

Contemplating Divorce?

Here's What You Need To Know



By Dr. Karen Finn
CEO & Founder of The Functional Divorce
karen@functionaldivorce.com
www.drkarenfinn.com

"Often when you think you're at the end of something, you're at the beginning of something else." ~Fred Rogers (aka Mr. Rogers from Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood)

No one can tell you exactly what your divorce experience will be like. That might make you feel very alone, but you're not.

Despite divorce being unique to each person, at its heart divorce recovery is all about healing from grief which has some very well-defined experiences that almost everyone encounters. This commonality is important because no matter how hurt, confused, overwhelmed, angry and sad you feel, it's probably normal.

But if you're wondering what to expect as you progress through your divorce, the following checklist is some of what you might encounter.

❑ You'll likely feel overwhelmed about having to do things you have no idea how to do

Going through the process of divorce will throw you into a legal world that you probably didn't know existed - except for what you've seen on TV. You'll be asked to produce financial documents, create a budget, decide where you want and can afford to live post-divorce, decide what to do about health insurance for you and the kids, and understand how to negotiate with your soon to be ex about settling your divorce and co-parenting.

Your best guide through all of the confusing and overwhelming legalities of divorce is an attorney or a mediator. But that in itself can pose a problem because most people have never interviewed, much less hired, an attorney before. To help you choose the best legal representative you can, follow these tips: [Insider Tips for Choosing Your Divorce Attorney or Mediator](#)

❑ You will feel tidal waves of grief

You might be surprised by the amount of grief and sadness you have. You probably associate grief with a death and not divorce. But, divorce is a type of death. It's the death of your marriage, the death of the "happily ever after" dreams you had, the death of being a spouse (at least for now), and the death of life as you've known it.

❑ **You will need to redefine your roles, rules, rituals and responsibilities**

No matter how long you were married or how happy the marriage once was, you still depended on your spouse and your relationship to make your life work. Chances are you divided up the chores - things you did and things your spouse did. Maybe you dealt with the finances and they dealt with car maintenance.

You had rituals - you always celebrated your birthday at your favorite restaurant, you always celebrated Thanksgiving with their family, or even, every Sunday you knew your ex would drink too much. Either good or bad, you had regular things you could rely on. These things that once made your life work will change when you get divorced. Now you have the opportunity to recreate your life in a way that works better for you.

❑ **You may feel anger unlike any you've ever experienced before**

Here's the deal, divorce sucks. It brings HUGE life changes. There are probably some changes that you're looking forward to, but others you just really wish weren't happening.

You're going to feel angry. Somedays you may feel enraged. Other days, you may merely feel irritated or annoyed. Believe it or not, it's actually good (*so long as you use it for good*). Divorce anger can help you to break the habit of being married and minimize the positive connection you feel with your ex.

❑ **You may need to move**

Rare is the couple that chooses to divorce and keep living together. That means one or both of you will move. Even if you keep the house and your ex moves out, your home will be different. In the long-run that's a good thing. Whether or not you move, it's important to have a fresh start for the next chapter of your life.

❑ **Your financial status may change**

Most couples do not have the finances to allow them to live in the same style after divorce as they did during marriage. The income that supported one household must somehow be stretched (*and may need to be supplemented*) to support two households.

❑ **You may not be with your kids 24x7x365**

This is one of the most difficult parts of divorce. The reality is that you'll miss some of the really great stuff because your kids won't be living with you all the time.

❑ **You may need to get a job**

If you were not employed before your marriage, you're probably going to need a job. You may start by going back to school, but either way, you're likely going to be looking for a job in short order.

❑ **Your job performance may change**

If you were employed before your divorce, your job performance will change. Very often people experience presenteeism - being at work, but not really being there in their head or in their heart. Folks in this state are simply distracted with all that's going on and can't truly focus in the same way that they did before the emotional turmoil started.

❑ **You may feel a burning need to know why your marriage failed**

Everyone wants to make sense of their situation. This is especially true during divorce. It's comforting to know why your marriage ended. However, in figuring out why things didn't work out, there's also a huge temptation to assign blame. This is problematic because it creates a victim. In other words, by blaming your ex for the end of the marriage YOU become a victim. Don't do this to yourself!

