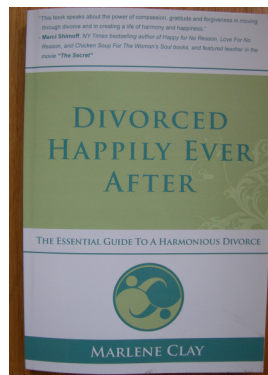


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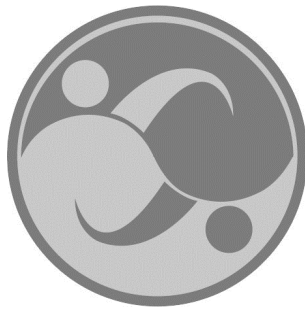
Book excerpt from:

Divorced Happily Ever After
The Essential Parents' Guide to a
Harmonious Divorce



Divorced Happily Ever After

The Essential Parents' Guide to a
Harmonious Divorce



Marlene Clay

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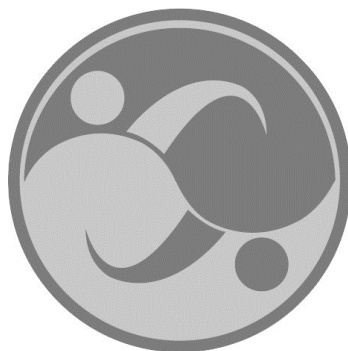
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Introduction/How to Use this Book

With all the changes occurring in your life at this time, you may feel overwhelmed, scared, alone, angry, exhausted, sad, betrayed, humiliated. This is normal and you are certainly not alone. You cannot predict what will happen tomorrow and you may feel you have no control over your emotions or your environment. I understand this. And I simply invite you to commit to reading one section in this book every week. Just one per week. All you need is five minutes and I know you can do that. Make the commitment to yourself to read one section and really pay attention to what it means to you. Notice what stands out the most, what really grabs you. If something brings up a lot of emotion, then focus on that and try to go a little deeper. That means there's something you're ready to let go of, ready to face, or need to explore further. If something makes you laugh, enjoy the moment. Feel it fully and appreciate it. Carry that with you all week.

Each section is designed to give you a focus that will help you feel more in control and less overwhelmed. Sometimes the most difficult challenge we have is how to get started. I'm taking care of that for you. You don't have to think about what to do next or where to begin. All you have to do is open this book at least once a week, read a section, and follow it.

You don't need to read the sections of the book in order. All the sections are listed in the Contents at the beginning of the book and you can pick the one that feels right to you each week. Then you can check it off so you know you've already read that one. You can even write down the date if you'd like to track your progress. If you want to read more than one a week, that's fine, but be sure to spend time on each action item. It's important to focus on the topic of each section for at least a week so you can really get the results you want. If you follow this process, you will discover that you are feeling more confident, positive, hopeful, strong, clear, and happy. Trust in the process and trust that there is value in each and every section, whether it makes sense to you at the time or not.

I also encourage you to write your experiences down as you go through this process. Writing helps us to identify what's really going on with us. When you read older entries, you'll be amazed to see how far you've come on this journey. To make it even easier for you to do this, I've left space at the end of each topic for you to jot down your thoughts, reactions, feelings, ideas, hopes, fears and desires. Feel free to write more in depth in a journal or notebook.

Congratulations on taking this very important step! You are choosing to play an active role in your life and well-being. I am honored to have the opportunity to share with you what I have found to be extremely helpful in navigating divorce and co-parenting. My goal is to support, encourage, and empower you along your journey to your own happily ever after.

I welcome your feedback, your questions, and stories of your progress and successes as you read the book. Please email me with your comments at marlene@DivorcedHappilyEverAfter.com.

Big hugs to you!

Marlene



Talk with Your Kids Often About the Divorce

(but don't give too much information)

“Sharing is loving.”

~ unknown

Children are very perceptive and will likely know if you are stressed or upset. So not saying anything about it simply allows them to worry more. Simply be open and receptive and let them know regularly that it's okay to talk about what's going on and how they're feeling.

What's most important in talking with your kids about your divorce and the changes that are happening in your lives, is reassurance. They just want to feel safe and loved. They need to know that both of you (parents) are going to be there for them, that you both love them, that you will always be their mom and dad, that none of this is their fault in any way, that it's okay for them to feel sad or angry, that it's okay for them to share those feelings with you, that you don't want them to feel like they're in the middle, that they don't have to choose between the two of you, that you understand how tough it is to get used to new things, and that you will do what you can to help them through it.

