

DIVORCE SERIES: BREAKING FREE FROM SADNESS



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Introduction and Disclaimer

This workbook is meant as a brief introduction to how to begin to break free of the chains of sadness surrounding separation, divorce, and transition. It is not meant to replace professional therapy but is meant as a brief self-help primer for those for whom self-help is appropriate.

Chapter 1 discusses sadness and depression as a normal part of loss. Chapter 2 addresses the thought distortions that go along with sadness, how to track them, and how to begin changing these. Chapter 3 concentrates on one of the best and evidenced-based ways to work through sadness and depression--mindfulness. Each chapter offers exercises to work through in an attempt to begin to understand and shift feelings of depression and sadness. As mentioned, this workbook is not pretending to be the be-all, end-all cure for depression from divorce. It is my hope that it can help you to start the process.

I invite my readers to contact me with any questions or for additional help, should you need it. My practice also offers individual and group sessions to help you through this difficult time, but if you aren't yet ready to take that step, I hope that you'll still reach out if you should need more resources. Serving my community is why I entered this profession to begin with, so I'd love to be a part of your healing and growth.

There are several resources available on my website: www.timetothrivetherapy.com that might help, including mindfulness/meditation audios, other workbooks, articles, assessments, and worksheets. It is my hope that these tools might provide some relief, however, if you feel that you need additional help, please feel free to contact me so that I can help point you in the right direction.

Warmly,

Katherine

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CHAPTER 1: SADNESS AS A RESPONSE TO DIVORCE.

Sadness as a part of grief and Loss

Sadness and depression are two big parts of the grief process surrounding separation and divorce. It is important to work through all stages of grief in order to find lasting emotional relief.

Sadness and depression are actually two different things. Sadness tells us that some emotional need is not being met. It is no wonder in with the multiple losses and huge changes that are usually involved in divorce that sadness would be a big part of the emotional picture. Separation and loss often involve some of our deepest emotional needs going unmet—companionship, intimacy, and love. Cherished interpersonal relationships including and beyond the relationship with your former partner can create unprecedented pain and strain. Loneliness can feel jarring. Having to leave a home that you've invested so much time and energy in can make you feel like you are losing part of yourself. Parenting becomes more challenging, and nothing feels worse than not being able to see your children as often as you used to.

Depression, despite the common usage of the word, isn't necessarily sadness, although sadness often accompanies depression. It is more a dulling or shut down and often includes other emotion. Depression is our bodies reaction that says, I'm exhausted and I need to curl around myself until I feel ready to be in the world again. Depression can include other emotional states such as sadness, anger, fear, guilt, and shame at different points in time or all at once. No wonder our bodies want to shut down in the presence of depression.

Loss and grief can be hard to overcome and can contribute to feelings of sadness and depression. If you're experiencing significant loss, know that you're not alone. And keep in mind that losses become magnified if you're trying to handle them on your own. This is the time to rely on those you trust and who care deeply about you. You may choose to reach out to a friend, a family member, a counselor, or a support group. If you are religious, you might also rely on God or members of a religious

community. If a source of comfort is not readily apparent to you, do an Internet search and find out what divorce support resources are available in your area.

People sometimes ignore or deny the losses they have experienced following a divorce. Denial might help temporarily because it allows you to focus on other things. But it's not a good long-term strategy, because unacknowledged losses can interfere with a sense of peace. So, it's worth spending some time reflecting on what you have lost.

EXERCISE 1: The Undesirable Pie

GOAL The goal of this exercise is to reflect on the losses you have experienced because of your divorce.

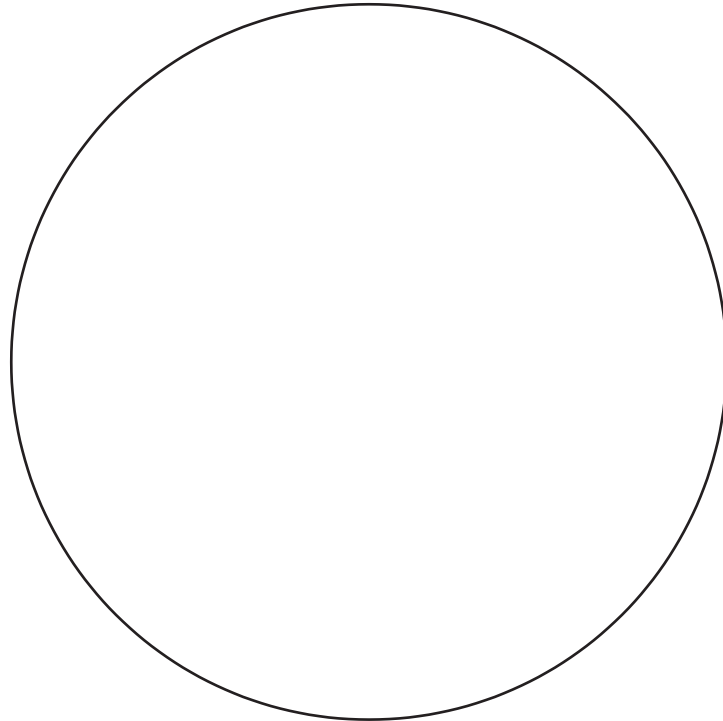
KEEP IN MIND This exercise can be difficult, so we suggest picking a day and time when you're feeling mentally tough. If you're depressed, I recommend that you wait to complete this exercise until your mood starts to improve. Also, you might want to hold off until you have a source of support, such as a close friend, therapist, or group with whom you can discuss your responses.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PART A In this exercise, you'll make a pie graph to illustrate the losses that you've experienced. For those of you who enjoy baking or making cool pie graphs, this exercise is for you!