❑ **You may simultaneously despise AND yearn to get back together with your ex**

Divorce is one of the most confusing things you can go through. One day you're together figuring out how to make it work and the next you're not. It's really hard to turn off feelings. You could find yourself despising your ex for all the pain and also believing the pain will stop if you just get back together.

❑ **You may feel embarrassed or afraid of telling people you're getting divorced**

No one likes admitting they aren't who they thought they were. When you're married you believe you're a spouse, but then suddenly with the divorce you're not. Who are you now? What will people think? These two questions drive most of the embarrassment and fear that people have about letting others know they're getting divorced.

❑ **You may feel exhausted and yet unable to sleep**

Divorce is a huge change to wrestle with. The grief is almost unbearable and your emotions are in nearly constant flux. The process is exhausting.

Yet despite the exhaustion, there is still a part of you that can't relax enough to sleep. There's a need for vigilance and a lack of comfort that combine to make for many sleepless nights.

Unfortunately, the lack of sleep exacerbates the emotional rollercoaster. Fortunately, this doesn't last forever. *(If it lasts for more than a couple of weeks, you may want to talk with your healthcare provider about it.)*

❑ **You might obsess about your ex**

What are they doing now? Who are they spending time with? Do they think about me? Do they miss me? Do they still love me? How are they handling this? These are just some of the constant stream of obsessive thoughts you could have about your ex. They should dissipate as you become more engaged in your life.

❑ **You could feel bad or unlovable because of your divorce**

Divorce isn't the ending anyone anticipates when they get married. When a marriage ends, there's a sense of failure. These feelings can cause you to feel bad about yourself for what now seems like a bad decision: getting married. The marriage failed, but that doesn't make you wrong or a failure.

If you got married because you fell in love, as nearly everyone does, then you could start to wonder if you're even lovable. I'm here to tell you that you're infinitely lovable whether or not your marriage worked out.

❑ **You may feel gut-wrenching loneliness**

You may have spent significant time alone while you were married, but somehow when you get divorced being alone is entirely different. The loneliness feels like you've been dumped into a huge pit of darkness that there's no getting out of. You just go through the motions of every day in a trance - isolated. As you begin to rediscover a sense of purpose for yourself, you'll move out of the gut-wrenching loneliness.

❑ **You could feel sadness that no amount of crying seems to fix**

You'll cry. You'll cry a lot. In fact, you may even have fits of sobbing. It may not seem like it, but crying is cleansing. It won't be instantaneous, but each time you cry, you let go of a little bit more of the pain, a little bit more of the grief, and hopefully a little bit more of the bitterness.

❑ **You may feel genuinely depressed**

Depression is a normal response to divorce so long as it's not chronic. I felt very depressed when my first marriage ended in divorce, but I chose not to take

medication. I wanted to feel my feelings so I could process them and know that I was strong enough to make it through (even when part of me was terrified I wasn't).

Some people are like me and others choose to have medication to help them through the worst of their situational depression. Whatever choice you make with the help of your healthcare provider will be the best for you.

❑ **You might find your desire for food changes, for better or worse**

It's funny how people relate to food during times of stress. I was one of those people who lost my appetite when I got divorced. In fact, I became anorexic and had to work hard to fix the situation. Other people experience an increased appetite and eat as a way to comfort themselves through the tidal waves of grief, the changes in lifestyle, and the changes in identity that come with divorce.

❑ **You may feel like you're not as good as other people (especially married people)**

Everyone tends to judge themselves more harshly than others do. That's what makes it so easy to fall into the trap of thinking you are what happens to you. This trap is why you may feel like other people are better than you.

The truth is that deep down you're still the same wonderful person you were before the divorce and even before your marriage. The wonderful part of you may just be hiding under all of the turmoil and grief, but you're still in there.

❑ **You might feel like you're going crazy**

One of the realities of experiencing divorce is that your emotions can swing from one extreme to another in a matter of seconds. At times it can seem almost impossible to know what to expect from yourself. You might be angry one minute and sobbing the next.

These emotional swings can make it difficult to think. You see emotions, thoughts and hormones are all tied up together. Thoughts can cause emotions. Emotions can trigger hormones to be released. Hormones can cause emotions and thoughts to happen. AND emotions can produce thoughts. It's a big tangled mess.