It's also very important that you do **not** tell your children all the details of what's happened between you and their other parent, that you do **not** say anything bad about their other parent, that you do **not** use them to get information about your former spouse, and that you do **not** share with them like you would with a close friend. They need to feel protected by you and should not feel that they need to protect you or be responsible for your happiness.

If your children ask you why you're not going to be married anymore, don't give them detailed reasons, particularly if there were serious transgressions like infidelity. This information, while it may be true, is very harmful to the children. They are too young (even as teenagers) to understand the complexities of adult relationships, and when they learn of "bad" behaviors of their parents, they worry that they too will be "bad" one day.

Instead let them know that you and your ex had difficulties in agreeing on things, or that the way you communicated with each other made you both feel bad, or that you argued about things or said things that weren't nice when you probably should have kept quiet, or that you didn't take the time to understand what was most important to each other. You can be honest, but without giving too much information.



Allow Yourself to Grieve

(but don't wallow in self-pity)

“Nothing that grieves us can be called little: by the eternal laws of proportion a child's loss of a doll and a king's loss of a crown are events of the same size”

~ Mark Twain

I know that coming to the decision to end a marriage is incredibly difficult and emotional. Even when you know in your gut that it's the right decision, it's still terribly sad and can be very scary. Your whole life is affected and there are so many unknowns ahead. Plus you're going to be grieving the loss of a relationship that at some point was very special to you.

When someone's spouse dies, there is an outpouring of love and support to the spouse left behind. People understand that they're grieving that loss and they expect them to be emotional. They really give them some space and time to work through it and slowly come "back to normal".

With divorce, it's different. You're typically still expected to carry on all of your previous everyday activities and responsibilities, in addition to the seemingly endless number of tasks you have to deal with related to the divorce process. And what people don't seem to realize is that you're going through an enormous loss, too.

Whether you instigated the divorce or not, whether your spouse is a jerk or not, whether you've been unhappy for years or not, you are still experiencing a loss. For many people, it's not just the loss of that person in your life and the loss of your marriage, but it's also the loss of the dreams and expectations you had with that person and your children. It's the loss of your identity as a wife or husband, the loss of your idea of a family, possibly the loss of your relationship with your in-laws, and often the loss of friends or groups you were a part of. You may be losing your house or neighborhood, too.

As you lose so much of your identity and your life as you've known it, your self-esteem, confidence and pride may be badly shaken. It's common, not only to feel hurt, but also to feel ashamed, guilty or embarrassed. You may find yourself putting yourself down or believing that others are judging you. We tend to be much more critical of ourselves than other people

actually are of us, so cut yourself some slack and don't use a lot of energy worrying about what others think.

It's normal to feel very sad when a marriage ends, regardless of the circumstances. Often people will try to cover up the sadness or pretend they're fine, but I encourage you to let yourself really feel this emotion. It's there and it's going to affect you one way or another, so I recommend that you simply allow it. By not resisting it, you can move through it more easily and quickly. If you ignore it and push it away, you're just creating baggage to carry around with you. Who wants more baggage?

Cry, talk with someone, write down what you're feeling....do something to honor and release your sadness.



Be Grateful

(even when you're having a rough day)

“Acknowledging the good that you already have in your
life is the foundation for all abundance”

~ Eckhart Tolle

Expressing gratitude can be a life-changer, and it's so easy. You can simply say out loud what you're grateful for or you can keep a gratitude journal in which you write down what you're grateful for.

Naming what you're grateful for can be a wonderful bedtime practice with your children. Each night, before bed, just take turns sharing something you are thankful for. Anything goes. There are no rules. Just name anything you are grateful for in your life. It can be butterflies, refrigerators, your cat, hugs, ice cream, sunshine, your car, your health, music, friends, whatever.

By starting this now with your kids, you're creating a lifelong habit for them. And remembering to appreciate all the beauty and love and conveniences you have in your life reminds you what really matters to you and how amazing your life is. There is always something to be thankful for.

I'd like to challenge you to write down (or name) ten things every day that you're grateful for. Ten things. If ten is a challenge, start with five and work your way up to ten. They don't all have to be different every time. The point is just to acknowledge what you appreciate and to recognize how much there is to be thankful for, no matter how tough things may seem right now.

Another wonderful exercise is to close your eyes, focusing on your breath. Then start focusing on your heart and imagine that your heart is breathing. As you focus on your breath coming in and out of your heart, remember a time in the past when you experienced deep appreciation or love. Feel that positive feeling of gratitude or love as you continue the heart-breathing. Do your best to feel that feeling in your body. Do this for 30 seconds or so. This simple technique has been scientifically proven to significantly lower blood pressure. It

reduces stress and increases clarity, inner harmony, and focus.
And it's free! Wow!