First, think of your least favorite type of pie. (For instance, we believe that putting spinach in pies is an affront to pie lovers everywhere.) Now imagine that this undesirable pie represents all of the losses you've experienced related to your divorce.

Take a moment to consider the individual losses—or slices—that make up the pie, and list them in the space provided.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PART B: Now that you've identified your losses, use a pencil to draw slices on the pie (illustrated here) to represent how deeply each of the losses has affected you. Larger slices should be reserved for particularly painful losses, such as not seeing your children as often as you did before the divorce. Smaller slices should be reserved for less painful losses (such as no longer having someone around to kill spiders). Label each slice with the type of loss that it represents.



REFLECTION Make sure you take some time to grieve over your losses. It doesn't hurt to have a good cry. Or two. Or three. Make sure you have a box of tissues nearby. Whether you're male or female, there's no shame in grieving. In fact—it's important to get in touch with your sadness. As you go through the grieving process, try to be compassionate toward yourself (see chapter 3 for more on self-compassion). You've been through a lot! Also, it's important to talk with someone you can trust and who will listen without being judgmental.

We encourage you to periodically return to this exercise and redraw the lines on your pie graph as a way of documenting how your perspective is changing over time. As you learn how to apply positive psychology strategies to your life, we hope that some of the slices will shrink in size or disappear entirely.

Note: It's completely normal for you to feel sad and down at times. Some even say divorce feels like someone close to them has died. But if your grief is debilitating for weeks on end and prevents you from engaging in your day-to-day activities, you may be suffering from depression. Learning how to spot symptoms of depression and knowing when to seek help are important skills to have following a divorce.

The Warning Signs of Depression

Unfortunately, depression is all too common, with almost one in ten people experiencing depression in any given year. The causes of depression are complex and may include genetic influences, biological factors, thinking patterns, and stressful life events. Not everyone with depression experiences the same symptoms, which can differ from person to person in type, duration, frequency, and intensity. Some people experience recurring depression, with episodic bouts throughout their lifetime. Others have situational depression in response to a specific stressful event such as divorce. Regardless, depression is treatable and there's no need to suffer.

The next exercise contains a widely utilized depression screening instrument, the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9; Kroenke and Spitzer 2002). Keep in mind that a diagnosis of depression can be made only by a qualified mental health professional. However, we invite you to take the survey to familiarize yourself with the symptoms of depression and to help determine if you're at risk.

EXERCISE 2: Assessing Depression with the PHQ-9

GOAL: The goal of this exercise is to familiarize you with the symptoms of depression and to assess if you're at risk.

Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3
Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3
Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3
Feeling bad about yourself—or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite—being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual.	0	1	2	3
Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself	0	1	2	3

To score, add up each column for a total score: + + +

= TOTAL SCORE

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people? (Circle one.)

Not difficult at all Somewhat difficult Very difficult Extremely difficult

Scoring:

Total Score Depression Severity (Kroenke and Spitzer 2002)

- 1–4 Minimal depression
- 5–9 Mild depression
- 10–14 Moderate depression
- 15–19 Moderately severe depression
- 20–27 Severe depression

REFLECTION: If you scored in the mild range, keep an eye on your mood. You may consider seeking professional help now or in the future. If you scored in the moderate or severe ranges, we strongly urge you to seek professional help.

Note: If you're feeling depressed, you may need to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, or professional to help you with this process. Part of treating depression includes looking at and working to change certain thought patterns that are related to having a depressed mood. Regardless of your score on the PHQ-9, you may be susceptible to these negative ways of thinking.

CHAPTER 2: CHANGING DEPRESSIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS.

Typical Problematic Thought Patterns

Cognitive-behavioral therapists such as Aaron Beck (1979) noticed that people who are depressed tend to have negative thought patterns. Many of these thoughts are automatic, and people often aren't aware of them. Automatic thoughts can be hard to identify and a challenge to change. One common treatment technique for depression involves identifying these thought patterns and keeping a record of them, so you can discuss them with a therapist. What follows are some common patterns of thinking in depression (Burns 2000). You may recognize some of these ways of thinking in yourself.