Questioning your sanity when you're thinking and behaving differently than usual is good. It's also a sign that you would probably benefit from talking with someone about what you're going through.

❑ **You may feel unattractive or even ugly**

Divorce is rejection: rejection of the relationship, rejection of the shared life, and rejection of you. Anyone who's rejected wants to know why. You're probably asking - *What's wrong with me?*

One of the most common answers to this question is *I must be unattractive*. It's easiest to consider that it must be your physical appearance that caused you to be rejected. After all, if you're thin, rich and beautiful your life must be a fairy tale and you would never have gotten divorced, right? WRONG!

The truth is that everyone, regardless of how they look can be attractive because of who they are on the inside. However, if you feel unattractive, make the effort to feel more attractive. I hired an image consultant after I got divorced because I felt ugly. And you know what? I wasn't ugly, I had just gotten lazy about my appearance. I'll bet you're pretty good looking when you put your mind to it.

❑ **You could be wondering if you even know what love is**

Most marry for love. I did and I'll bet you did too. When a marriage that was entered into for love ends it makes sense to question what love is. As you continue creating your new life you'll redefine love for yourself.

❑ **You will lose your plans and goals for the future with your ex**

This is one of the facts of divorce. Whatever you dreamed of for your marriage and your family won't be - at least not the way you originally dreamt it. The loss of your plans and goals that included your ex is ample cause for grief.

However, as the sadness begins to fade you can change your plans and goals. Your new plans and goals can be just as inspiring as the ones you had to say goodbye to because of your divorce.

❑ **You might feel like a failure**

This is a toughie because it's so easy to lose sight of the fact that you aren't what happens to you. Your marriage ended in divorce. Your marriage failed.

Yes, as time passes, you'll probably come to see that you played a part in the end of your marriage. However, just because you might come to see that you could have done things differently, it doesn't make you a failure.

Divorce is a lesson. It will teach you a whole lot about yourself including the fact that you're not a failure. Give it time.

❑ **Your life might feel out of control or completely chaotic**

Divorce introduces change into every life it touches. For divorcing spouses the myriad of things that change can seem titanic. From your routine to your very identity, everything seems to change when a marriage ends.

Despite the discomfort and discombobulation, you can do little things to calm your world. I know one woman who was able to calm the divorce storms raging around her by plucking her eyebrows. In the moment she did it, all she had to think about was one thing, not the slew of chaos around her. I know one man who calmed his divorce storms by taking time out to ride his bike. What simple thing can you do to create your calm in the eye of your divorce storms?

❑ **You may have difficulty concentrating**

Extreme emotions are one of the realities of divorce. The emotional swings are exhausting and confusing. You could be crying one minute, laughing the next, and furious in the one following that. These strong emotions also affect your cognitive ability (aka your ability to think) because you've got a different chemical balance of neurotransmitters bathing your brain than when you're not experiencing such emotional swings.

Seriously, do you make better decisions when you're feeling calm or when you're furious? If you're like most of us, you do a bit better when you're calm. So, it makes perfect sense that you might have difficulty concentrating when you're dealing with the emotional rollercoaster of divorce. ([Read more about how your brain reacts to emotions.](#))

❑ **You might feel really stressed out**

On some level, you probably understood that you'd feel stressed going through divorce, but did you really think it would be as tough as it is? Most don't. If you'd like a quick fix for combating your stress, [check out this 2-minute relaxation recording.](#)

❑ **You could have difficulty trusting others**

For most, divorce is a betrayal. Your spouse may have betrayed you. You may have betrayed yourself or your spouse. Wherever there is betrayal trust has been broken.

Trust is a delicate thing. Once trust has been broken in one of your intimate relationships, it can be scary to trust again. If this is true for you, one of the best ways to move forward is to slowly open up to someone again. BUT to avoid getting hurt, you need to learn how to open up and experiment with trusting someone new. Repairing a situation like this takes time, but it can only happen if you try to trust again. And believe me, I know it's hard.

❑ **You may believe there is something wrong with you because you got divorced**

It's so easy to compare yourself to others. When you look at all the people you know who are still married, you might be tempted to believe there must be something wrong with you since your marriage didn't work.

