

Grieving is a healing process. Although the movement through the healing is not as simple as denial, sadness, anger, protest, and acceptance, allowing oneself to feel the feelings of loss in a manageable way when they present themselves results in the end or near-end of the pain.

People experience loss in different ways based largely on personality, life experience, and probably genetic makeup. Some people are open to experiencing the feelings of loss while others avoid the feelings like the plague. Unfortunately, those who refuse to grieve or are too frightened to do so are left with pockets of unresolved grief that rob them of energy and ultimate happiness, and may create unhealthy feeling states and moods such as anxiety and depression.

Divorce-specific psychotherapy is geared for people who are either in the process of a divorce or who have been through a divorce but have not been able to resolve feelings that interfere with their functioning and ability to enjoy life.

Divorce-specific psychotherapy initially addresses the crisis associated with the divorce or post-divorce period. A plan is devised to bring the crisis under control and allow for stabilization of the person's emotional state and functioning.

Help is then provided in a number of different areas including but not limited to the process of grieving, the management of stress associated with the person's involvement in the legal system, how to deal with a difficult spouse, and how to help children as they grieve and adjust to the changes in their lives.

Once issues related to the present situation have been stabilized or resolved, a decision is made regarding whether or not to delve into long-term issues most often related to earlier life experiences. For example, a person might want to understand why he or she chose a certain person to marry, which usually means looking at one's childhood years. In that case, divorce-specific psychotherapy becomes what I have termed "individual psychotherapy", described at a different location on this website.