It's only natural that the more often you feel gratitude, the
more positive your outlook will become. Pretty soon you'll be
the queen or king of optimism!



Forgive

(and start with yourself)

“Forgiveness does not change the past,
but it does enlarge the future.”

~ Paul Boese

Forgive. Forgive yourself and forgive your ex.

This will likely take some soul-searching and may take some time. But when you open yourself up to this powerful act and you find that place in your heart that wants to connect and be compassionate, you will discover how liberating and empowering forgiveness is. Forgiveness is about letting go of blame and the desire to punish or get revenge. It's about empathy and love, even in the face of cruelty or betrayal.

Often people confuse forgiveness with letting others off the hook. They think that if they forgive someone who did something bad or unkind, it means that what the person did was okay. Sometimes they're afraid that the other person will then take advantage of them or continue to mistreat them if they forgive them. But forgiveness is not something you do for the other person; you do it for yourself. You are releasing yourself from the bond with the deed perpetrated by the other person. They don't even need to know when you forgive them, unless you want to tell them.

By forgiving the actions of another person who hurt you in some way, you are releasing their hold on you and allowing yourself to move forward. Regardless of what your ex may have done to you, staying in anger and resentment only allows them to continue to hurt you. Pain occurs in our lives to let us know what isn't working, but suffering is something we choose in order to prolong the pain. Suffering is what we're choosing when we hold on to judgment and blame. Letting those negative feelings go opens up space within us to receive love and joy.

Think about what happens when your child misbehaves or does something you expressly told them not to do. You might get angry and yell or discipline your child in some way that makes it clear that behavior is not acceptable. And then, later, everything is pretty much back to normal. In other words, you

forgive your child. You don't stay mad forever. Why not? Because you expect your kids to occasionally act up or rebel against you, right? They're learning and developing and will make mistakes.

The thing is, even as adults, we're all still learning and developing. Yes, we should know better when it comes to certain things, and yes, we should be more mature and more thoughtful. But the truth is, we all make poor choices sometimes and we've all hurt other people, even when we didn't mean to. And that is why compassion and forgiveness are so crucial. They are a way of acknowledging ourselves and our own inadequacies and imperfections, and caring for other human beings just as we do our children.

What can you forgive yourself for? Let go of any guilt you are harboring and love yourself.

A series of 20 horizontal lines, evenly spaced, providing a template for writing.



Focus on What's Working

(and reframe what's not)

“There are always going to be critics sniping from the side.
It's never been my way to focus on that – you have to
focus on the positive and trust yourself.”

~ Jessica Rowe

We tend to focus on what's **not** working well, and not pay enough attention to what **is** going well in our lives. It's not our fault. Most of us are programmed to do this from an early age. We were told over and over what not to do, to stop doing this or stop doing that. We got in trouble when we did the wrong thing and that got a lot of attention. And the media bombards us with negative stories.

So when we want to make changes or improvements in our lives, we're typically trying to quit doing something that's hard to quit, or we're trying to start doing something new because we're unhappy with our current situation. We tend to think that if we're unhappy with something, especially with ourselves, that we can just decide to do things differently ("better") and then life will be great, right?

But it doesn't happen. The focus is too much on what's not working and how much better things will be once we achieve some goal that requires drastic change.

With resolutions, we typically word them in the future tense, right? Like, I'm going to go to the gym at least three days a week, or I'm going to stop eating junk food, or I'm going to work fewer hours so I can spend more time with my kids, and so on. It's like we're playing mind games with ourselves. "I'm going to..." sends the message that at some point it is going to happen, so it kind of lets us off the hook for **now**.

Yes, it's important to be aware of our weaknesses and to strive to improve our skills, our relationships, ourselves. But how we go about it and the mindset we adopt can determine how successful we are.

People who achieve a lot don't focus on their mistakes or challenges. They take what's working well for them and they see where they can do more of that. And they are always learning from what doesn't work well. Rather than seeing it as



Be a Role Model

(but don't try to be perfect)

“This is our purpose: to make as meaningful as possible this life that has been bestowed upon us; to live in such a way that we may be proud of ourselves; to act in such a way that some part of us lives on.”

