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The Transition Institute of Marin

Transition News

February 2005

Dear Susan,

Happy February! I hope you had a good holiday season. My thanks to all of the women who came to the December workshop called, "Getting Through the Holidays Going Through Divorce." It can be a tough time of the year, but we came up with some creative ways to deal with some difficult situations. I look forward to seeing more of you at upcoming workshops and I am excited about the topics T.I.M. will be covering this year.

In this issue, I will be focusing on New Beginnings. January and February are the months when many people focus on the year ahead, set goals and make plans. Starting things can be challenging but it can also be extremely exciting. If there is one thing I have learned in being a beginner, it's that when I ask for help and let support in, the path is much easier! For those of you who are just starting your divorce process, there are many resources out there for you. You do not have to go it alone.

Susan Pease, Director

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New Beginnings

I don't know about you, but I hate being a beginner. The mechanics of learning a new skill are maddening and I feel vulnerable. As if this weren't bad enough, I seem to have a tape running in my head telling me that I should know how to do this thing I'm trying to learn -even when I've never done anything even remotely similar before!

The only thing that's usually harder than a beginning is an ending! One reason why divorce is so difficult is that it involves both endings and beginnings - often to extremes. So many people put off going through a divorce and instead, choose to stay in abusive or even less- than-fulfilling marriages because they don't want to go through this process.

Many women have told me that, despite every effort to fix the problems, they have stayed in their bad relationship for years after they knew it was over, in order to avoid all the "negatives" that come with divorce (i.e. feeling like a failure, having to move, uproot the kids, live on less income, having to date again, etc)

What people lose sight of, is that there are so many positives that come after the dust has settled. New people and situations show up that wouldn't have (and couldn't have) had you stayed in your relationship. I consider these the gifts of the process.

I believe that with every challenge there is a gift and with every gift, there is a challenge. Everything in life involves trade offs. But there are different types of challenges and pain. The pain of healing ends in time, whereas the pain of repeating unhealthy cycles, taking the "easier road," Staying with the familiar to avoid the uncomfortable is to be stuck in a never ending no-win situation. If you, or someone you know, is putting off a separation or divorce, (or any change for that matter)

remember these things:

1) Thinking about making a change is often tougher than actually making the change.

2) Honoring your true needs is one of the most esteem building things you can do for yourself whereas ignoring them tears you down.

3) You don't have to do it alone! Find support, become informed about your rights, what to expect, etc., and surround yourself with loving friends and family.

Ask T.I.M.

This segment is devoted to answering questions you may have regarding divorce.

Q: *What do I do with my feelings of rage? I have fantasies of piling all [my ex's] belongings into the middle of the street, dousing it with gasoline and dancing around the bonfire. I won't even mention what I fantasize about doing to him. Will these feelings ever subside? - CM, San Rafael*

A: These feelings are actually quite healthy and normal. (It is when a person acts on these feelings that the trouble starts.) Women often feel wrong for having anger, believing it's socially acceptable for women to feel sad or scared, but not angry. However, anger is an important part of the grief process. Regardless of whether the split was mutual, you were left, or it was initiated by you, you can still experience tremendous anger and sadness. Although it can take a long while (a year or more) these feelings will eventually go away. The key is, however, is finding the fine line between experiencing all the anger you need to, but not getting stuck in it.

I have known some people to get bogged down in their ire for a variety of reasons. Often, women get stuck because they are angry at themselves for still being angry!! Trust me, this is *not* going to push you through the process faster! Other times, women deny their anger and try to push it away. Emotions don't go away just because we want them to, or because we ignore them. They go away when enough healing has taken place. Unresolved anger simply lays in wait, gets stored up and often comes out later in an explosion, or it seeps out in sarcasm about the ex, for example. Be gentle with yourself and allow yourself all the feelings that come up.

Healthy outlets for anger: yell into (and/or kick) a pillow, punch a punching bag, scream in your car or go to the top of Mt. Tam and yell, write letters and emails you'll never send, write the person's name on a piece of paper and tear it into a million pieces, get some exercise, sing. Don't judge yourself or think something is wrong with you because you have not gotten over this part yet. Get some guidance from friends, therapists, or spiritual/religious professionals.

Q. *Do you think it is wise to always wait a while before dating while divorcing, especially in the case where you have unexpectedly met a really nice person that you want to be with? - Diana*

A. There is no simple answer to this question. I think this is a very personal choice. That being said, I do believe that in almost all cases, there should be some space and time between partners in order to "get yourself back," feel your feelings, and integrate all that has happened.

There are people who run to the next relationship in order to avoid feelings of pain and loneliness from a break-up. These people run the risk of creating almost the exact same dynamic they didn't like in the previous relationship.

Another thing to consider is your children, if you have any. Children need time to process what has happened as well. Depending on their age and level of maturity, they will have a better understanding and allowance for you to have a new life.

Even if *you* don't think it's too soon, be considerate of how you introduce this new person into your childrens' lives. For younger children, you may start out telling them that this is "Mommy's new friend." Tell them that they will see him more often. Older kids and teens will know exactly what's going on so it's better to speak frankly with them about it and let them know you are dating someone new. Ask them how they would like to be introduced to your new partner. This gives them the sense of empowerment and control in the situation they often need. (Beware of giving them more power than they should have! Especailly if they are teens!)

All children, regardless of their age (unless they are adults themselves) need to be reassured that you will not leave them because there is someone new in your life. They may not like the fact that they see less of you so, as a way of showing them (not just telling them) that you think they are special, you might consider going on "dates" with just your kids. Your children will usually adjust once they have been reassured that you are still there for them. If they don't and they seem to be having trouble accepting the reality of the divorce and your new life, I would recommend having your child see a counselor, therapist or someone who can help them heal from their loss.

To submit a question to T.I.M. for future publication in the Transition News, direct your query entitled "Ask T.I.M." to susanpease@tiofmarin.com.

Upcoming Events

Contemplating Divorce Workshop - This workshop is designed to help women who are ambivalent in their marital situations to get clearer on whether to stay or leave.

Details - Saturday, February 5th from 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm at the Marin Suites Hotel, 45 Tamal Vista Blvd (bet DMV & Cinema). The cost is \$35

Women's Divorce Workshop - an absolute MUST workshop for any woman going through divorce!

You will learn just about everything you need to in order to get through your divorce more easily, quickly and inexpensively. As one participant wrote, "**Knowledge is Power - and it's also a Money-Saver.**"

Details - Wednesday & Thursday evenings, February 16 & 17; from 6:00 - 8:30 pm; 265 Miller Avenue, Mill Valley. Cost is \$195 before February 11/\$225 after February 11.

Women are encouraged to register in advance for all events as space is often limited. *Some Partial Scholarships are available.* Checks may be made payable to T.I.M. and mailed to 705 Fourth Street, San Rafael, CA 94901.

Coming in March a workshop for women on, **How to Start Your Own Business.**

This workshop will be followed by a Women Business Owner's Expose later in the spring for women in the T.I.M. community.

Call (415) 257-0830 for more information on all upcoming events.

Suggested Reading

Rebuilding by Drs. Bruce Fisher & Robert Alberti

Crazy Time - by Isabel Trafford

Life After Divorce - by Sharon Wegscheider Cruse

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