



*Make Prevention a CHOICE*

## **Separation And Divorce In The Military Family: Survival Tips For Adults (Part 1)**

Separation and divorce is one of the most stressful experiences any person will ever have to face. It forces a rearrangement of every aspect of our lives - home, children, friends, relatives, everything.

Your personal future and that of your children depends heavily on the way you choose to cope with this powerful challenge. Here are some tips that can help you focus on a better future.

### **PAY ATTENTION TO YOURSELF**

- ◇ Few experiences are more painful than divorce. Anger, depression, anxiety, guilt, and failure are all part of how we sometimes feel. Pay attention to the feelings. They are part of the hurt, but also part of the cure.
- ◇ Divorce is like a “death”. It pushes you into a kind of grieving for something very important which has been lost. The grieving has some important phases:
  1. **Denial:** This isn't really happening to me. He/She will change his/her mind and everything will go back to the way it was.
  2. **Anger:** Why is this happening to me? This isn't fair! I did everything right! This feeling could spill over to your children, other family members and friends who are trying to be helpful.
  3. **Bargaining:** Trying to “make a deal” to change things and avoid the divorce, attempting to put off the inevitable.
  4. **Depression:** Loss of interest in people and things you used to enjoy. Isolation, prolonged loss of or too much sleep, eating too much or too little.
  5. **Acceptance:** Recovering a sense of hope, direction. Getting past the transition to a life with new goals and priorities
- ◇ Just when you think you're past it all, a birthday, wedding anniversary or court date could throw you back into a phase of anger or depression. This very normal reaction will pass. Be patient with yourself.
- ◇ Be careful to maintain good eating, sleeping and exercise habits. Taking care of yourself physically will help you handle the strong emotions you feel.

### **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR CHILDREN**

- ◇ Pay special attention to your children during the divorce. Allow them to express their feelings about it. Listen to what they say without being defensive or judgmental. They are grieving just as you are.

- ◇ Unless there is evidence of abuse, your children should have the chance to maintain a relationship with the non-custodial parent. Their relationship with the other parent does not end with your marriage.
- ◇ Keep your children out of your marital conflict. Using them as messengers, criticism or name-calling of your spouse in front of them, showering them with excessive gifts when they visit are examples of using the children as pawns in your conflict. In the long run, these ploys will damage their relationship with you.

### **STAY IN TOUCH**

- ◇ Stay in touch with family and friends. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Your supportive friends want to help but may not know how. Tell them what you need.
- ◇ Treat yourself to some things you might otherwise not do, such as a movie, lunch with a friend, or something new for yourself. It's okay to pamper yourself a little without threatening your financial stability.
- ◇ Be aware that some friends will withdraw from their relationship with you when you separate or divorce. This is because they find it awkward or threatening to relate to you as a "single" person. Treasure those who maintain their friendship with you.

### **BE CAREFUL ABOUT MAJOR DECISIONS AFTER YOUR DIVORCE**

- ◇ Try to avoid unnecessary major decisions such as purchasing a house, new car, major items for your house, a move to another part of the country. You've already experienced a major upheaval. Give yourself time to settle into your new situation.
- ◇ Avoid "re-bound" relationships. Take the time to carefully understand why your marriage ended and what you might do differently the next time. Otherwise, you risk finding another problem relationship.
- ◇ Remember, while about 50% of first marriages fail, over 75% of second marriages fail.
- ◇ Check with you JAG Office and your lawyer about your eligibility for military benefits such as retirement, health insurance, and Survivor Benefit Pay. Avoid unpleasant surprises.

For further information about community resources regarding separation and divorce, contact the Choice Behavioral Health Partnership Prevention and Wellness Department at:

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