~ Oswald Spengler

In all that you do, be mindful of what you are teaching your children. It may sound cliché, but your actions really do speak louder than words. Remember that your kids will pay attention to what you do, regardless of what you say. And if you tell them to be a certain way or do a certain thing, but you don't adhere to those same rules, they will notice. Children are very impressionable and pick up on all that is going on around them like little sponges. In fact, they are often far more aware of what is happening between you and your ex than you may realize. They learn how to interact with others and what normal behavior is by observing us in our everyday lives.

We can all think back to things our parents did or told us, or said repeatedly, that have affected our lives in some way. Many beliefs and ways of living are passed on to us from our parents, including some we don't like or agree with. Many of us struggle for years to break free from old patterns or painful memories. There's no question that your children will have some of these same issues with you as they mature and become adults. But having that awareness gives you an advantage. You can pay attention to what you're saying and doing on a regular basis, and you can think about how you may affect your children. As you are more conscious of your actions and your words, you can begin to change them if you choose to. And as you go through challenging situations, you can decide what you want to teach your children and what you want them to learn from you for the times when they are faced with challenges in their own lives.

This may seem like a very dark, tough time for you right now, but I invite you to think about the opportunities that you have to teach some amazing qualities and characteristics to your children. You can be an amazing role model for them. Refrain from making negative comments about your former partner, even if they say negative things about you. Show compassion, understanding, and patience. All of these traits will be passed on to your children.

Communicate in a positive, effective manner to demonstrate your desire to work together and do what's best for everyone involved. Your children will see that and they will learn to do the same in their own interactions as they go through life. Take a stand for what you believe in and what matters most to you. You'll be modeling that behavior for your kids. I know it's hard, and I know it may seem right now that it doesn't make much of a difference, but trust me, it does, and it will. And when your children are adults, they will remember how you behaved and what you did or didn't do that helped your family get through a trying time. They will appreciate and respect you and want to emulate you, as they will see what a difference it has made in their lives. And you can be proud of what you've done and have no regrets. It's totally worth it. So think about what you're teaching and modeling before you think or act. Decide what you want your children to learn from you and how you want to be remembered. Be a role model to everyone around you.



Celebrate Your Successes

(and learn from any failures)

“The more you praise and celebrate your life,
the more there is in life to celebrate.”

~ Oprah Winfrey

We all tend to be good at finding every single little thing we haven't done perfectly and going over in our minds how we might have done things better or differently. Our inner critic gets a lot of action and a lot of attention. When we're going through a challenging life experience like divorce, this is often even more common.

So I'm giving you permission right now to quiet that inner voice that likes to find fault and criticize, and to make a point of acknowledging everything that you're doing well. Look at what you're accomplishing and where you're making progress and give yourself credit for it.

Take some time at least once a week – and especially whenever you're feeling down – to make a list of your successes. They can be big or small and they don't have to be tangible. Maybe you held back when you were tempted to say something antagonistic to your spouse, maybe you had a great laugh yesterday with a friend, perhaps you completed another section in this book, or completed some paperwork that you needed to take care of.

When you have done something that makes you feel good, that gives you a sense of relief or moves you the tiniest bit forward, then celebrate it. Go ahead and pat yourself on the back for a job well done. For some of the bigger items or those that have the most meaning for you, actually have a celebration of some kind. You can celebrate alone, or with someone else. Just make it fun and meaningful because the point is to feel good about yourself and recognize that you really are making progress.

It can help to share your successes with others. Tell a close friend or relative who will be happy for you and celebrate with you. You can sing and dance in your living room, have your favorite meal, go out with a friend, get a massage, or whatever helps you feel special and appreciated.



Rid Your Space of Negativity

(even when it comes from your friends or family)

“Keep away from those who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you believe that you too can become great”

~ Mark Twain

When your friends and family find out that you're getting divorced, their reactions may vary quite a bit but many of them will want to help in some way. They will want you to feel better. But their ideas of what might help you could be very different from what you actually need right now. The last thing you want right now is to feel overwhelmed by other people telling you what you should and shouldn't do, all about their other friend's nightmare divorce, or how awful your former partner is and how you could make their life hell.

What you need are people who truly understand where you're coming from and the outcome you're seeking for your family, people who honor and respect your wishes and your commitment to keeping this divorce experience harmonious and positive.

You can set boundaries with people that you know well by sharing with them how important it is to you to keep things amicable and provide the healthiest environment you can for your kids. Ask for their support in this. You can tell them that it would help you a lot to stay focused on your goal if they wouldn't say anything negative about your ex, and if they would only offer words of encouragement.