All-or-nothing thinking. In all-or-nothing thinking, everything is black or white, and there's no room for shades of gray. For example, you see yourself as either successful or a complete failure—there's no in-between. This all-or-nothing thinking often emphasizes the worst in yourself and situations.

Personalization. Personalization involves believing you are personally responsible for things over which you have no control. For example, Sally's ex-husband has a drinking problem, and she blames herself for his alcoholism. She thinks, *"If only I'd been a more supportive wife, he wouldn't have starting drinking so much."*

Overgeneralization. When people overgeneralize, they tend to make sweeping conclusions that go far beyond what is happening in the present. For example, you may think, *I'm depressed now. I'll always be depressed.*

Mind reading. Mind reading involves inferring what someone is thinking from their behavior. These inferences are generally negative. For example, John is in a bad mood when he comes home, so his partner thinks he must be mad at her. She doesn't consider that John could have had a bad day or that someone else might have gotten under his skin.

Must-statements. *Must-statements* involve having expectations about how people (including yourself) must behave. Psychologist Albert Ellis called this “musterbation.” In a televised interview (1988), Ellis said, “The three main musts are ‘I must do well or I’m no good,’ ‘You, you louse, must treat me well, or you’re worthless and deserve to roast in hell,’ and ‘The world must give me exactly what I want, precisely what I want, or it’s a horrible, awful place.’”

Magnifying and minimizing. When depressed, people often magnify the negative aspects of life and minimize their own strengths. For example, one may tend to make situations out to be worse than they really are while simultaneously downplaying internal and external coping resources.

Other depressive-thinking patterns. Other patterns include mental filtering (focusing on one or two negative details while discounting the wider picture), fortune-telling (predicting negative events for the future), and catastrophizing (emphasizing and expecting the worst possible outcome).

Many of us use these same thought patterns throughout our day. Oftentimes, they are the result of long-standing and rigid beliefs about oneself, others, and/or the world. It can sometimes be challenging to find these long-standing beliefs on our own. After all, we have often carried them for so long that we mistake them as fact or reality.

If you recognize any of these thought patterns as your own, good work! The first step is to notice them. With a qualified mental health professional, you can begin to identify even more of these thought patterns that contribute to suffering.

A sense of profound loss following a divorce is often accompanied by anxiety about the future. Anxiety is another reaction to divorce that can impact your post-divorce adjustment.

It is often helpful to start with noticing what emotion you are feeling at the time, and then noticing what thoughts are going through your head to lead to that emotion. Often there will be more than one emotion hitting us at a time. This usually feels like overwhelm. It is

very common to feel overwhelmed when faced with separation and/or divorce. Those stages of grief don't always come one at a time, after all. Along with the stages of grief are the emotions of fear, shame, guilt, and hurt.

Portioning out which individual emotions are making up your overwhelm is one of the first steps in squelching the emotion, but emotions can also give us clues with regard to the accompanying thoughts.

Sad tells us there is an emotional need not being met.

Anger tells us something feels unfair or something is standing in the way of our goal. However, anger is often a secondary emotion that protects us against feeling other, more vulnerable emotions.

Fear tells us something feels dangerous.

Guilt tells us we feel we did something wrong.

Shame tells us we feel that we ARE something wrong.

Hurt tells us that we feel that someone has injured us.

Our emotions are necessary bits of information to helping us understand our thoughts so that we can begin challenging those thoughts. Rather than suppress those emotions, listen to them. What are they telling you?

EXERCISE 3a: Monitoring Your Problematic Thought Patterns throughout the Day

GOAL The goal of this exercise is to enhance your skill at monitoring your thoughts and identifying thought patterns that may be limiting you.

INSTRUCTIONS Over the next three days, write down what's going through your mind a few times per day using the Thought Record on the next page. Try not to judge the content of your thoughts as good or bad, or acceptable or unacceptable. Simply observe your thoughts.

THOUGHT RECORD

Example: Emotion	Thought going through your mind.	Associated Problematic Thought Pattern(s)
Fear	I will always feel this alone.	Fortune Telling; Catastrophizing; All or None Thinking
Sadness/Fear	I am unloveable.	Overgeneralization; Mental Filtering; All or None
Anger	He should give us another chance.	Must-statement

Day 1: Emotion	Thought going through your mind.	Problematic Thought Pattern

Day 2: Emotion	Thought going through your mind.	Problematic Thought Pattern

Day 3: Emotion	Thought going through your mind.	Problematic Thought Pattern

EXERCISE 3b: Challenging Your Problematic Thought Patterns

GOAL To begin to question and change your problematic thought patterns in favor of more realistic ones.

INSTRUCTIONS Using the completed Thought Record on the previous page, notice the types of emotions that you are recording. Are they all the same or are there many different emotions felt at the same time or in the same day? How are you determining what emotion you are feeling? How do different emotions feel differently in your body?

Next, **were you able to identify the thoughts going through your mind that caused the emotion** that you were feeling? Were you able to match these thoughts to one of the Problematic Thought Patterns noted above? Were there certain patterns that tended to come up over and over again?