But the truth is, it's the marriage that had something wrong with it, not you.

❑ **You might deny that your marriage is over**

Denial is one of those often misunderstood emotions. It's even the butt of jokes ("Denial isn't just a river in Egypt."). But, denial is one of our natural protection mechanisms. It keeps us from feeling too much all at once. And when it's working correctly, it will slowly dissipate as you're able to accept and work through more of the realities of your divorce.

❑ **You could become fearful of just about everything**

Fear is a natural response when you feel threatened. And let's face it, when your marriage ends and all that you thought your life was just isn't any more, you might feel a bit threatened. Fear can keep you safe, but it can also blossom out of proportion if not talked about with a trusted friend, counselor, religious leader, or coach.

❑ **You might be curious about dating**

As you progress through some of the more unsettling parts of divorce, you'll probably become curious about dating. You may wonder things like, "What would it be like to have sex with someone who isn't my spouse?", "Are all wo/men just like my ex?" and "Could I be in another relationship?". Dating is different from being in a relationship. It's also different now than it was when you were dating before you got married. So, take your time and have fun.

❑ You could find yourself unable to make the decisions others seem to be demanding of you

All of the emotional turmoil you feel as you come to terms with the end of your marriage can make it really difficult to think, to imagine what you want in the future, and to make decisions.

As disconcerting as it is, this is normal. It's OK to say you need a bit more time to consider your options and not feel forced or coerced into making decisions you aren't comfortable with. *(You'll also want to make sure you're getting the support you need to work your way through the emotional turmoil because at some point you will need to make those decisions.)*

❑ You may feel the need to find someone or something to blame for the end of your marriage

When you're extremely hurt, one of the ways to deal with the pain is to figure out what's causing it. If there's a person or thing that's at fault for hurting you, you might feel a sense of relief and even power in being able to assign blame.

But here's the thing, if someone besides you is 100% to blame for the end of your marriage then you're a victim. If you find that you're 100% to blame for ending your marriage, then you're taking too much responsibility. In either case, you're not helping yourself.

❑ You might feel jealous of your ex's new life

It really hurts when your ex moves on from the end of your marriage before you do. There are three reasons why you might feel jealous of your ex's new life.

1. You might feel like you're getting the short-end of the stick because they're already in another relationship. It's possible that your ex did their divorce recovery work before you even knew they wanted a divorce.

It's also possible that they have done NONE of their work and the issues from your marriage will come right back up in their new relationships because they haven't worked out their issues. Either way, because they've had a head start, they seem to be moving on with their life faster than you are.

2. You could feel jealous of your ex's new life is because they have fewer responsibilities. This may be especially true if you have custody of your

children and they have weekend visitation.

3. You may also feel jealous because your ex has more discretionary income.

Jealousy is a common emotion of divorce. It's not all bad though because you can use it to inspire you to change your circumstances.

❑ You could fear becoming sexually active (even just a little bit) with another person

If you had a monogamous marriage (at least from your side), you might feel strange about having sex with someone else. You developed the habit of being faithful to your ex and you might even feel like you're cheating the first time you have sexual contact with another person after your divorce. Like any habit though, you can choose to behave differently. So long as you're practicing safe sex, chances are you'll come to enjoy sex and your sexuality as a single person.

❑ You might feel uncomfortable being alone in public places

You might feel more alone, depressed and unwanted (normal expressions of grief) when you're in public places by yourself. But it's important that you challenge yourself in little ways to become more comfortable. Try people watching, reading a book or even striking up a conversation with a person of the same sex when you're out. As you become more comfy, you'll realize you are reclaiming the joyfulness of being you.

❑ You could feel emotionally distant from others

You might try to protect yourself from further hurt by preventing yourself from feeling close to others. As you begin to allow yourself to trust both yourself and others, you'll begin to feel close to the most important people in your life again. And as your trust continues to grow, you'll naturally expand your emotional connection to others.

❑ You may have sudden urges to cry

During the most tumultuous times of your divorce, you may be overcome by the need to cry. Crying is an expression of grief. Expressing your grief is critical to moving through it. You might find that scheduling time when you allow yourself to experience your grief will decrease your sudden urges to cry.

