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CANADIAN MENTAL  
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POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE

## Separation and Divorce



Some marriages end suddenly while others seem to fall apart over a long period of time. No matter what the cause, if your marriage fails, you are likely to feel a whole range of intense emotions: sadness, anger, hurt, fear of an uncertain future, loneliness, confusion over the many decisions you must make, and a sense of failure at your lost plans and dreams.

How you choose to handle a separation is very important because of the effect it will have on the rest of your life. If you do not deal with the pain, and if you allow yourself to become bitter, you will be unhappy for a very long time. Let go of your bitterness and anger. Try to look at the separation as an opportunity to re-examine your abilities, your assets and your dreams, and to make the changes necessary for a new, full and rewarding life.

If you or someone you know is going through a separation or divorce, we hope this pamphlet will help you understand and cope with this difficult period of adjustment.

### Things you can do

Most people who have gone through a separation and divorce have felt the same way you do now, and most have ended up stronger than before. However, while you are going through the experience, you will need coping skills and emotional support. Here are some things you can do:

- **Talk to someone you trust.** Talking to a family member or close friend can give you an outlet for your frustration and anger. Be careful not to burden your children with these feelings. Be sure you can trust the person to keep your secrets so that you can feel free to share your deepest concerns. You may find that a person who has been through a separation or divorce is the best one to offer support.
- **Keep a familiar routine for yourself and your children.** It is very important to have a sense of stability at a time of such major and painful change. This is especially important for your children: the more their world stays the same, the better they will be able to cope with the changes they will have to make.
- **Keep the lines of communication open with your children.** They need to know that they are not losing the love and support of either parent, and that they are not responsible for your separation or divorce. Talk openly to them about your new living arrangements.
- **Stay healthy.** You may find yourself forgetting to eat regularly and staying up late worrying. This could lead to a loss of energy and illness at a time when you most need to be on top of things. Keep yourself in good health by eating regular meals and getting enough sleep. You should also try to get regular exercise.
- **Learn some methods for coping with stress.** There are many good books you can read on coping with stress, and you may also find some information on relaxation techniques helpful. Check with your local library and bookstore.

- **Keep in mind the old saying, "One day at a time."** Deal with your separation and the unexpected problems and feelings it creates by asking yourself, "What do I need to do today?" Try not to worry about things you cannot do anything about until next week or next month. When the time comes, deal with them just like the others - one day at a time.
- **Avoid making major decisions until your life has become more settled.** Some decisions have to be made quickly, such as housing and school arrangements for the children, and, if you have not been working, getting a job. However, you can put off many decisions until "the dust has settled." It may be best to give yourself some time before deciding on a career change, moving to another community, going back to school or getting involved with someone new.
- **Allow yourself the time you need to heal.** Your family and friends may encourage you to "cheer up" and "get on with life" before you are ready. Generally, this happens because people who care about you feel distressed at seeing you unhappy. Although their concern is understandable, you must take whatever time you need to heal. Losing a marriage, no matter how difficult it may have been, still causes wounds, and you will need time to grieve. Give yourself quiet times alone in which you can think, cry, or simply be by yourself.
- **Get professional help when you need it.** You will face many legal and emotional problems along with separation and divorce, and you will probably need professional help. For legal matters, seek the help of a lawyer. If you are experiencing severe emotional stress, your family doctor can help you find a counsellor. You may also find it helpful to talk to a member of the clergy for your religion. Make sure you use these services when you need them; ignore the desire to "tough it out" on your own.
- **Look for support in your community.** There may be workshops and self-help groups in your community which can help you in this difficult time.

#### **Do you need more information?**

If you or someone you know needs help coping with a separation or divorce, contact a community organization, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, which can help you find professional help, courses and workshops, and self-help groups for people like yourself.