Finally, **were the thoughts absolutely and undeniably true, or is there the possibility that an alternate reality is possible?** For example, in the second example below, can the thought "I am unloveable." be challenged? Can you think of one person that loves or has loved you that would make that thought untrue?

Try to come up with more realistic possibilities for each problematic thought. For example, in the example above: "My ex-partner may no longer love me, however, others in my life do, so it stands to reason that as time goes on, still others will."

Begin to catch yourself in these problematic thought patterns as they come up. When you notice a pattern, label it and immediately challenge the thought with something more realistic.

CHAPTER 3: USING MINDFULNESS TO QUIET THE MIND

*Yesterday is history,
Tomorrow's a mystery,
Today is a gift,
That's why it's called the present.*

-Master Oogway, Kung Fu Panda

Does it sometimes feel like your mind has a life of its own? Sometimes it seems that no matter how hard you try not to think about your divorce, troubling thoughts and feelings crush you like waves beating against the shore. So, there's some bad news and some good news. The bad news is this is a common experience for many folks going through a divorce. Your mind just won't be quiet. The good news is "you can't stop the waves, but you can learn how to surf," notes Jon Kabat-Zinn (2004, 30), the founder of mindfulness-based stress reduction.

Feeling like you're at the mercy of your racing thoughts is a common experience for people going through a divorce. Fortunately, you can learn to accept and quiet your thoughts, which will enable you to respond more creatively and effectively to situations and help you achieve a greater sense of well-being. This can be accomplished through the practice of mindfulness, which is the topic of this chapter.

What is mindfulness?

According to Jon Kabat Zin, mindfulness is paying attention to something in the present moment in a specific way without judgement. Let's take that piece by piece.

Paying attention to something: a piece of music, a leaf on the ground, the smell of coffee, the taste of a jelly-belly, the touch of the fabric, the sensation in your tummy.

In the present moment: In the here and now.

In a specific way: Using sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, etc.

Without judgment: Without judging it as good or bad, right or wrong, etc.

It's a state of gentle, focused attention on things you may have previously ignored, including internal states (thoughts, feelings, body sensations) and external circumstances (physical surroundings, interactions with others).

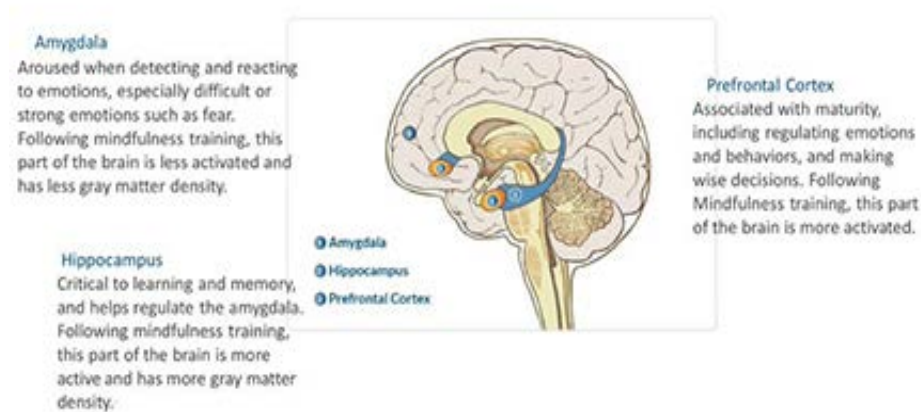
The practice of mindfulness is centuries old and comes from contemplative spiritual practices found in both Eastern and Western religious traditions. You don't have to be religious or even consider yourself to be spiritual for this practice to improve your life. However, mindfulness is like a muscle. It gets stronger with consistent practice.

Self-compassion is also important. When you're mindful, you're kind to yourself. You don't judge your perceptions or state of being. You just notice them and attempt to see them for what they are.

Why bother with mindfulness?

Mindfulness affect the portions of our brain responsible for emotional arousal, emotional regulation, thought, judgment, and memory.

Mindfulness and the Brain



While the more you practice, the greater the results, research has found just a few minutes of mindfulness practice a day results in reducing the amygdala, the part of our brain that activates fear and anger. Meanwhile, the prefrontal cortex, responsible for regulating emotions, planning, and decision-making increases significantly as does the hippocampus, responsible for learning and memory functions.

In addition, regular mindfulness practices have been found to result in better immunity, thus less illness and a host of other benefits.

Our minds tend to run off in directions that have little to do with our present experience, and when the going gets tough, we concoct elaborate *backstories*—some worthy of a Hollywood production! Your backstories are the narratives that go through your mind as you try to make sense of your experiences. These stories may or may not accurately reflect reality—they can be based on previous experience,

expectations about the future, or personal bias—and depending on their content, they can increase negative feelings and make dealing with others more difficult.

