



**RECOVERY FROM
SEPARATION AND DIVORCE**

WORKBOOK

WWW.RESTOREDLIVES.ORG

Restored Lives helps people recover from relationship breakdown. By supporting people and their children through separation or divorce, when a relationship is beyond repair, we help reduce the negative effects on individuals, children and communities.

We are a charity dedicated to creating resources to support anyone going through the breakup of a significant relationship. These resources include an eight-session course for adults, a five-session workshop for teenagers and young adults whose parents have separated, online sessions and abuse support groups, a book, workbooks and how-to guides.

Founded by a group from a London church (HTB) who felt passionately that more should be done to help everyone recover from relationship breakdown in a non-judgemental space. The course is based on values of love, acceptance, second chances, unconditional support, respect and inclusivity whatever your situation. It is for people of all faiths and none whatever your situation.

For more information visit www.restoredlives.org

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HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

We've used icons in this workbook for specific activities to help you get the most out of using it

WRITING PROMPT



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION



THINK ABOUT THIS



REMEMBER



WELCOME

It takes courage to come on the Restored Lives course – well done for making it here.

Everyone on the team understands what it's like to go through separation and/or divorce.

You will all be at slightly different stages but the course is designed for everyone, for people of all faiths and none. You may feel intensely lonely but here on this course **you are not alone.**

SESSION 1

FACING THE EFFECTS OF WHAT'S HAPPENED

Welcome

We will be looking at the building blocks for successful recovery, and each one of the sessions is important in the process of moving on.

3 common things about relationship breakdown

1. Separation and divorce represent a loss, it hurts – it helps to acknowledge this
2. Accepting that the events have occurred is a crucial first step in the recovery process
3. There is hope – amidst the despair, there is a real hope of having a restored life in the future

We **cannot** change the past or our ex, but we **can** change ourselves, and that will affect our future.

Small groups are an important part of the course. Everyone can participate as much or little as they like. Please keep discussions confidential.



Small-group discussion

How did you come to be on this course?

The pain of loss

Some people find that their break up is relatively painless. Others find themselves consumed by the pain of the losses caused by separation and divorce.

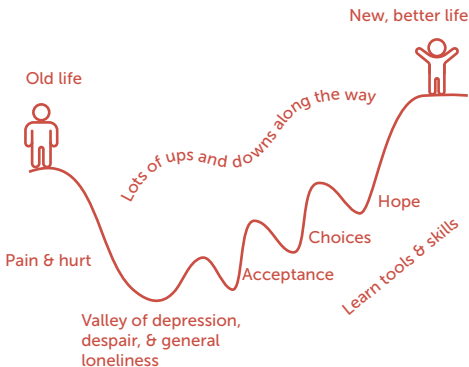
We have lost our partner and, because of that, we have sustained a series of related losses.

We need to understand when and why we feel pain so that we can help relieve it and recover more quickly.

Why talk about these things if they seem well hidden? If we don't, the pain acts like a landmine inside us, ready to explode at any unexpected trigger.

We should not ignore the pain of these losses because **pain, physical or emotional, demands action.**

The recovery process



Everyone's journey of recovery is different but typically we will experience the phases shown in the diagram above.

Recovery is full of lots of ups and downs. It's a slow process. Time is not the healer ***it's the choices that we make which dictate the pace and the speed of our recovery.***

We can move quickly from being a normal, interesting human to being to a confused bag of emotions. This downward curve is temporary. The intensity of our emotions ***will*** change.



Small-group discussion

What emotions have you experienced about your separation or divorce?

Personal story

How to deal with some of these thoughts and feelings.



Small-group discussion

What has helped you deal with these thoughts and feelings?

Holding on to hope

However hard things are, there is hope for us all. We may have a failed relationship; **but we are not failures.**

You have other successful relationships, talents, and skills. We've experienced a huge change and need to adjust to new circumstances.

Ten suggestions to help deal with the pain

1. Take one day at a time
2. Start writing a journal
3. Understand you're grieving the loss of your relationship
4. Appreciate others
5. Be kind to yourself
6. Be grateful for the good things in your life everyday
7. Enjoy laughter
8. Take some physical exercise
9. Help others
10. Seek help where necessary



Small-group discussion

What practical things do you find helpful for day-to-day survival?

What would you like to get out of this course?

Summary

You will adjust to your new set of circumstances, and can learn from your experience of breakdown to make the future better.

This course is about restoring lives and giving you real hope for the future.

There **is** life after separation and divorce.

JOURNAL



How are you feeling this week? What coping strategies could you try?

Use the journal pages in this workbook to capture thoughts and feelings during the week. We've included journal prompts to help.

SESSION 2

COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION



Small-group discussion

What did you find useful/helpful from the last session?

Since then, have you been able to use any of the ten suggestions to help you survive from day to day?

The importance of communication

Communication is the lifeblood of all relationships. It's a vital skill.

There are many blocks to good communication, e.g. anger, lies, emotional hurt, differences of opinion, legal stress, financial worries, addictions, and fear.

Improving communication empowers us and builds our confidence in every area of our life.

We cannot change the way our ex communicates, but ***we have choices about how we communicate***, and those choices will affect our recovery.

