

Using Therapy During Divorce

By Cheryl Deaner, MFT



Divorce—the mere word can bring up lots of feelings. For a family, divorce is the most stressful situation that can be gone through except death, and it can feel a lot like a death—since your ex-partner is still there, but not for you. Whether a divorce is “amicable” or destructive, it can invoke such emotionally intense needs that the support of your friends, family and co-workers simply may not be enough. Even though you may feel strapped by mandated legal and financial obligations, this is not the time to neglect your personal needs and the needs of your children.

Finding a therapist to help address the confusing and emotionally painful parts of divorce will help both you and your family to rediscover what “normal” is again. It can help you and your ex-partner find the grace to set new and healthy boundaries with each other. And it can give your children a safe place to say what they need to say in order to stop hurting and start healing.

Below are some tips about finding a therapist and using therapy:

1. **You can find therapy no matter what your financial situation.** LGBT family-oriented therapists can be found in private practice, family clinics, and possibly under your insurance plan. Talk to more than one therapist if possible—three are often suggested. If you don’t have a therapist already, try calling Gaylesta, the Bay Area LGBT Therapist Association, for resources and referrals. They can help you to explore what kind of therapist could work best for your family’s particular circumstances. Go to www.gaylesta.org or call toll free: 1-888-869 4993.
2. **Therapy with your ex-partner:** Do not hesitate to make an appointment with your ex-partner. Communication, even if painful, can save you much grief and can be much less expensive than communicating through attorneys. Make sure the therapist is an experienced couples therapist.
3. **Therapy for children:** When you are

hurting, you may have less emotional resources available for your children, and your sense of what might best help your children may become skewed. If you suspect that your child might benefit from therapy, have them evaluated by a child therapist. Do not be surprised if the therapist asks to first talk to you and/or your ex before seeing your child, or asks for a copy of a court order with regard to custody. If your child is a teen, they may have some right to privacy about what they discuss in therapy.

4. **Individual therapy:** A divorce is major change and a major opportunity for you to make deep and lasting changes in your life. So even if it seems like the divorce was 95% your partner’s fault, don’t stint on yourself during this time. You need to be present—not only for others but for yourself.
5. **Family therapy:** It is often quite useful for the entire family to attend one or more sessions with a therapist to help sort out the new family situation. Family therapists can make it possible for the family to say what needs to be said and to adjust to its new configuration in ways that just wouldn’t be possible otherwise.

Whatever your situation, there are many of us who have already been there. There is no pain too great to be lessened, and no sorrow that will not end. Know that no matter what is happening now, that eventually you will find new peace, freedom, and reasons to smile. ☺

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RESOURCES

Kids’ Turn

www.kidsturn.org
415-437-0700
1-800-392-9239

The only program in the Bay Area helping children when their parents separate or divorce.

Online Resources

www.divorceABC.com
www.divorcenet.com
www.divorcesupport.com

Children’s Books

Daddy’s Roommate by Michael Willhoite
This story’s narrator begins with his parents’ divorce and continues with the arrival of “someone new at Daddy’s house.” The boy discusses his father’s new living situation. The dad and his gay roommate share eating, doing chores, playing, loving and living.

Saturday Is Pattyday by Leslea Newman
Although Frankie is hurt and confused when his two mommies separate, he is comforted by knowing that Patty will still be part of his life.