The practice of mindfulness can counter your tendency to concoct backstories, but is it worth your time and effort? After all, navigating the divorce process already takes an enormous amount of time and attention. On top of all that, you must cope with the hassles of daily life. Based on the evidence, we think the practice of mindfulness is worth considering as a way to cultivate inner stillness and peace of mind, which can make this life transition easier for you and those you love. Practicing mindfulness may lead to several positive results.

- *Decreasing Rumination*
- *Reducing Stress*
- *Improving Relationships*
- *Promoting Clarity*

Clarity in the Midst of the Storm: The Snow Globe

Do you own a snow globe? If not, take a moment to picture a snow globe and what you would put in it.

Crystal's snow globe contains a little black dog, an ice cream stand, some tall trees, and a 1965 Ford Mustang. When the snow globe is shaken, it's difficult to see these objects, and important details are obscured, such as the breed of dog and type of Mustang. Similarly, when your life is shaken by divorce, thoughts swirl in your mind and difficult emotions cloud your vision. The more stressed you are, the bigger the resulting storm inside.

Once Crystal stops shaking her snow globe, she watches as the snow settles to the bottom, and then she can see that the Mustang is a fastback and that the little dog is a Boston terrier. Similarly, if you become still and pay close attention to your moment-to-moment experience, you can see more clearly what is going on in and around you. The cultivated stillness settles the snowstorm, and although the snow remains on the ground, it doesn't interfere with your ability to clearly see. This is how mindful, directed attention and awareness can lead to clarity.

Cultivating the right attitude to promote mindfulness.

According to Kabat-Zinn (2013), mindfulness is facilitated through the cultivation of seven interdependent attitudes. Developing and nurturing these attitudes will form a solid foundation for your mindfulness practice.

Being nonjudgmental. Your mind naturally categorizes and evaluates your experiences. By being an impartial observer of this activity, you're less likely to be swept away by this ongoing narrative. Therefore, mindfulness entails not judging your thoughts but just observing them. As you experience the myriad of emotions prompted by your divorce, your job is to compassionately notice what's going on both inside and around you by being fully present with what is unfolding moment by moment.

Patience. It's important to be patient with the divorce process and to learn to understand and accept that things unfold in their own time. When examining the activity of the mind, you accept that it will wander, but you don't get carried away by it. It does its thing, and you patiently watch and are open to what each moment brings.

Beginner's mind. Openness to new experiences following a divorce can be facilitated by cultivating a beginner's mind, the attitude that the old is new. It's a willingness to look at things with a fresh perspective, as if you are seeing them for the very first time. "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few," says Zen master Shunryu Suzuki. This promotes receptivity to new experiences and prevents you from being stuck in preconceived notions.

Trusting yourself. You may not always understand why things happen as they do, but if you trust yourself as events unfold, you can find security in the face of instability. This is particularly true as you cope with the unexpected twists and turns that divorce can bring. Trust involves confidence and faith in your own wisdom and goodness, and it can lead to personal responsibility. Through nonjudgmental observation of your thoughts, feelings, and circumstances, you can learn to more fully trust

your own experience, intuition, and authority, and to act in accordance with your own truth.

Nonstriving. When was the last time you were advised not to work hard? Contrary to the dictates of the surrounding goal-directed culture, mindfulness necessitates nonstriving, as there is really nothing else to do but be as present as possible. Comic Paul Dean once said, "The nice thing about meditation is that it makes doing nothing quite respectable." Mindfulness is being able to more fully experience what is already here. The only thing to do is just be, in the here and now, fully aware. This may be a comforting thought as you're going through your divorce.

Acceptance. Acceptance is a willingness to see things as they are without trying to change them. It doesn't mean condoning or approving of everything. Rather, it means making an openhearted effort to see things as they are without viewing life through the backstories your mind loves to tell. Acceptance is embracing what arises inside just as it is.

Letting go. The final attitude is letting go. Letting go entails seeing what is unfolding for what it is and then letting it fall away. You don't try to actively push unpleasant thoughts or feelings away, or cling to pleasant ones either. You look at them and then let them go. They will likely come back in one form or another, and you will need to let some things go, over and over and over again, countless times. We know you'll have ample opportunities to practice this during your divorce and its aftermath. That's where patience comes in, right?

Learning to become more mindful.

How do you apply mindfulness in your own life? In fact, there are many different approaches to mindfulness meditation, and we're not able to cover them all here. Our goal is to provide you with some basic techniques that can get you started in your mindfulness practice. We'll cover some strategies you can use to become more aware of your breath, body sensations, thoughts, and feelings so that you can inhabit each moment of your life more fully.