How to communicate well

1. Identify your historical patterns of communication.

You will have built up habits in the way you and your ex communicate, some of which are healthy and some unhealthy.

A helpful first step is to reset your communication patterns by having a period of non-communication. It's like rebooting a computer.

For parents who need to make arrangements with their ex concerning the children, keep the communication to minimum and business-like.

Take time to understand what's gone wrong. What are the unhealthy patterns, what works and what doesn't?

This may be incredibly hard, but it will pay dividends in the future. Be positive in the way you explain it to your ex – the aim is to create a more productive communication for the long-term. If you have children, this is essential.

2. Learn the difference between facts and feelings.

When we talk, we transmit both facts and feelings. When a relationship works well there is an easy mix of both. Now your relationship has changed you will need to be more factual.

Find someone else you trust to share your feelings.

- What are the facts that need to be communicated to your ex?
- What are the feelings that you need to deal with in other ways?

3. Set healthy boundaries

In the same way that the walls of a home provide physical refuge, the boundaries we make in our relationships provide emotional refuge.

Drawing a definite line between what is and is not appropriate is called setting a boundary.

E.g. "You may no longer ring me at the office unless there is an emergency."

"I will not speak with you if you scream and shout."

"I am not going to open emails received from you after 9pm."

You must make it clear to the other person that the boundary is there. It may not be popular, but is it reasonable for your emotional well-being? If so, put the boundary in place and get support to cope with the reaction from your ex.

A boundary is not there to punish the other person but to protect you emotionally. When you feel less vulnerable, you can relax the boundary.



Small-group discussion

Which of these would help you: identifying historical patterns of communication, distinguishing between facts and feelings, or setting healthy boundaries?

4. Being a good listener

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood"
Stephen Covey.

To be good communicators, we need to be good listeners, who:

- Pay attention – don't do anything else.
- Listen without talking about our own agenda and opinions.

Be aware of bad listening habits:

- Interrupting
- Giving advice
- Going off at a tangent
- Referring it back to ourselves (e.g. "Oh, I remember when that happened to me...")
- Intellectualising (e.g. "Psychologists have said that's not true...")

Reflect back – repeat some words back to the speaker to show them you've been listening, ask a question and give them a chance to say more.



Reflective listening in pairs

Take it in turns to be the listener and the speaker. The listener should reflect back and then ask:

What is the most important thing?

Is there anything you'd like to do about it?



Small-group discussion

What did it feel like to be listened to?

Conflict resolution

Even if communication is good there will still be conflict.

Two dangers

- never disagreeing
- arguing, but never resolving the issues

Conflict resolution is about understanding each other's concerns and finding a compromise.

It is not about winning or losing.

There are some tools that can really help in times of conflict but some problems may need outside or expert help.

1. Commit to a positive attitude

Choose to approach the conflict with a good attitude. Avoid reacting aggressively or running away.

2. What is the issue?

If there are many issues, prioritise them. Talk them through with a friend to help you work out what's most important to you. Think creatively about solutions.

3. Find the best time, place, and method

A neutral venue is often helpful.

4. Confront the issue rather than each other.

Avoid saying "You always..." or "You never...". Avoid becoming personal or speaking negatively about them. Stick to facts not feelings and stick to points specifically related to the dispute you are resolving.

5. Seek outside inspiration

If necessary, bring in a neutral outsider: a friend, mediator, or counsellor. Stop the negative spiral of unresolved conflict.



Small-group discussion

What would help you in dealing with your ex?

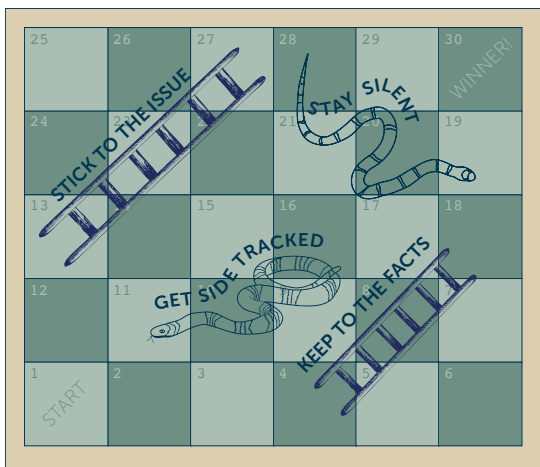
What did Kathy do differently this time in the role play?

Summary

We cannot change others, but we can take responsibility for the way we communicate.

Learning to be a good communicator is empowering and will build our self-confidence in all areas of life.

Managing difficult conversations with your ex is a bit like this game of snakes and ladders, if you stick to the issue and communicate the facts rather than your feelings you will both "win". If you stay silent or get side tracked you both "lose".



JOURNAL



What difference could better communication and reduced conflict make in your life?

SESSION 3

LETTING GO



Small-group discussion

What did you find useful/helpful from the last session?

Have you had any practical experience of any of the communication problems we covered?

Forgiveness

No matter how good our communication is, it will not stop the pain of what has happened. The key tool for letting go of the pain is forgiveness.

Forgiveness stops us from being tied to the past and gives us hope for the future. It breaks the chains that keep us emotionally bound.

It helps us to make the right choices free from the effect of past hurts and gives us new life and freedom.

