

Coping with an Emotional Divorce

Strategies to help you unpack your emotional baggage, take a step away from the past, and move forward.

By Terri L. Orbuch Updated: January 25, 2016

After a relationship or breakup, it's important to have an outlet for your emotional stress. A successful strategy to unpack your emotions is to identify ways to constructively release your emotions. On the good side, these outlets can also provide you with many other positive benefits. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

1. Get Physical

High-energy exercise or physical activity can zap your stress and your negative emotions. Exercise decreases stress hormones like cortisol and, at the same time, increases your body's "feel good" endorphins, which will give your mood an instant boost. By hitting a punching bag at the gym or grunting through your last set of weights, you'll also release pent-up anger that could otherwise impact your health. In addition, certain sports like swimming, golf and yoga provide you with personal time to effectively reflect and meditate on your feelings. And new research suggests that physical activity may even reduce your body's reaction to future stress. So by exercising now, your emotions will be even easier to deal with later on.

2. Find a Sense of Community

Take in roommates, join a club or gym, or move to a condo complex. Seek the company of good friends and family. Renewing your ties to the community not only provides you with a source of emotional support, it's a great way to meet new people.

3. Volunteer

By volunteering, you become less concerned with your own problems; your own personal issues may suddenly appear very small compared to the challenges of those you are helping. Put the focus on others and what you can do for them. You'll feel good about helping others, you'll keep your mind from dwelling on your emotions, and you'll keep your perspective in check.

4. Create!

Paint, play music, garden, or write. Creative activities make you live in the present. These right-brain activities also continue to stimulate the emotional and intuitive side of your brain.

5. Scream in a Safe Place

Get inside your car where no one can hear or see you, and then yell at your ex at the top of your lungs until you've said absolutely everything you need to say and have gotten it all off your chest. After you're through, you'll feel renewed.

6. Write a Letter to Your Ex

Try writing a really honest letter to your ex without holding back – let loose and really give your ex a piece of your mind or clear the air and confess the mistakes that you made in the relationship. When you are done, put the letter away. Don't send it. That's right save it. This letter is for you. Write a letter like this

once a week or once a month and keep it in a special place that only you know about. You can describe your anger, sadness, frustration, guilt, or other emotions. Putting your feelings on paper will help to defuse your emotions, and over time, reviewing your letters will allow you to see the change in yourself and how you are putting the past behind you.

A Letter to Your Ex: How to Express Your Anger

Are you angry with your ex, but find that you're having a hard time letting your feelings out? Does your letter sound too wimpy, too tame, or too nice? Follow these four steps to release your anger:

1. **Admit your anger.** Would your friends or family be surprised to know just how angry you are? Well, they might be surprised, but your ex should know better. Admit to your ex, and yourself, just how angry you are.
2. **Tell your ex why you are angry.** Are you angry because your ex cheated on you? Spent your savings? Never wanted to have sex? Was never home? Didn't pay attention to you? Tell your ex exactly why you're angry, and don't hold back.
3. **Allow yourself to feel negative.** Do you feel like your ex ruined your life? Are you upset that your ex lavishly spent money on a Caribbean cruise instead of your children? Do you feel like your ex is a terrible parent? Let it rip!
4. **Explain how your ex has affected your life.** What are you dealing with thanks to your ex? Are you now a single parent? Are you struggling financially? Do you miss Friday night pizza or card games with your mutual friends? Let your ex know what he or she should feel responsible for, and the consequences you are dealing with, as a result of your breakup.

A Word of Warning!

Again, whatever you do, do not send a letter to your ex! No matter how great you think your letters are, they are for your eyes only. Why? When we share something with others, even if this something is just a letter or email, we subconsciously expect a response in return. Writing a letter to your ex isn't a reason to start talking with your ex again, and it's not a way to "get back at" your ex-partner. Writing this letter is completely and totally 100% for you.

This article was adapted and condensed by Divorce Magazine from the book Finding Love Again © 2012 by Terri L. Orbuch, with permission from Sourcebooks. Dr. Terri L. Orbuch is a relationship expert, a therapist, and the project director for the Early Years of Marriage project funded by the National Institute of Health, a landmark study of marriage, divorce and repartnering. Dr. Orbuch is a research professor at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan and a professor at Oakland University. For more information visit: www.drterrihelovedoctor.com.