Your Breath Is Your Anchor

If you're alive, you're breathing. (Okay, that's obvious.) But while breath is your constant companion regardless of what's happening to or around you, this indispensable ally is often ignored. The breath provides you with your fundamental life rhythm and is with you until your physical body dies. With each in-breath, you are renewed; with each out-breath, you release and let go. The breath is a gauge for the state of both your physical self and emotional self. When you physically exert yourself or are emotionally upset, your breath becomes rapid or maybe even labored. With physical and emotional relaxation, it slows down and deepens. Sometimes your breath is shallow, other times slow and deep. In response to various life events, you may work to "catch your breath" or may experience something that can "take your breath away." In mindfulness practice, the breath is central and can be utilized as an anchor and stabilizer in times of stress. Take a moment to become mindful of your breath.

Exercise 4: Noticing your breath.

GOAL This goal of this exercise is to help you tune in to your breathing.

INSTRUCTIONS After you finish reading these instructions, put the book down and sit for a moment or two observing your breath

with your eyes softly closed. Then return to the book.

REFLECTION What was that like for you? Did you notice your breath as it traveled through your nostrils? Did you feel your chest slowly moving up and down? Were you conscious of the breath on your upper lip as you inhaled and exhaled? Were you breathing deeply, or was the breath more on the shallow side? There are lots of other observations you can make. Who knew the breath was so interesting? Write down your observations in the space provided.

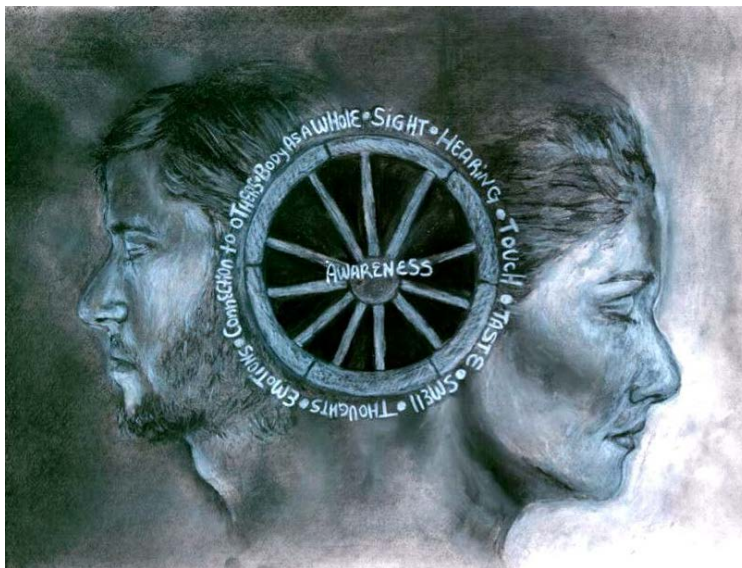
When becoming mindful of the breath, remember that you're merely observing it. Although there may be times when you'll want to make the conscious decision to slow it down by taking deep breaths, for now try to become accustomed to just observing it. Don't analyze it. Don't evaluate it. Just breathe and see what unfolds moment by moment.

Increasing Your Field of Awareness

Mindfulness practice involves observing your thoughts, feelings, body sensations, and external stimuli. When stressed by life events, such as those experienced while navigating the divorce process, the body and mind can go into overdrive; you can experience uncomfortable body sensations and painful emotions and thoughts. And you are probably highly motivated to stop these hurts. But mindfulness teaches you that you don't have to distract yourself from these uncomfortable experiences. Through focusing compassionate awareness on these uncontrollable feelings or body sensations or thoughts, you learn that these experiences come and go, and they aren't static. The discomfort doesn't last forever—it goes away, and you survive.

It may help to think of awareness as the hub of a wheel, with the spokes extending from the hub to the wheel's rim representing awareness directed to various parts of the rim—which in turn represents your senses and the content of your mind (see figure 1). At any time, you can focus your awareness (via one or more of the spokes) to different parts of this rim of experience. For example, in exercise 2.1, you focused on the sensation of breathing, which is one of the many senses and experiences that make up the rim.

Paying Attention to Your Mind Chatter



Stress following divorce is often compounded by the incessant chatter that can run through your mind. Many divorced people focus on negative events that have occurred or worry obsessively about what will happen in the future. They try to push these troubling thoughts away, but to no avail, and they may beat themselves up for being unable to control what goes on in their own heads. It's as if telling yourself not to think about your situation is really an invitation to think more about the whole divorce mess!

In fact, research suggests that trying to suppress a thought—especially over long periods of time—produces even more thoughts of what you're trying not to think about. In a classic study (Wegner et al. 1987), one group of participants was asked not to think about a white bear. Not surprisingly, they were unable to suppress thoughts about the white bear. This same group was later asked to think about the white bear. Their

responses were compared with a group who was told from the very beginning of the experiment to think about a white bear. Those who were told not to think about a white bear reported thinking about a white bear more often than those in the other group! More research on this paradoxical effect of thought suppression demonstrates that people may be able to successfully suppress thoughts for a short period of time but not in the long run.