❑ You could want to hurt or get even with your ex

If you're blaming your ex for all of your pain, it's quite possible that you'd want to get even with them. Making them hurt as much or more than you do, may seem like a

good idea for a moment. But, as satisfying as that is to think about, it's not a good thing to do. You can call it Karma or taking the high road, but you'll be better off doing what you know to be best for you in the long run even despite the pain you're experiencing right now.

❑ **You might secretly wish that your ex would die**

This is one of those dirty little secrets that most people won't tell you. But it's pretty common to think that if your ex would just die then you wouldn't have to worry about the divorce and you wouldn't have to argue about who gets what and you wouldn't have to share the kids and... Well, you get the picture. And we both know that it's just one of those fantasies you say goodbye to anytime it pops up.

❑ **You could feel guilty about your divorce**

If you're one of those people who take responsibility for everything and everyone around you, then you probably feel guilty about your divorce.

If your behavior triggered your ex to file for divorce, then you probably feel guilty about your divorce. In this case you might want to consider apologizing to your ex and choosing to do differently next time.

❑ **You might have suicidal thoughts**

You need to be alert to these thoughts. Suicidal thoughts can be brought about by divorce because your brain is working overtime in an exhausted state trying to figure out how to help you stop hurting so much. If these thoughts are more than rare and fleeting, seek help from a therapist immediately or call 911 if you feel like you're in urgent danger.

❑ **You may feel excluded because, after a certain age, society is couples-centric**

Our society is primarily geared toward married couples raising children. You were probably raised with either an explicit or implicit expectation to marry and have children.

Luckily things are changing and there are plenty of people who choose to remain single after divorce without stigma. You may need to find a group of single people to become friends with, but websites like MeetUp.com can go a long way toward shortening your search!

❑ **You will probably feel rejected**

Divorce can seem like it's the ultimate rejection. The person who promised to love you for better or worse didn't. I just want to remind you that you're not alone. I'm here even if you feel like no one else is.

❑ **You could believe that no one understands what you're going through**

You're right, no one understands exactly what you're going through because your grief is different from everyone else's. However, if someone's been through their own divorce, they'll have a better idea of what you're going through. These people will be more able to empathize with you even if they don't exactly understand everything. And empathy can go a really long way.

❑ **You might notice friends and family taking sides (and maybe not yours)**

Especially in a contentious divorce, but even in more collaborative ones, friends and family members often feel the need to take sides. You might even be surprised that some feel such a pressure to take sides that they would rather walk away from the friendships than choose to support either you or your ex.

❑ **You may wonder if you'll ever be happy again**

The grief and sadness of divorce can be of such depth and duration that you might wonder if you can ever be happy again. The answer is yes, you can. It will take some time for you to process all of your grief, but it will pass and you will be happy again.

❑ **You will probably notice a growing sense of freedom**

The pressure and continual presence of your grief will gradually lift. You'll begin to notice that you appreciate being able to make your own decisions without needing to consult your ex. And this is the beginning of you embracing freedom.

❑ **You might create goals and plans that excite you**

As you put your grief behind you, you'll naturally start creating a life that inspires you. You could start with dreams, and then develop goals that inspire you to take action.

❑ **You may grow to embrace your new single life**

Actually, this is my heartfelt hope for you. Accepting and embracing the wonder of your life independent of your marital status is one of the greatest joys.

Thank you for investing your valuable time and reading this checklist.

Now's the time to take action - if you want to have individualized support and guidance to navigate the chaos of your divorce, here's what you can do:

[Schedule A FREE \(30-minute\) Complimentary Consultation](#) with me directly on my calendar. On our call we can:

- identify how you want your life to be *ideally* post-divorce
- understand what's coming so you can prepare for the unexpected instead of getting derailed when it happens
- know what the support you need to get on with your life and protect the ones you love the most
- make sure that divorce is the best next step for you. Remember, it's NOT a done-deal until the papers are signed!

No one should have to go through divorce alone. As someone who has been there and coached hundreds of people through the process, you have me in your corner.

To learn more, please reach out to me in any of the ways listed below. And feel free to share this e-book with the ones you love.

Contact Details:



DR KAREN FINN

karen@functionaldivorce.com

www.drkarenfinn.com