Forgiveness is one of the most misunderstood concepts. We all carry ingrained ideas of what forgiveness means.

Why forgive?

1. Revenge does not work

We have an instinctive desire for justice and sometimes we want to bring about that justice ourselves.

If we start on this path it can quickly go out of control. Vengeful acts can never compensate for the harm that has been caused.

2. If we do not forgive, we lose out

Lack of forgiveness affects every area of our life. It's like carrying heavy baggage everywhere with us.

Our feelings of anger and longing for retribution do not hurt the person they're directed at. It's like drinking poison and hoping that the other person will die.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said *"To forgive is not just to help others. It is the best form of self-interest."*

When parents act as role models in showing forgiveness, their children are more likely to choose to forgive.



Small-group discussion

What do you think about forgiveness?

Forgiveness is NOT:

- Condoning wrong behaviour
- Denying justice
- Denying that the hurt happened
- Demanding an apology
- Pretending that the issue does not matter
- Demanding that the person change
- Opening ourselves up to being hurt again – appropriate boundaries may be necessary
- Weakness – forgiveness takes courage

Forgiveness means:

- Releasing a person from punishment
- Ceasing to hold it against someone

If someone does something wrong, we mark it down on an imaginary scorecard. Forgiveness means wiping the slate clean.

We also need to forgive ourselves – for things we've done wrong. These marks can also be wiped clean.

Forgiveness has to be chosen – it doesn't just happen. Don't ask "Can I forgive?" but instead "When will I be able to forgive?".

We may need to forgive other people who've had an impact on our relationship, either recently or a long time ago.

How to forgive

1. Recognise the hurt

This includes acceptance.

2. Acknowledge your responsibility, however small

Relationships are rarely “black and white”, it is unusual for only one person to be completely at fault.

Apologise where you can.

“Sorry” acts like the handle on the door of forgiveness.

3. Choose to release. There are 2 elements to this:

Choose to release a person from punishment.

Choose to cease holding it against them.

4. Make it an ongoing choice... again and again

Summary

We eventually arrive at a situation of complete forgiveness. We want the best for the other person.

Don't worry if you can't imagine complete forgiveness at the moment, but hold on to it as the ultimate goal of complete freedom for you.

If we do not forgive, we lose twice: once for the act against us, and second for holding onto hatred and pain. Forgiveness is costly – we sacrifice our pride, our self-pity, and our need for justice, but we come out with something much greater: our freedom.

Things that hold back forgiveness

1. Intense emotions

Allow them to subside first.

2. Enjoying the feelings of sympathy

Being the “victim” can make us feel that our lack of forgiveness is justified. This can trap us in the past.

3. Wanting to maintain power over your ex

You may think that holding it against your ex will help you. In fact, it will prolong a language of winning and losing, which will make it harder to find a mutually acceptable solution and delay your recovery.

4. An insurance policy for the future

Focusing on the past will mean only that you are still affected by it.

5. It was so long ago

Events from a long time ago can still have an effect.



Small-group discussion

When you consider forgiveness in your situation, what is the most important thing for you?



Forgiveness enables you to let go.

This is the single most important key to moving on successfully.



Journal prompt - What do you really feel about forgiving your ex? What would the benefits be? What would it cost you?

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SESSION 4

YOUR VALUES AND GETTING EXPERT HELP



Small-group discussion

What did you find useful/helpful from the last session?

What are your thoughts about forgiveness?

Your values

Living an authentic life means living your values. After the breakdown of a significant relationship it's easy to feel lost.

In your relationship, your values will have been influenced by your partner's values.

Now is a good time to reappraise your values because they're going to have a big impact on the choices you make in the future.

Understanding your core values helps you know yourself and gives you peace of mind.

When your words and actions aren't aligned with your values it can create confusion, guilt or shame.

The process of separation and divorce itself may have created a situation where you aren't living your values.



Small-group discussion

What ideas, activities or character traits are so important that you want them to shape your life, your time, and your habits, now and in the future?

Write down your three core values

e.g. Friendship

Choose the one which is most important and write a sentence describing what it means to you.

e.g. Deep relationship with people who know me well over a period of time. They know my flaws and my successes. There's mutual respect and interest in each other.

Note down some actions which you could take in the next month to implement these values.

e.g. Keeping in touch, remembering birthdays. Putting time in the diary to see them.

Share and discuss your values with your small group. Has your divorce challenged any of your values? If so, what could you do to realign with them?

Getting expert help

Your separation may be the biggest crisis you experience in life. This is your “rainy day” it’s **the** time access any help you need. This may include from experts and professionals.

Accepting help can be really hard. But it can be a wise investment in your future (and your childrens’ future, if you have them).

As you recover the type of support might change. Even if your separation happened years ago, accessing help now, could still be life changing.

What type of help is available?

- Solicitors and mediators
- Financial advisers including pension specialists and debt counsellors
- Counsellors (for yourself and/or you children)
- Parenting/family relationships experts
- Divorce coaches
- Life coaches
- Experts on abusive relationships

Preparing well for any meetings with experts will build your confidence and help you get the most out of your interaction.

Individual exercise

Looking at the list of experts, consider:

- How might each of these experts help you?
- Who do you want to see?
- What one thing do you want to ask them?

