

# **Divorce and Breakup Recovery**

*What recovery actually looks like, without the forced positivity*

CB Fields Coaching

### **A Note Before You Begin**

*This guide offers general information and a coaching perspective on recovering from a divorce or breakup. It is not a substitute for therapy, psychiatric care, or legal advice, and reading it does not create a coaching or clinical relationship. Chris Fields is not an attorney and provides zero legal advice of any kind. If you are experiencing abuse or are afraid of your partner, this guide is not the right resource. Contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233. If you are having thoughts of harming yourself, contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988.*

## Why This Guide Exists

Divorce and breakup advice tends to swing between two extremes: forced positivity about new beginnings before you're anywhere near ready to hear it, or doom-focused content that assumes you'll be stuck in pain indefinitely. Neither is accurate. This guide is a direct, honest look at what recovery actually looks like, whether the relationship was a marriage or not.

## The Grief Nobody Warns You About

Ending a relationship, married or not, is a loss, and grief is the accurate word for what follows. It doesn't move in a straight line, and it doesn't require the relationship to have been good for the grief to be real. People grieve relationships they're relieved to be out of. That's not a contradiction. You can lose something you needed to lose and still feel the loss of it.

## How Long This Actually Takes

Timelines vary widely across studies and depend heavily on individual circumstances, but a few data points are worth knowing. A study published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology* found that many people begin to see meaningful emotional recovery from a breakup around the eleven-week mark. Divorce recovery tends to run longer, with much of the research and clinical literature pointing to a window of twelve to eighteen months or more before people report feeling substantially more like themselves again, though this varies a great deal by individual and circumstance.

What matters more than any specific number: there is no correct timeline, and comparing your pace to someone else's, or to a statistic, tends to add pressure that doesn't help.

*Research referenced: study findings on post-breakup emotional recovery published in the Journal of Positive Psychology. Divorce recovery timeline estimates are drawn from a range of clinical and research sources, which vary based on methodology and individual factors.*

## The Line Between Processing and Obsessing

Thinking about what happened, examining the relationship honestly, and working through feelings is processing, and it's necessary. Replaying the same scenarios repeatedly without reaching new understanding, checking an ex's social media multiple times a day, or rehearsing arguments that will never happen is obsessing, and it tends to keep the wound open rather than closing it. If you notice the second pattern more than the first, that's a signal to bring in outside support rather than trying to think your way out of it alone.

## Being Left vs. Choosing to Leave

These two experiences of the same event, a relationship ending, are different enough that they deserve to be named separately. The person who didn't choose the ending often deals more with shock and a sense of losing control over their own life. The person who made the decision often deals more with guilt, even when they're confident the decision was right. Neither experience is easier than the other. They're just different, and expecting your process to look like your ex's, or like a friend's from a similar situation, tends to add pressure that doesn't help.

## Handling Mutual Friends and Family During the Split

It's common for shared friendships to become complicated or to change entirely, and for some family relationships, especially in-laws, to shift as well. This is a real loss on top of the primary one, and it's worth acknowledging rather than dismissing. You're not obligated to compete for people's loyalty, and you're not obligated to cut people off either. Most people find their social circle naturally settles over the following year, even when the first few months feel unstable.

## The Decisions Worth Delaying

In the first few months, especially, there's often pressure, internal or external, to make big decisions quickly: where to live, whether to relocate, major purchases or sales, even new relationships. Where there's no urgent deadline forcing the decision, giving yourself more time before locking in permanent choices tends to lead to better outcomes than deciding while still in the acute phase of the grief. This doesn't apply to decisions with real deadlines, like legal filings, which should be handled on their actual timeline with your attorney.

## Rebuilding an Identity That Isn't Built Around the Relationship

Long relationships and marriages often fold a person's sense of identity into the partnership itself: shared friends, shared routines, a shared sense of who you are as a couple. When that ends, part of what's disorienting is that your individual identity has to be reconstructed, not just your schedule. This tends to happen through small, deliberate choices, reconnecting with interests or people that got sidelined, rather than a single defining moment of 'finding yourself.'

