

Ep #9: Forgiving Yourself for Your Actions During Divorce



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With Your Host

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You're listening to *The Sensible Split* podcast, Episode 9. Today, we're talking about those times when how you're acting during your divorce does not feel like who you are or who you want to be.

The Sensible Split is a podcast for smart but overwhelmed women in search of a roadmap to a successful separation and divorce. If you are looking for guidance in navigating the practical, legal, and emotional aspects of divorce with confidence, this is the show for you. Here's your host, Master Certified Life and Divorce Coach, Divorce Attorney, and Mediator, Lauren Fair.

Hello, ladies, how are you? I hope you're having a great week so far. I ended last week on a warm and fuzzy note I wanted to share with you. I started volunteering at a charity that provides baby clothing, handmade blankets, and similar essentials, to mothers who are identified as being in need. This organization is run by women, and I had such a great time meeting them, touring the facility, and getting down to work on that first day there last week.

I grew up volunteering because my mother has always been big on volunteering community service, and she'd involve me in those efforts from a young age. But it had been quite a while since I had volunteered in this hands-on way.

And other than service on a board of directors of an organization, for example, volunteering is something that went by the wayside when I had a full caseload of clients, a firm to run, and little kids at home. Maybe you know what that's like, having so many things to juggle between work and home and all of the things that we as women are responsible for.

Now that my kids are all in school full time, I have more of an opportunity to get back into doing these things that fill my heart and that feel really good. And I'm committing to making that a regular part of my life going forward. Because I really value serving others, and I feel best when I'm actively incorporating that into my life.

If you're like me, and you've stopped doing something that you found fulfilling in the past because of your role as a mom or wife, or both, and what that required of you, I would encourage you to consider how you might reconnect with that

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part of yourself now. It can really contribute to your overall emotional wellbeing. I found that to be true for me, for sure, this last week.

So, on a similar note, last episode we talked about the importance of knowing your values in divorce and utilizing those as a decision-making filter. As well as utilizing them and setting yourself up to thrive after divorce. Today, I want to talk to you about those times in divorce when you notice what you are doing or what you are saying does not align with your values.

People are generally not at their best when they are going through a divorce. This is often because of the impact on the brain and body that divorce related anxiety, stress, and grief can have, particularly when you do not have a regular practice of actively managing your mind and grounding your nervous system. As a lot of people going through this transition don't.

When people going through divorce are not at their best that can come out in various different ways. They might say things that they might normally not say. They may do things that they may normally not do.

And this is also true in the course of the breakdown of a marriage. People say things they might not normally say, and they do things they might not normally do, as things are deteriorating in their marriage. And what they say or what they do in those circumstances may not only be what they wouldn't normally do but are actually in conflict with their own personal values at times.

When you notice this is what is happening, that you've behaved in a way you don't like or you're not proud of, a natural reaction to that can be developing feelings of guilt, regret, or shame, for example. And when you feel guilt, regret, or shame one of two things or both usually happens. You beat yourself up for what you did, which adds to your suffering. And/or you take actions that are in conflict with what is best for you in the short and long term.

So, let me give you a few examples of this. For me, one thing, among others, that I did during my divorce that I am not proud of is refusing to agree to give my ex-husband some candlesticks he wanted. We received this trio of Vera Wang candlesticks as a wedding gift and when we were divorcing, he wanted them.

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This made no sense to me. My brain was like, “Why would he want these? He never seemed to care about these during the marriage. He knows I like them. I cannot believe he is asking for these,” and so on and so forth.

I felt very justified in not agreeing to his request. I had a long list of reasons in support of the idea that he, for sure, should not have those. He eventually let it go. And then after some time passed, after the divorce, and I was in a better place to have some cognitive empathy, I looked at those candlesticks and thought to myself, “Wow, I'm a horrible person. Those must have meant something to him.”

He wasn't a spiteful or vindictive person, and I really don't think he would have just asked for those for the sole purpose of upsetting me. Even if that was his motivation, which, again, I don't think it was, did I really want to sort of match that energy? He really asked for very few of these types of items in our divorce, and I got to thinking, maybe him asking for these was his way of wanting to hold onto something from our marriage or our wedding. Maybe he just liked how they looked.

I don't know what the reason was to this day, but I really felt like I was a petty jerk for not just giving them to him. And that way of talking to myself continued on and off for a long time. I was very much in that, criticizing myself for the way I handled him wanting those items during the divorce, for a long time. I valued not being petty, treating him with respect, and being generous and caring in trying to set him up to do well after our divorce.