Summary

Now is a good time to think about your core values. You no longer need to be influenced by your ex and what is important to you may have changed.

By understanding and living your values you will live a happier more authentic life.

There is lots of help available. Now is a good time to access whatever you need to support your recovery. You don't have to do this on your own.



Journal prompt - For the other values you identified what actions would you like to take to bring them to life now and in the future?

JOURNAL

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SESSION 5

MANAGING OTHER RELATIONSHIPS



Small-group discussion

What did you find useful/helpful from the last session?

Have you thought any more about your core values or getting expert help?

The impact on other relationships

Relationship breakdown not only affects our relationship with our ex, it also changes other relationships.

Friends

Every friendship will be affected by the breakdown. Some friends may become closer, some may be awkward for a while, and others will be lost.

These changes can be painful and frustrating, but are very normal.

Nurture trusted friends. Put in appropriate boundaries with shared friends. e.g. Don't ask them about your ex.

You may have to be willing to forgive and let go of some friendships.

Consider taking up new hobbies to help make new friends and build your self-confidence.

Work

Try not to take the chaos of the breakdown into your workplace. But if you feel your performance is being affected, tell your manager.

Parents and siblings

Our relationship with our parents will change. We may need to ask them to limit what they say to us about their emotional response to the relationship breakdown, and limit what we say to them.

If our parents and siblings become too hostile towards our ex, it may fuel our own anger and bitterness, and harm our children.

In-laws

If you have children, your in-laws are your children's grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc. Try to maintain these relationships. Speak to your in-laws only about your children and not about your ex.

These relationships can be very important for your children. Support your children to continue these relationships even if you don't like spending time with your in-laws yourself.

Avoid doing so or saying anything that would deter children from continuing to enjoy a relationship with their extended family.



Small-group discussion

How are you managing your other relationships?

If you don't have children please skip to page 43

Children: The parent's perspective

Separation from children

One of the hardest consequences of separation or divorce is being separated from our children.

Be willing to acknowledge the pain, and to grieve for the loss of what could have been.

If you are unable to see your children regularly:

- Do all you can to make contact arrangements that are best for the children
- Try to live somewhere close to the children if you move out of the family home
- Stay in touch by email, letters, and phone or, if they are older, social media
- Remember important events in your children's lives
- Strive to speak respectfully of the other parent

However hard and painful it is, keep letting go, give yourself space and time to recover, and make sure you have close friends alongside to support you.

Some practical thoughts on parenting after separation:

Recognise that everyone makes mistakes as a parent – don't be overcome with guilt.

You are balancing your own personal survival with trying to be a good parent.

Recognise your emotional triggers and get support for yourself.

The moments when children are being collected can be very hard. Have a friend you can speak to if you think you'll get upset.

Release your children to enjoy their time with their other parent.

Have a regular meeting with your ex to discuss arrangements regarding your children. Keep it businesslike and run through any potentially difficult aspects with a friend beforehand.

Never cross-examine your children after a visit. Find ways to help them open up and express their feelings.

Learn to handle shocking news appropriately in front of your children. Offload your feelings to a friend, not to your child.

Understanding the children's perspective

Regardless of our part in the breakdown of our marriage, our children never asked for this to happen.

Children want:

- to be "normal" – at school, with their peers, with their parents, with others
- to be kept right out of the conflict between their parents
- to be able to express what they are feeling – some children's suggestions are: to talk to a friend, a pet or someone neutral/to write a diary/to cry.

How can we help our children?

- Give them opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings
- Recognise signs of anger – acknowledge them, help the child to work out what is the cause of the anger, and allow the child to let it out constructively
- Model forgiveness so that they might see and choose to forgive those who have hurt them. We cannot expect a child to forgive if they do not see us doing it

Shared parenting

Research shows that a good working relationship between parents significantly reduces the impact of family breakdown on children and creates an environment where they can thrive.

It's important your feelings don't influence your children's relationship with your ex.

Choose to rebuild a "shared parenting" relationship with the other parent. In the early stages of separation, this may be only a goal for the future, but, as recovery comes, try to make it happen.

The goal is to shift from being parents who live together to being separate adults who share the parenting role successfully.

Consider sending a letter to the other parent, setting out various goals and guidelines for the way forward as parents. The "Parenting Together" letter (available on the Restored Lives website, www.restoredlives.org) suggests the following ideas:

Dear _____,

I am writing about our children. Whatever our thoughts are about each other, our children have never asked for this to happen. My hope is that we can put aside our issues and still be good parents to them, even though we will live apart.

The question for us is how do we shift from being parents who live together, to being separate adults who share the parenting role successfully? To start this process I have put down my thoughts below, but I would welcome your comments or additional ideas so that we can agree on the way that we share our parenting roles for the benefit of the children.

