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columns



the mindful divorcée

BY DEBBIE MARTINEZ, DIVORCE COACH

Reduce Your Stress During Divorce

STRESS IS DEFINED BY WEBSTER AS “A STATE OF MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL STRAIN or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances.” Let me sum that up in one word – divorce.

Divorce is the second most stressful event in someone's life according to the Holmes and Rahe Scale, only preceded by the death of a spouse or child. Research has shown that prolonged exposure to stress can cause all types of illnesses and greatly impair one's life. So, how do you keep your stress level under wraps while going through a divorce? The key here is two-fold. One is recognizing it when it first starts, and two is knowing what to do to bring your stress level down.

Being mindful of when it starts begins with being aware of your body. Are you clenching your teeth, feeling flushed, have a headache, can't concentrate or feeling your body stiffen? All these are signs of stress. Make a list of what your body does when you are stressed out and commit it to memory. This will increase your mindfulness and help you stop the blow up or breakdown before it happens. Once you are aware of how your body reacts to stress, you can come up with a way to bring yourself back down.

Focus on your reaction to things that crop up. Is your reaction based on emotion or facts? Are you taking the situation personally? Are you dealing with the facts or the story you are writing surrounding the facts?

Here is an example of writing your own story. Your ex doesn't drop the kids off on time and blames it on traffic. The fact is the kids were late. Could there have been traffic? Possibly. However, you take it to the next level by writing your own story that goes like this: “He did this on purpose because he wants to ruin my night. He is so inconsiderate, I'm going to do this to him next week.”

Now, here's the thing. He could be doing it for those reasons but that is not a “fact” until you know for sure. You are integrating your story and beliefs into the situation, which heightens your stress level to defense. Stay focused on the facts.

Once you become aware of your stress, come up with ways to at least bring it down to a manageable level. Here are some ideas:

- » Do deep breathing
- » Tell yourself this is time limited
- » Don't take it personally; this is his/her issue
- » Remove yourself from the situation and shift focus
- » Strategize how to avoid similar situations in the future and let it go
- » Overall shift your perspective from “it's not fair” to “I've got this.”
- » Meditate
- » Write in a journal
- » Exercise
- » Take a break from what you are doing
- » Make time for fun

During the divorce it is imperative that you have great self-care. So many people and things are pulling on you that if you don't get good sleep, exercise and eat well, you will not be good for anyone. When fighters are going into the ring, they have a good diet, get sleep and get themselves psyched up for a good fight. Let's face it, divorce is no walk in the park and even though I've seen some amicable ones, many turn into a “fight ‘til the death.”

Learn quickly what you can and can't control and let it go. Accept your current reality but never let go of hope for a better tomorrow. Keep moving forward and as hard as it is, let the negative emotions go or you will suffer physically and mentally. Do your best and let go of expectations. Think things through at your pace so you don't have the stress of doubting your decisions down the road. Remember this too shall pass but in the meantime, let's keep the stress level down.

Debbie Martinez, MA is a certified, mindful life coach specializing in divorce (aka: heartbreak coach). She professionally coaches clients on how to avoid the breakup backlash and live better, not bitter. As a Florida Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator trained in collaborative divorce, Debbie gives clients the tools they need to successfully untie the knot and stand strong in the wake of adversity. She brings her formal training and life experience into her coaching practice to empower and educate clients through their divorce journey and onto new beginnings. You can contact Debbie at debbie@transformationthrudivorce.com.