## Dating Again: How You'll Know You're Ready

There's no fixed timeline for this, but a few honest signals tend to matter more than how much time has passed:

- You can think about your ex without the emotional intensity taking over your whole day
- You're not looking for someone to distract you from grief you haven't actually processed
- You have a clearer sense of what you want and don't want, separate from reacting against the last relationship
- You're dating from curiosity and interest, not from loneliness alone

## What a New Relationship Can't Fix

A new relationship can genuinely help with loneliness and can be a real source of joy, but it can't do the work of processing what happened in the last one. Unresolved patterns, trust issues, or grief tend to follow into the next relationship if they weren't addressed first, sometimes showing up as unexplained jealousy, difficulty trusting a partner who's done nothing wrong, or comparing a new relationship unfavorably to a version of the old one that's been idealized in hindsight. Doing at least some of that processing before getting seriously involved again tends to make the next relationship healthier from the start.

## Common Mistakes People Make

- Jumping into a rebound relationship specifically to avoid sitting with the pain
- Cutting off all support from friends and family out of embarrassment or exhaustion
- Insisting on 'staying strong' in a way that blocks any actual grieving from happening
- Making major decisions, moving, quitting a job, cutting off family, in the first few raw months, before the initial shock has settled

## If Children Are Part of Your Situation

Parenting through a divorce or separation is its own subject, with its own considerations around co-parenting, conflict, and keeping a child's needs central. If that applies to you, a dedicated guide on that subject is available through the family law resources section of this site.

## What Recovery Actually Looks Like

Recovery isn't a single moment where everything suddenly feels resolved. It tends to look like gradually noticing fewer bad days than good ones, thinking about your ex without it derailing your whole afternoon, and eventually realizing you've gone a while without thinking about them at all, only to notice it in hindsight. There's rarely a dramatic turning point. It's closer to a slow shift in the ratio of hard days to normal ones, until one day the hard days are the exception instead of the rule.

## When Grief Doesn't Follow This Pattern

Most of what's described in this guide assumes a grief process that, while difficult, gradually eases over time. For some people, that easing doesn't happen. Persistent depression, inability to function in daily responsibilities for an extended period, or grief that intensifies rather than settles months in are signs that professional support isn't optional at that point, it's necessary. There's no failure in needing that. Prolonged, unrelenting grief responds well to treatment. It rarely resolves on its own through willpower alone.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Is it normal to miss someone I know was bad for me?**

Yes. Missing a person and knowing the relationship was unhealthy aren't mutually exclusive. Attachment doesn't disappear just because a relationship wasn't good for you, and that's one of the more confusing parts of this kind of grief.

### **How do I stop checking their social media?**

Removing the ability to check, unfollowing, muting, or taking a break from the platform entirely, tends to work better than relying on willpower alone. Most people underestimate how much a single glance can undo days of progress.

### **Will I ever trust someone again?**

Most people do, though it typically takes deliberate work rather than happening automatically with time alone. Trust rebuilds through positive experience with a new person, and through understanding what actually went wrong last time rather than assuming it will always happen again.

### **Is therapy or coaching better for this?**

If there are significant symptoms of depression, anxiety, or trauma, a licensed therapist should be involved. If what's needed is structured support moving forward, practical decision-making, and accountability, coaching fits well, either instead of or alongside therapy.

### **Is it normal to feel like I'm grieving someone who didn't die?**

Yes, and many people find that framing genuinely helpful. Losing a long relationship shares real similarities with bereavement: shock, denial, anger, and eventual acceptance, even though the other person is still alive. Naming it as grief, rather than something you should just be able to get over quickly, tends to make the process easier to move through.

### **Should I stay friends with my ex?**

This depends heavily on the specifics, how the relationship ended, whether real feelings are still involved, and whether staying in contact helps or delays your own recovery. There's no universal right answer, but if maintaining contact is clearly keeping you from moving forward, it's worth reconsidering, regardless of how amicable things feel on the surface.

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## A Final Note

If you want structured, one-on-one support moving through this, that's exactly the kind of work I do.

If it would help to talk this through with someone, I offer a free 30-minute conversation, no pitch, just a chance to talk through where things stand and whether working together makes sense.

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