1. It would be good if we could tell them together that we are separating. We can tell them that this is not their fault, that we both love them, and that they will be spending lots of time with both of us.
2. Let's commit to be respectful about each other in front of the children. I recognize that they love you and the best thing for them is for me not to make unkind comments about you to them. I will find opportunities to talk about you in a positive way with them. Let's try to stop others, like our parents or friends, from being disrespectful about either of us in front of the children.
3. When we are in conflict about something, let's deal with it privately and not in front of the children.
4. At times of handover, let's be polite and friendly to each other, as these can be stressful moments for everyone.
5. When they are with me, I will not ask the children for information about you or your life, as it's not fair for them.
6. Let's make sure that we communicate directly with each other about their arrangements and their needs so that we never use them as the communication link between us.
7. Please can we agree to similar house rules or boundaries? We may not always agree, but at least then we can tell them that we've spoken about it, and

that we know something's allowed in one of our homes and not the other. My hope is that they will experience us parenting together in this way, and will not be able to play us off against each other.

8. Can we try to attend some school events together, and sit next to each other at parents' evenings or school plays/matches, etc? I know that the children will appreciate this enormously if we can manage it in a polite way.

9. We will have a lot of arrangements to sort out, such as when they spend time with us both. It won't always be easy and we won't always agree, but I will commit to listen to you, and do my best to be constructive and polite in finding solutions to any disagreements. Let's agree to try to find solutions that work for both of us, rather than talking about winning and losing on every issue.

10. You share responsibility with me for our children and therefore, if any serious difficulties or challenges arise, I will discuss these issues with you rather than turn to others. Even though we have separate personal lives, I will make the effort to communicate with you about these issues straight away.

If we both follow this agreement, I believe that it will give our children a good hope for their future. I am confident that we can agree on the way forward for our parenting and will commit to putting all this into practice. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about how we can take this forward.



Small-group discussion

What would help you in parenting your children?

For people who don't have children

The choice to have children or not, and fertility issues may have played a part in the ending of your relationship.

The end of your relationship may have an impact on the likelihood of having children in the future.

This is a very sensitive topic and can be a very painful grieving process itself that is very difficult to speak about.

Friends and family may think differently about your divorce because you didn't have children with your ex. They may encourage you to get into a new relationship more quickly. Or they might think your separation "isn't too bad".

This can be a very difficult area. Being childfree or childless is still a taboo subject. It is understandably very private.

Unfortunately there is still a lot of shame surrounding the topic.

Our society is constructed around families and it can feel extremely isolating to be outside this.

People can be very insensitive and clumsy - it's not uncommon to be asked if you have children, or want them by relative strangers in everyday social situations.

Be willing to acknowledge the pain, and to grieve for the loss of what could have been. Reach out for support to do this if you need to.

Be open to exploring options around fertility treatment if this is relevant or helpful for you.

Think about some easy rehearsed phrases you can use if you are unexpectedly confronted about having children. For example *"No I don't have children, it's just not the way my life has unfolded"*.

Consider setting boundaries around this topic if you need to. For example *"I'm not comfortable discussing this at the moment. Please don't ask me about my plans for having children."*

Regardless what friends or family think about your separation, don't feel pressured to rush your recovery or jump into a new relationship.



Small-group discussion

Is there anything you'd like to share about this topic?

Do you relate to any of these experiences?

Summary

The end of your relationship is likely to impact all of the relationships in your life. This may cause significant pain but the relationships that remain in your life may well be deeper and stronger.

One of the aims of this course is to give you relationship skills that will support the development of strong healthy relationships for the rest of your life.



Journal Prompt - What changes would you like to make in your relationships with family and friends?

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SESSION 6

LEGAL MATTERS AND MOVING ON SUCCESSFULLY



Small-group discussion

What did you find useful/helpful from the last session?

LEGAL MATTERS

Legal issues: understanding the options

The most important tools to resolve legal issues are good communication, listening skills, and being able to resolve conflict, as covered in Session 2.

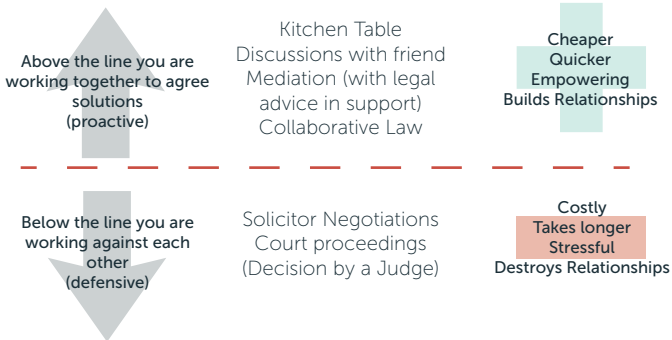
You are likely to need outside help to resolve the legal issues. You can choose which process to use to resolve the legal issues. A solicitor and a court process is not the only way.

This session aims to empower you to understand your options so that you can make the best choice for your family.

The goal is to have a fair outcome and also, if you have children, to have a positive parenting relationship with your ex.

The choice of which process you use will have an effect on your recovery and on your relationship with your ex.

Legal Process Options



Around a kitchen table

If you still communicate well with your ex then you could sit around a table and agree a solution that is suitable for both of you. During a relationship breakdown this may be impossible for many couples.

Discussions with a friend

If you have a wise and trusted friend then they may be able to sit with you both and help you to agree a solution.

Mediation

A mediator works with you, either in the same room or separate rooms, to resolve your legal issues and find your own solutions for the way forward.

It is a robust legal process that enables you to make your own decisions, helped if necessary with legal advice in the background.