The human mind is constantly producing thoughts. Trying to stop your mind from wandering and thinking thoughts would be like trying to stop your eyes from making tears or your mouth from salivating (or your stomach from rumbling loudly during important meetings when you're hungry). Much of the time, your mind goes on its merry way, reveling in judgments, contemplations, ruminations, and obsessions, and you don't even realize this is happening. To stay anchored in the present, to respond to what is happening in the here and now, you must first become conscious of your mind chatter. (One therapist who worked with Crystal on mindfulness training called it "monkey chatter"— an apt description!)

Much of mind chatter takes the form of judgments or evaluations. For example, you may compare your experiences to similar experiences from the past and consider whether they meet or fall short of your expectations. These judgments are like a cloudy lens through which you perceive the events of your life. It's therefore difficult to see and fully experience the present moment.

Because mind chatter is often outside of your conscious awareness, the first step is to make a conscious effort to notice it—no easy task! If you're like most people, you really haven't considered your thoughts to be objects of attention, and the narrative that goes through your head just seems to happen. If this is true for you, don't expect that paying attention to your mind chatter will be easy from the outset. Examining the content of your thoughts takes work and diligence. Are you ready for the challenge?

Exercise 5: Monitoring Your Thoughts Throughout the Day

GOAL The goal of this exercise is a bit different from Exercise 3 in the last chapter. This exercise is to start noticing the types of thoughts that are going through your mind at different times of day and begin to use the observer's mind to allow them to float in and out.

INSTRUCTIONS Over the next three days, write down what's going through your mind a few times per day. Please don't judge the content of your thoughts as good or bad, or acceptable or unacceptable. Simply observe your thoughts. See if you can just notice them. You might visualize the thoughts as clouds floating by or attempt to step back from them as if watching them on a movie screen in front of you. Notice how even a bit of space from these thoughts might change the sensation and height of emotion that you are feeling.

THOUGHT RECORD #2

Day 1	What You Were Doing?	What was going through your mind?

Day 2	What You Were Doing?	What was going through your mind?

Day 3	What You Were Doing?	What was going through your mind?

Day 4	What You Were Doing?	What was going through your mind?

REFLECTION At the end of four days, what was this process like for you? Did monitoring your thoughts become more automatic over time? Did you need to rely on your reminders?

Did you notice the emotions and bodily sensations change with different thoughts?

Did you notice any connection between what you were doing or the time of day and what was running through your mind?

Way to go! You're making progress on your mindfulness journey. By gently examining what goes on in your mind throughout the day, you can better understand your internal life and how this connects with what happens in your external world.

For more mindfulness tools, go to www.timetothrivetherapy.com .

You may have noticed yourself having certain repetitive themes among your thoughts. If so, what were they?

Mindfulness in interpersonal relationships

You can apply mindfulness skills to become more attentive to your interpersonal relationships. If you can commit yourself to being mindful of both what's going on inside you and what's happening with the people around you, it's more likely that you'll slow down and pause before responding when emotions and stress are running high. This can come in handy when co-parenting or dealing with your ex-spouse! This doesn't mean that you will never feel anger, frustration, disappointment, or any other negative emotion when interacting with others, but you can learn to be more receptive to these feelings and just notice them and let them go instead of avoiding or holding on to them.

Given that you are surfing the tumultuous waters of divorce, we bet that before long you will have an emotionally charged interaction with someone related to your divorce— your ex, your children, your attorney, or anyone else. So, next time you're interacting with people in your life that could play a role in an Oscar-worthy drama, take note and use it as an opportunity to practice mindfulness. The next exercise will help you become mindful of your experiences.

EXERCISE 5: The Influence of the Backstory on Your Thoughts, Feelings, and Body

GOAL The goal of this exercise is to better understand the impact of your backstories (the elaborate stories you concoct about situations) on your ability to see things as they are and to notice what is presently unfolding.

INSTRUCTIONS The next time you have an emotionally charged interaction with one of the people connected to your divorce, complete this exercise.

During the interaction, notice your thoughts. What feelings are coming up? How is your body reacting? Look deeply. Don't avoid any unpleasantness or try to change anything, but just pay attention to what's happening as it unfolds.

Do what you can to let go of your backstory—you'll probably have to do this over and over—and to look at the other person through beginner's eyes. Listen to what the other person is saying as if you've never heard him or her speak before. Watch their body language as if you were meeting for the first time. If you find yourself getting emotionally reactive, just notice it: *I'm feeling anger*, or *Oh, that's frustration*. And before you reply to the person, pause briefly and choose how you would like to respond.

Mindfully respond to this person. Do all of this compassionately.

KEEP IN MIND Your response may not have been ideal. That's okay. Observe your thoughts about it. Remember, this is an opportunity to practice external mindfulness. (If you could do this perfectly, it wouldn't be called practice, would it?) Don't use this exercise as an excuse to beat yourself up because you aren't doing it right. We are asking only that you notice what is happening both internally and externally in a gentle, compassionate way.

REFLECTIONS: Briefly describe the situation and the backstory.

Describe your feelings as you observed them in the moment.

How was your body reacting?

