
Sarah Kelsey: 7 Steps For Dealing With Divorce

I'm a spaz in big groups, my friends call my fashion sense «eclectic special» and I've been known to burst into tears at a moment's notice. Take last week, for example. I bawled after catching a cute old couple holding hands. This is all important to note because I'm least composed when going through some sort of emotional upheaval.

When my marriage fell apart about a year ago, at the age of 29 (on top of me going through a huge job change/having to sell my house, car, etc.), I knew there were only two ways to cope: I could be super melodramatic about how unfair life was – which given my at-the-time penchant for drinking wine, eating full bags of potato chips and watching horribly unrealistic and depressing chick flicks like *Eat, Pray, Love* seemed like a definite possibility – or I could do something I'd never done before... I could let my relationship epically fall apart as honestly and gracefully as possible.

As you can probably tell, I opted for the latter. Here's how I got it done.

Step 1

Cancel your plans. Yeah, I get it: I should be saving for retirement; I should be eating eight to 10 servings of vegetables a day; Alcohol is bad, the occasional cigarette is even worse; I should be looking toward marriage, kids, a home or I'll never achieve it. But you know what? Nine times out of 10, life never works out as one thinks it will. My solution: stop planning. Go the way of Buddha and enjoy the moment. Or, if you're more a Lennonist, remember: «Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.»

Step 2

You can't control what's going to happen to you. I'm not religious, so I don't believe there's a god-driven plan to life, but I do believe wherever we are at the present moment is where we're supposed to be. (Yes, my problems are champagne when compared to others, but there's still something I should be learning from them.) And the more one tries to control everything that's happening, the more out-of-control they'll start to appear and feel. Stop trying to get a grip on things and go with the flow. Shit happens... To everyone. And I promise the insecurity/pain you're feeling will fade.

Step 3

If you self-destruct, you have to pick yourself back up. One of the hardest lessons I've had to learn over the past year is no one can help you move on from bottoming out except you. Sure you can (and should) count on your friends for moral support, but the only one who can stop you from consuming too much chardonnay, cheesies and chick flicks is you. You have to be ready to move on from a situation and to learn and grow from your experiences or else it'll never happen.

Step 4

You aren't perfect, so admit your shortcomings. No one wants to admit their faults (especially to the people they love – lest they run away, of course), but part of getting through the tough times is admitting you played a role in how/why your relationship self-destructed. There's that old saying, «It takes two to tango,» and it's totally true: You can't blame everyone else for your problems... You've

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created some of them. And the most graceful thing you can do -- yet also the hardest -- is to admit when you're in the wrong and to honestly own up to your shortcomings. Only then will you ever be able to learn from the experiences you've had. Only then can you grow.

Step 5

Even though you have shortcomings, you're not entirely to blame for a relationship's demise. Part and parcel with step four is learning to forgive yourself for your shortcomings and, at the same time, accepting you aren't 100 per cent to blame for all of your relationship's problems. You're not perfect; neither was your partner. Which means you're both responsible for how your relationship ended up. You can't spend an undue amount of time beating yourself up for everything that happened. Take on your share of the blame, learn from your mistakes and move on with forgiveness toward yourself and others.

Step 6

You will -- and are allowed to -- love again. When everything is said and done, your old relationship is over, you've owned up to your shortcomings and you've healed, it can be hard to believe you'll ever find love again -- or that you actually deserve it. (Some of the rotating questions I had in my head were: Why would anyone love me again? Will the fates conspire to punish me for the rest of my life because of my shortcomings? Why would anyone want to marry me again, especially because I'm only 30 and divorced?) But, the thing is, you will and you deserve it. Yes, when it happens, you'll be absolutely petrified: You'll want to puke, you'll have panic attacks, you'll get ridiculously nervous about seeing someone's face beside you every day and you'll feel giddy. But you're allowed to feel all of this. And it'll all start happening when you least expect it. Which brings me back to my first point: Life isn't

really something you can plan; just go with it... the good and the bad.

Step 7

Don't listen to anyone's advice. When I first split up with my husband, I was given so much advice (from well-meaning people like me, obviously!) I simply couldn't follow: go out and randomly sleep with a few men; stop believing in love; never look to get married again; pack your schedule so you're never sitting at home alone; don't take a trip or travel -- it's only a sign you're running away from your issues. There's only one catch: coping with life's hardships doesn't have a one-size-fits-all solution. When bad things happen you, very quickly, develop a keen sense of a) who you are and b) what you want from life. So while none of the bits of advice I received were bad or wrong, they just weren't right for me. You have to do what's right for you if you ever want to heal.

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