If you have children, an important benefit is that your ongoing relationship as parents begins to be rebuilt as you discover you can still make decisions together.

Collaborative law

You each appoint a solicitor under a collaborative law agreement. You all meet together around a table and your solicitor supports and advises you in your discussions to enable you to make your own decisions.

This process is more expensive than mediation, but is suitable when at least one person needs a legal advisor present in negotiations.

Solicitor and court proceedings

In this option you instruct a solicitor who represents you in any negotiations and court proceedings.

The court process is usually started immediately and a good solicitor will seek to negotiate a settlement on your behalf at an early stage.

A court process is where you and your solicitor defend your position against your ex. A solicitor is paid to defend your position in seeking the best outcome for you.

You are working **against** each other, which may cause increased conflict and hostility with your ex.

In the diagram, options above the dotted line leave you in control and making the decisions – **you are working together for solutions.**

These options are cheaper, quicker, empowering, and they build relationships.

The option below the line is more costly, takes longer, is more stressful, and can destroy relationships.

You can choose to create a constructive environment to address the legal issues.

The Family Justice Review in the UK found that the legal process is not about finding justice, but rather about finding the “least worst outcomes for families”.

Which process is right for you? Where do you want to be on the diagram? What are the implications for your family?

Lord Wilson, President of the Family Law Division said: *“We still usually say to ourselves, ‘I must find a solicitor’. But in many (though not all) cases, we would be better to say, ‘We must find a mediator’.”*



Small-group discussion

What has been your experience of sorting out the legal issues? What was helpful, and what was not?

The legal issues to be resolved

Approach the legal issues with realistic expectations, especially if you feel like a “victim” in the breakdown.

The court process does not make any moral judgements; it looks at the practical consequences that arise when a relationship breaks down.

Maintain realistic expectations. The “no fault” system of divorce means that your ex will not be “punished” by the courts, even if you believe the breakdown is their fault.

In cases of abuse or violence then specific court processes may be necessary.

Three specific issues to be resolved:

1. The legal ending of the marriage.
2. Arrangements for any children.
3. The finances.

These are each separate issues from a legal perspective.

Legal requirements in England and Wales

1. The legal ending of the marriage – the divorce

Under the system introduced in April 2022, a marriage can be ended legally by a statement in the application from either or both people that the marriage has irretrievably broken down.

This is the only evidence the court requires. Nobody needs to 'prove' or provide a 'ground' (reason) for divorce because we now have a truly 'no-fault' divorce law in place.

It is no longer possible for either you or your ex to contest (stop) an application for divorce.

2. Arrangements for any children

Parents are given "parental responsibility" and the children have "rights" (for example, the children have the right to enjoy a relationship with both parents).

Children need parents who can communicate with each other.

Avoid using lawyers or the courts to resolve disputes regarding the children, except as an absolute last resort.

Children suffer when there is parental conflict or hostility, as they usually want to please both parents. Court proceedings can cause them stress.

Use friends or professional mediators to help you reach any difficult decisions together as parents.

3. Resolving the finances

The UK does not prescribe a fifty/fifty split of assets. Instead, the courts seek to be flexible in dividing assets by considering a number of factors.

The exact outcome of any individual situation cannot

be predicted.

Before any negotiations on finance can take place, you both need to give honest, comprehensive information about your financial situation on Form E. This can be done in mediation or through lawyers depending which process you have chosen.

The financial disclosure provides the information needed to know what is in the family pot.

It may be helpful to ask a lawyer to advise you on what the upper and lower limits of the financial split are likely to be if your case went to court.

Then you are ready to negotiate terms of settlement. The settlement will cover property, capital, pensions and maintenance for a spouse, and child support. Wherever you are in the process, always remember the end goal, which is to find a fair settlement so that you can both move on with your lives.

Using the Internet

For simple situations where there are no financial issues then this can be a good route to obtain a divorce.

If you have financial issues then be aware that an internet agreement made without separate legal advice might be vulnerable to being re-opened at a later date.

Civil partners or cohabiting couples

The different legal processes outlined in the first part

of the session are the same for married couples, civil partners, or cohabiting couples.

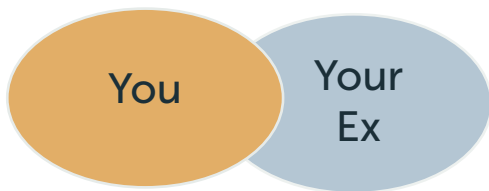
The law for married couples and civil partners is the same. If you are a cohabiting couple, then the law on finance is very different and you need legal advice as each case would depend on your particular facts.

MOVING ON SUCCESSFULLY

When you're in a relationship it shapes how you act, and even who you are.

Your identity is linked with the other person. When you come out of a relationship, you lose that part of your identity and become single once again as shown in the diagrams below.

A Relationship Breaks Up



Slightly Different Characters, Revealing New Colours

Ongoing relationship with your ex

As you separate the single you is revealed. The extent to which your ex still colours your life as you move

forward will dictate the speed and the success of your recovery.

Overall, there are three ways your ex might continue to have a negative effect and make it harder to move on.

1. Direct contact that is tense and fraught
2. No contact but your ex still takes up mental space
3. If you still want to be with them

Some people may have a hope (however small) of saving their marriage. If that is the case for you, beware of the divorce process getting out of control too quickly.