What was it like being in the moment with this person?

How did you respond to this person? Did you feel you had a choice in how you could respond? Why or why not?

Note: Learning to listen mindfully to others has the potential to transform your interpersonal interactions. Look for other opportunities throughout the week to employ mindful listening and see if you can begin to make mindfulness a way of life.

Mindfulness as a way of life.

Just being for a few minutes per day can strengthen your mindfulness muscle for day-to-day living. Here are some quick exercises to build a few moments of mindfulness into each and every day.

MINDFUL HAND AWARENESS EXERCISE

Grasp your hands really tight and hold for a 5 to 10 seconds, then release and pay attention to how your hands feel. Keep your attention focused on the feeling for as long as you can.

MENTAL FOCUS EXERCISE

Stare at any object and try to remain focused on just that object for as long as possible. Keep a mental watch on when your mind starts to wander, then just bring it back to the object. The longer you can remain focused, the more your mindfulness will increase.

MUSICAL STIMULI EXERCISE

Listen to your favorite song and pay attention to how it makes you feel. What emotions stir? What memories come up, and how do those memories make you feel? Engage the emotions and see where they lead.

UNDIVIDED ATTENTION EXERCISE

Do something around the house that you've never done before and do it with utter and undivided attention.

FULL SENSORY AWARENESS EXERCISE

Wherever you are, just stop and look around when safe to do so. Become aware of everything that your senses pick up. How do you feel? Do you feel over-stimulated? Do you feel anxious? Make a mental note and keep observing without judgement.

The Power of Visualization for Emotional Wellness

Through visualizing positive events from your past, you can “trick” your body and mind into producing the “feel good” chemicals that make you feel good both mentally and physically. This technique is ideal for those in trying situations that bring negative emotions to the surface. If you don't possess a strong visual memory, just go with the feeling of wellness created by happy memories.

EXERCISE 6: Visualization

GOAL To increase positive emotions and positive bodily sensations at will.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Think about a time when you felt happy and alive. It could be a memory of a carefree vacation, a joke that a friend told you, the way that your dog wags his tail when he sees you, the feel of your child's hand grasping your finger. . .something that brings a smile to your face when you think about it.
2. Once you've identified a vivid, positive memory or thought, use your imagination to enhance the colors, physical sensations, sounds, and smells. Pay attention to the positive emotion, trying to hold on to it and deepen it.
3. Now center the feeling in the center of your chest, around the heart region. Breathe evenly and deeply, imagining your breath and the thought centered in your chest.
4. Hold on to this feeling as long as you can, but for at least 5 minutes. If your thoughts wander, just gently bring them back and re-center the visualization and the emotion that it brings back to the heart area.

REFLECTION: Briefly describe your experience.

CHAPTER 4: Final Thoughts and Contact Information

Divorce is often one of the most difficult things an individual will have to go through in life. There are so many losses associated including the loss of all of roles and rules one lived with during the marriage, loss of a partner, often the loss of friendships and family members, at time, the loss of one's home and perhaps some belonging. However, one of the biggest losses is often the loss of the imagined future that was expected at the beginning of your relationship—a loss of the dream of Happily Ever After.

Moreover, there isn't much time to grieve as one is attempting to organize for the divorce itself, and if children are involved, parents are often attempting to help them through this difficult time while managing their own grief.

All of that said, the grieving process should be temporary. It may not seem temporary while you are going through it, but just as waves ebb and flow in the ocean, emotions ebb and flow as well. The grieving process is different for each person, so there is no telling how long this period will last. You will find yourself going through the stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and finally Acceptance. However, these stages don't necessarily come in order, and often come back up repeatedly while you process your grief.

It is important to note that while grief doesn't have a time table, should your depression last more than 2 weeks, you might need additional help to fully process your grief. This will be one of the most vulnerable times in your life, however, it will also be a time where clarity, resolve, and strength will be very necessary to get you and your kids, if applicable, through the practical and nitty gritty parts of separation and divorce.

As mentioned, this workbook is meant as a beginning to your journey. I hope that the exercises contained here will help in your process. Remember, should you need additional resources, go to www.TimeToThriveTherapy.com for more tools and resources, and please feel free to contact me for support and/or referrals. I am happy to help. You are why I became a therapist in the first place, so I would love to support you on your journey.

Remember, while this part of the journey can be rough, it is only a small part of your overall journey. One of my favorite quotes reads:

*Life is like a circle.
Just when you think you're at an ending,
You find yourself at a new beginning.*

Let's get you to the better part of your journey, the one that finds you stronger and better than you ever thought possible—your new beginning.

**You can contact me with questions,
comments or suggestions at:**

katherine@TimeToThriveTherapy.com

925-322-1681

www.TimeToThriveTherapy.com

Be sure to sign up on my email list to be notified when new resources become available.

Coming Soon: [Divorce Series: Breaking Free of Guilt](#)

[Divorce Series: Breaking Free of Fear](#)



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