And my response to him asking for those candlesticks was so out of alignment with that, and I could really clearly see that after I was out of the process. And by continuing to judge myself over a period of years for behavior I engaged in like this, it wasn't about the candlesticks the whole time, right?

But it was that, and so many other things that I looked at in hindsight, and I went, “Wow, I could have handled that a lot better than I did. I don't like that I did this, or I did that. I could have handled this in a much better way.” But by doing that I added suffering to the pain that was already there, right? There's always

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some pain associated with what leads us to divorce and going through the divorce process at times.

What I was doing, by continually kind of putting myself down and criticizing myself for things that I had done, just really added to that suffering. And it prevented me from more efficiently integrating the divorce experience into my life and moving on with the lessons that I had learned.

So, I'm going to give you another example. I had a client who was not faithful to her husband, and that, among other things, led to the breakdown of the marriage. He had also done similar things in the marriage. But because she had acted out of alignment with her values of fidelity in her marriage, she felt tremendous guilt.

And from that guilt, she was about to give up a large portion of her share of the equity that she had in the home that she shared with her husband because he wanted to stay there. She felt she had put him in that position, of having to figure out a way to keep the house, because of her choices.

So, because she felt guilty, she was about to, from an outside perspective, what I was seeing as I was working with her, was she was about to give away the farm and forfeit an opportunity to have financial stability after the divorce. That was the largest asset that they had, and she was entertaining giving it up out of guilt.

Through coaching, she was really able to take a step back, explore whether she wanted that guilt to drive her decisions in her divorce, and make an intentional, well-reasoned decision about what to do with the house and his desire to stay in it. Instead of making it solely from an emotion that she may no longer have five years from now.

She may be thinking differently about the circumstances that led to the breakdown in the marriage five years from now and wished that she would have done something different that, at that point, could have no longer been undone.

Another example of acting out of alignment with your values could even just be something as simple as how you spoke to your ex in front of the kids, because

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he was just pissing you off in the moment, right? And your response did not set the example that you wanted your kids to see of you in dealing with perhaps a difficult person. So, you're judging yourself for how you acted in front of them possibly, and that's taking up brain space, and maybe having you feel down.

As you can see with these examples, when you act out of alignment with your values and you notice this, and then you judge yourself for it, it can really create some roadblocks to healing from divorce and also successfully engaging in the divorce process, in a way that your post-divorce self may have wanted or needed from you at that time.

So, what do you do when you notice that you've acted out of alignment of your values? I know for me, I tried to find what my friend, Dorothy, calls "alternative truths". Alternative truths are really reasons in this situation for my behavior, that also feel true, besides the ones that I was believing, like the ones that my brain wanted to go immediately to.

Thoughts about how I behaved that had me feeling more self-compassion than judgment. It doesn't mean, in looking for or believing alternative truths, that I liked or condoned my behavior at the time. I can still look at it and think, "Gee, I wish I would have handled that differently." But I understand why I would have done what I did there at the time.

And you can certainly do this. Make the case for why what you did makes sense. List out all the reasons and see what's true for you. But let me give you a little shortcut. Because after a long time of considering alternative truths for myself, I read one sentence written by Jody Moore and it changed my life in an instant. She said, whenever we are acting out of alignment with our values, it is coming from pain.

My mind was blown. When I read this, it just felt so instantly and intuitively true. I was in pain when I told him he couldn't have the candlesticks. I didn't even want the divorce that I had initiated, okay? I wanted him back the way he used to be. The life we dreamt of together, that was gone. That's what I wanted back. Of course, I was in pain.

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And in an instant, my suffering was replaced with self-compassion when I had that realization of what Jody was saying. It finally got me past the prolonged suffering of self-judgment that existed years past the end of my marriage. I still don't like things I did back then, but I understand why I did them and I have self-compassion and forgiveness for myself around them. And that lets me hold them more lightly, incorporate those lessons learned, and move on.

In case you're wondering, I still have those candlesticks. I keep them around as a reminder of what I learned from this experience, and how I want to be different when presented with similar situations in the future.

I hope that if you find yourself in a place of self-judgment for doing or saying something that doesn't align with your values in your divorce process, you will remember that it's coming from pain. Find self-compassion so you can heal from the experience, fold it into your life, and move forward.

That's all I have for you this week, my friends. Take care. I'll see you next time.

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advised to seek the advice of qualified legal professionals regarding their individual situation.