CourseMints

GUIDE

Starting Over After Divorce

Rebuild Your Life with Strength

SELF-PACED PDF COURSE

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Rebuild Your Life with Strength

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How to Use This Guide

Divorce or separation changes almost everything at once: your home, your money, your time with your children, your friendships, your daily routines and your picture of the future. Even when ending the relationship was the right decision, the months that follow can feel like walking through fog while carrying a pile of paperwork. This guide helps you find your footing, one area at a time.

It is written for anyone ending a marriage or long-term relationship, whether you are just separated, in the middle of the legal process or months past the final papers. It covers the emotional side (grief, anger, relief and everything in between) and the practical side (documents, money, housing, co-parenting) because in real life they arrive together.

What you will learn

- How to stay safe if abuse or control is part of the picture.
- What divorce does to your emotions and your stress levels, and how to steady yourself in the first months.
- A practical checklist for documents, accounts, the legal process, money and housing.
- How to tell the children and co-parent calmly, including with a difficult ex.
- How to handle friends and family, rebuild your social life and rediscover who you are.
- How to know when you are ready to date again, and how to design your next chapter.

How to get the most from it

1. **Read Chapter 1 first** if there is any chance you are not safe.
2. **Then read in the order that fits your situation.** If you are overwhelmed by paperwork, go to Chapter 4 next. If you are telling children this week, go to Chapter 7.
3. **Go slowly.** You do not need to rebuild everything this month. Chapter 13 sets out a 12-week plan you can start at any point.

4. **Do the exercises in writing.** When your mind is full, paper holds what your head cannot.

CAUTION

Not legal, financial or tax advice

This guide explains common issues in plain language, but divorce law, child custody, support, property division and tax rules differ greatly between countries, states and provinces, and they change. Get advice from a qualified family lawyer, and from a financial or tax professional where needed, before you sign agreements or make major decisions. If money is tight, ask about legal aid, law school clinics or court self-help centers in your area.

TIP

About the examples

The people in the example boxes are illustrative composites, not real clients. Their situations show how the methods work; your own process and outcome will depend on your circumstances and local law.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Divorce changes emotional and practical life at the same time; this guide covers both.
- Read Chapter 1 first if safety is a concern, then go where your need is greatest.
- Rebuild one area at a time and write things down.
- Get qualified legal advice for your location before signing anything.

CHAPTER 1

Safety First: If Abuse Is Part of the Picture

01

Most divorces are painful but safe. Some are not. If your partner has hurt you, threatened you, frightened you or controlled your life, the end of the relationship needs a safety plan as well as a legal one. Domestic violence organizations warn that the period around separation can be a time of increased danger, so leaving deserves careful planning with people trained to help.

What abuse can look like

Abuse is not only physical violence. It can include:

- Hitting, pushing, choking, restraining or harming pets
- Threats to hurt you, the children, themselves or others
- Sexual pressure or force
- **Coercive control:** a pattern of monitoring your phone, location or messages; controlling money; isolating you from friends and family; constant criticism and humiliation; making you afraid of how they will react
- Threats to take the children, to report you to authorities or to ruin you financially
- Stalking, harassment or showing up uninvited after separation

If you often adjust what you do because you are afraid of your partner's reaction, take that seriously.

Steps toward safety

1. **In immediate danger, call your local emergency number** (911 in the US, 999 in the UK, 112 in much of Europe, 000 in Australia).
2. **Talk to a domestic violence advocate.** Hotlines are free and confidential, and advocates can help you make a safety plan whether you are planning to leave, have already left or are not sure yet. They also know local shelters, legal help and protective orders.
3. **Think about technology.** Shared accounts, location sharing, family plans and tracking apps can reveal where you are. Use a device your partner cannot access to seek help, and ask an advocate before changing passwords or settings, because sudden changes can alert someone who is monitoring you.
4. **Prepare quietly.** Safety plans often include copies of important documents (identification, birth certificates, financial and immigration papers), medications, some cash, spare keys and phone numbers, kept somewhere safe outside the home or with someone you trust.
5. **Ask about protective orders.** Courts in many places can issue orders that restrict contact or require someone to stay away. An advocate or lawyer can explain how it works where you live.
6. **Tell your lawyer or mediator about the abuse.** Mediation with an abusive partner may not be safe or fair. Many mediation services screen for abuse and can offer separate sessions or advise against mediation. Courts can also arrange safer child handovers, such as supervised exchange centers.

Where to get help

At the time of writing:

- **United States:** National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-7233, text START to 88788, or chat at thehotline.org.
- **United Kingdom:** National Domestic Abuse Helpline, 0808 2000 247.
- **Australia:** 1800RESPECT, 1800 737 732.
- **Canada:** sheltersafe.ca helps you find shelters and support near you.
- **Elsewhere:** search for your country's domestic violence or abuse helpline, or ask a doctor, nurse or social worker.

EXAMPLE

Dee's call

Dee, 41, had not been hit, but her husband checked her phone every night, controlled every dollar and told her she would never see the children if she left. She called a hotline from a work computer during lunch. The advocate helped her see the pattern as coercive control, explained how to set up a bank account her husband could not see, suggested which documents to copy and store at her sister's, and gave her the name of a local legal aid service that handled custody cases involving abuse. Dee did not leave that week. When she did leave, two months later, she had a plan.

CAUTION

Why this chapter has no worksheet

If someone who controls or monitors you might read this book, do not write a safety plan in it. Keep your plan with an advocate, in your head, or somewhere only you can reach. Everything else in this guide still applies to you, with safety first.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Abuse includes threats, coercive control, financial control and stalking, not only physical violence.
- The time around separation can carry increased risk; plan it with a trained advocate.
- Be careful with shared technology, prepare documents and essentials quietly, and ask about protective orders.
- Tell your lawyer or mediator about abuse; mediation may not be safe or appropriate.