

Surviving Separation

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Relationships begin, they evolve and sometimes they dissolve. Relationships are complex things to understand. Perhaps this perception needs to change. It is not relationships that are complex to understand, it is people who fail to understand themselves first, so that they may understand another.

Having survived 11 years in a marriage that was physically violent, emotionally abusive and psychologically traumatic, I have first-hand experience in feeling like the whole world was against me, like I was worthless, like I was better off dead and there was no need for me here, like it was never going to get better, like a part of me was empty and meaningless, like I couldn't even breathe again. All of these feelings of self-loathing, self-neglect and negative perceptions became my daily companion when I separated from my ex-husband.

Now, nine years later, I know firmly in my heart with absolute faith that the following ayat from Surah Al-Baqarah is most relevant when I reflect on how I survived those terrible feelings of self-loathing and worthlessness:

Surat Al-Baqarah (ayat 286)

يَكُلُّ لَآ إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ فَبِئْسَ مَا تَكْفُرُ بِهَا وَلَا

“Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns...”

Going through separation or divorce can bring about negative perceptions of the world, others and self. More than ever, it is during this phase that one needs to consciously practise daily ibadah and self-care. As Muslims, we know that ALLAH is the best of planners.

Practise these self-care strategies and **have faith that ALLAH has put you to this and HE will put you through it** and give you what is best for you and your deen, In Shaa ALLAH.

9 Self-Care Strategies When Going Through Separation or Divorce

1. **Self-Compassion** - blame is pointless and keeps one stuck in the past. The whole idea is to live “through” the pain and grow from it to be better and to move on with hope and faith. Blaming yourself or another will cause further pain and anguish. One of the best ways to practise self-compassion is to express gratitude for everything, even those experiences that were painful. Thank ALLAH for helping you survive them. Thank ALLAH for making you stronger and wiser.
2. **Re-visit your life's purpose and dreams** – when you were younger you must have had some dreams or goals about how you envision your life to be. Re-visit these goals and dreams and try to understand how you can move towards them. Perhaps you never pursued them because of various reasons. Now that you have started a new chapter in life, use your energy into realising your purpose.
3. **Talk it out but don't gossip** - speak to positive people and a trusted professional about your feelings. Let things out and unburden, however, be mindful that you are not bad-mouthing your ex-spouse. Refrain from talking all day, every day about your breakup to different members of the family and relative circle. This inevitably turns into a gossip session. As Muslims, our communities are close-knitted and people know each other. Be mindful of your words, in case they may be misconstrued and cause hurt to another person.
4. **Eat, pray, sleep, exercise** - keep focussing on the daily basics of life. Eat healthy meals on time, engage in daily exercise so that your body releases endorphins, the “happy hormones”, sleep for at least 7 hours, and be sure to commit to daily prayers, dhikr and silent moments of reflection.

5. **Tahajjud salah and silence** - try getting up for Tahajjud salah as much as you can. This will help you overcome any kind of confusion you may be going through regarding your separation or divorce. After your Tahajjud salah, ask ALLAH the questions you need answered and sit in silence. Have faith that HE will give you wisdom, signs and inspiration to make choices that will be good for you and your deen.
6. **Start learning something new** - whether it is something creative like a new craft or a new language, now is a good time to start learning something new. This will help you keep your mind engaged in something productive instead of allowing your mind to dwell on the past and bring about anxiety for an imagined future.
7. **Rearrange your room and de-clutter your living space** - the movement of energy and positive vibrations in the home is vital. Create a space for yourself which will be your sanctuary. Rearrange furniture and add new colours in order to breathe new life into your home, filling it with light and joy.
8. **Detox your body daily** - one of the best strategies for detoxing your body is to drink plenty of water and excrete toxins from your body. When your body repairs and replenishes from the inside, your immunity and overall health improves.
9. **Practise awareness exercise daily** – practise a 3- to 5-minute body scan meditation activity. This daily exercise of the mind brings about clarity and awareness. It makes you understand the difference between your responses and reactions. Mastering your responses is how you begin living life with immense joy and absolute faith in ALLAH alone, instead of reacting to circumstances and living in fear.

Always remember, you are not your experiences. You are the FORCE that overcomes them.
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