If you are not yet legally divorced, stop and think, "Is there anything more I can do to prevent it?" Make sure you'll be able to look back and say you did all you could.

If both parties are willing – see a counsellor and/or do The Marriage Course (see www.relationshipcentral.org/marriage-course).

If only one party is trying to re-establish the marriage, then:

- Build up normal friendly relations.
- Get support.
- Affairs, addictions, or other inappropriate relationships need to stop.
- View any reconciliation as a new relationship.

Whatever our situation we need to reduce the way our

ex colours our life. Use the skills we have learned through the course to do this:

- Use appropriate boundaries
- Communicate facts not feelings
- Acceptance and forgiveness
- Wish them well

Wishing them well

Signing off with your ex in a good way is an important step in moving on successfully.

Having sensible, polite, civil relations with your ex will put you in a far better position to move on.

If you can wish your ex well, it will help you get a sense of closure and not fear meeting them in the future. For parents, this step enhances your ability to start a new shared parenting relationship.



Small-group discussion

How is your ex going to shape your future?

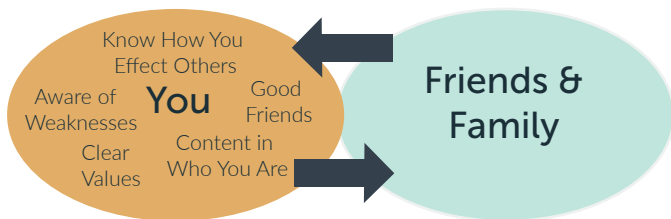
What do you think of wishing your ex well?

We want to enable you to uncouple and move on in a healthy way so you can stand strong on your own, free from the impact of the past.

Be comfortable being single, so that you can make better choices going forward and build new relationships and new friendships, which are so important for giving us meaning and purpose.

Some of the elements shown in this picture characterise this period of your life. Being more self-aware, accepting your situation, being content, understanding yourself better, and living your values more fully.

Investing In You & Your Friends



Grow Closer Using Key Relationship Skills

Living happily, as a single person is a really important stage in your recovery. Well-intentioned friends may try to match you up quickly with a new partner.

It can be tempting to look for another intimate relationship straight away. But take your time because a new relationship is not going to be the solution to all your problems and may cause more issues.

Focus on your interests, hobbies, and values preferably in a group setting. Then new friendships and refreshed interests will come.

These friendships will build your confidence, reduce loneliness, and allow you to become more aware of your own needs and desires, as well as understand and test the skills needed to sustain friendships and committed relationships.

It will create a really strong foundation and a healthy place to decide if you want another relationship.

Being single is not a halfway house or a stopgap before you get married again. Being single can be a positive and fulfilling lifetime choice.



Small-group discussion

What are the skills that will make a friendship or relationship good over the long term?

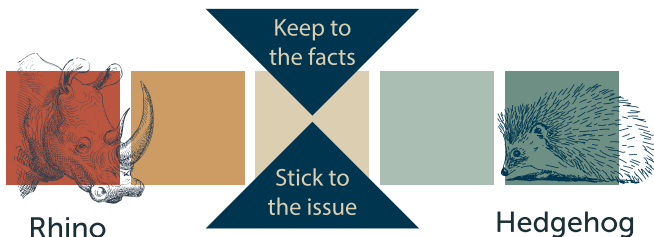
There are no lessons at school on how to make relationships work, but all our relationships can be strengthened by what we have learned on this course.

We need a willingness to keep learning so we can build the foundations of strong, fulfilling relationships across all areas of life.

Five skills for healthy relationships

1. Listening well
2. Expressing yourself
3. Problem-solving and conflict-resolution
4. Knowing your own emotions
5. Acceptance and forgiveness

Are you like a rhino or a hedgehog?



Charge at issues
Express all feelings
Vent anger
Don't worry if you
cause damage

Curl up and hide
Refuse to speak
Keep thoughts inside
Hide feelings
Feelings leak out



Small-group discussion

Are you a rhino or hedgehog?
How could these ideas help you?

Summary

The choices you make about the legal process will impact the time and impact it has on you, your finances and your family.

Try to remain focused on the main objective – to achieve a fair settlement and a restored relationship in the future.

In order to move on successfully it can help to think about how your ex affects you, whether you intend to stay in contact with your ex or not signing off well can be a helpful step in your own recovery.

Having a period of investing in yourself and your friends and family is a really good investment in your future self.



Journal Prompt - What would investing in yourself look like in your life? What changes would you like to make?

JOURNAL

The background of the page is a light teal color, overlaid with various abstract brushstrokes and shapes in a darker teal shade. These strokes vary in thickness and direction, creating a dynamic and artistic pattern. Some strokes are curved, some are straight, and some form circular or oval shapes. The overall effect is that of a hand-painted or artistically rendered background.

SESSION 7

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



Small-group discussion

What did you find helpful from the last session?

What does recovery look like for you?

Building strong foundations

Meaningful relationships are vital to us all. It can be tempting to jump into new intimate relationships but there is an important phase before deciding to date or not.

You may be single for a long time, you may choose to stay single or never meet a new partner. This doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you or that you will have a boring or miserable life.

Investing time in this phase enhances all types of friendships and relationships. It is a strong foundation for building a happy life.

Friction is normal in relationships, if you're vulnerable or not ready for it, it can set you back and hurt deeply.

If you jump into a relationship too quickly, how do you know which habits, fears or worries are the result of their problems or yours?

Building a relationship



Two Galaxies Collide – Friction Happens!

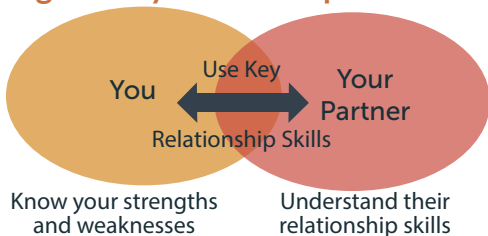
Start enjoying life on your own and find out your own interests. Understand yourself better whilst you are single. What do you like doing on a Saturday? Which interests do you enjoy? What are your aspirations or dreams? How can you fulfil them?

Practise the core relationship skills with your friends and family first.

- Are you good at setting boundaries?
- How do you react to problems?
- Are you good at listening?
- Do you express yourself and your needs?
- Do you hold grudges?

When you have spent time understanding yourself and building your relationship skills you will be in a better place to decide if you want a new relationship and if so, to understand any new prospective partner.

Building healthy relationships



Key questions about a prospective partner:

- Do they do what they say they'll do?
- Do they take responsibility for their actions and mistakes?
- Do they have good long term friends?
- Are they willing to change their behaviour to ensure that you feel more trusting?
- Can you talk to them about your worries?
- Do they find a way to alleviate your concerns? Or just say it's your problem?

Restored Lives Supermarket

Restored Lives is a bit like a supermarket. We are offering lots of different ideas but not everything is for everyone. We encourage you to take what you need based on your specific situation.

Just like a supermarket we are all shopping for different things on different days and our needs will change over time.

There may be some things that look unappetising at the moment or perhaps you just can't carry them right now. That's ok, you can always come 'shopping' again whenever you like.



Small-group discussion

What have you seen so far in the Restored Lives Supermarket that you want to takeaway?



What ingredients do you need?

Some ingredients will be essential and others might feel like the icing on the top.

Use the space below to write down the ingredients that are essential for your own recipe and note any that you would like as 'icing' on the top. We've set out some examples as a guide.

Example Ingredients

- *I'm not a failure (my marriage failed)*
- *New patterns of communication*
- *Facts not feelings*
- *Forgiveness (for myself)*

Ingredients

Now you've chosen the ingredients, what are the steps you want to take to bring them alive.

During the week, try sharing your list with a trusted friend so they can support you to complete the steps.

Example Actions

#1 Use a neutral tone when I speak to my ex

#2 Stop telling myself I'm a failure and celebrate my successes

#3 Think of one small thing I can try to forgive my ex for



Your recipe for a recovery

What actions can you take that to bring your 'ingredients' alive?

Actions

#1

#2

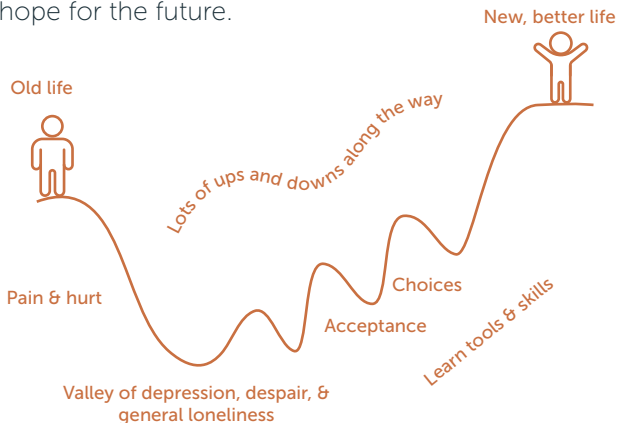
#3

icing on the top

Summary

Recovering from the breakdown of a relationship is a journey and we are all at different stages.

Through many ups and downs, we can achieve a recovery that leaves us stronger and wiser and offers hope for the future.



Ultimately, there are no easy solutions to the problems that arise from separation or divorce.

Relationships can be challenging, but equally they can be the most fulfilling and satisfying part of life.

This course is designed to help you enjoy good, healthy relationships in every area of your life, and to rebuild a new life.

There is light at the end of the tunnel. A Restored Life is possible!

Individual exercise

Consider the personal statement

I want to move on by...

I accept that...

I forgive...



Your knowledge and experience is like gold dust to others going through separation or divorce. Write one thing that helped you and post it on social media with #RestoredLives and a link to www.restoredlives.org



Journal Prompt - Write a message to your future self. In 6 or 12 months time what would you like to remember from this course?

JOURNAL

The background of the page is a light beige color, overlaid with numerous abstract, hand-painted brushstrokes in a slightly darker shade of orange. These strokes vary in length, thickness, and direction, creating a dynamic and textured visual effect. Some strokes are curved, resembling waves or loops, while others are more straight and jagged at the ends, suggesting the use of a dry brush. There are also several circular or ring-like shapes scattered across the page, some of which appear to be formed by multiple overlapping strokes.