Just remember – how they respond to you is not about you, it's about them. So if they don't respect the boundaries that you set and they continue to bring negativity into the situation, it is because of their own issues and does not represent their feelings for you. People often try to bring those around them down to their level in order to feel better about themselves and their own decisions. And let's face it; today most people expect divorce to be ugly and nasty, and for the two parents to dislike each other for eternity. You're on a different path.

If they can't fully support you on this path, you will need to cut them loose. I know this is very difficult, especially when it's someone close to you, but you must hold fast to your vision, to

what you know is right for you. It doesn't necessarily mean the end of your relationship, but it might mean less contact (or a different type of contact) for a while. And when you stand in your integrity and don't let them "bring you down," they may eventually come around.



Be Compassionate

(but don't be a doormat)

“It is lack of love for ourselves that inhibits our compassion toward others. If we make friends with ourselves, then there is no obstacle to opening our hearts and minds to others.”

~ unknown

Being compassionate is about seeing people from the inside instead of the outside. It's about connecting with them on a soul level, rather than just a human level. It's about understanding that at our core we are all the same – we are all one – and we share this human experience to learn and grow, even when the growing is difficult or uncomfortable. Being compassionate is not about being a doormat and allowing people to treat you like crap, and it's not about trying to save other people either.

Showing compassion means caring at a deep level and understanding that everyone has their own challenges and fears that they're dealing with. Compassion means you don't judge, you don't take everything personally and you don't have the need to strike back when someone attacks you in some way.

Realize that people do mean, hurtful things to others because they are hurting. They act out of fear or pain or self-loathing. They want to punish others or themselves because they believe (subconsciously) that it will make them feel better. It may appear that their goal is to hurt you or make your life miserable, but deep down, their true goal is to get rid of their own misery and pain so they can be happier. Not realizing this, they continue to act in ways that may temporarily bring them satisfaction, but ultimately prolong their pain and unhappiness.

When you treat someone with compassion when they are hurting, their deep longing for love and joy and acceptance (that we all have) will be awakened and they will be more open to connecting in a positive manner. So the next time your former partner is rude or inconsiderate or tries to start a fight, take a deep breath and think about how bad they must be feeling. Respond in a calm, caring voice and send positive vibes their way.

Spend some time each day envisioning the people in your life who are being negative; imagine them with beautiful white light

surrounding them and filling them up. Imagine them feeling joyful and content. Picture all the negativity pushed out of them by the white light and then falling away. Do the same for yourself. Then imagine the white light forming a bridge between you. Whenever you interact with them you can bring up this image of the white light between you that only allows positive words and feelings to get through.

Remember that a person who has inner peace and is happy with themselves is not mean to others. They have no need to be and they genuinely want everyone else to be happy. If you're feeling angry or wanting to get back at someone, look inside and see what's really going on. And be compassionate with yourself!



Get Curious

(and see what you can learn)

“Seize the moment of excited curiosity on any subject to solve your doubts; for if you let it pass, the desire may never return, and you may remain in ignorance.”

~ William Wirt

It's amazing what can open up for you when you open your heart and you let yourself be curious and interested. We tend to be more closed off and defensive when we're upset, scared, or angry, and then we miss opportunities and possibilities that present themselves, sometimes right in front of us, because we can't see them.

I invite you to practice by noticing how you're feeling when you're having conversations about, or even thinking about, your situation. Are your arms folded across your chest or your teeth clenched? Do you feel anger, frustration, fear, or confusion? Notice whether or not your chest feels tight. If any of those are true, close your eyes, relax your shoulders, and take some deep breaths. Concentrate on breathing for a couple minutes and then focus on your heart as if you're breathing in and out through your heart.

Then focus on being curious and interested in what's happening in your life. Think of whatever situation you've experienced recently that was upsetting, or something you're dealing with right now that's challenging, and ask yourself about it starting with "I wonder." You can say "I wonder what I can learn from this?" or "I wonder how I can respond that will result in the best outcome?", "I wonder why I'm so angry about this?" By turning it around to an "I wonder...", you become more curious automatically and you think about the situation from a completely different angle. And when you ask yourself a question, the human brain can't help but try to come up with an answer to it, which results in a whole new line of thinking. New ways of thinking produce new actions and new results, and things begin to shift.

I encourage you to notice when you're interacting with your former partner, or dealing with any stressful situation, how your body feels. If you're feeling constricted and closed, or emotional, just breathe into it and then start asking yourself about it. "I wonder why I'm so angry right now?", "I wonder

why I feel sick?”, “I wonder why I want to scream?”, “I wonder why this feels so scary?” And begin answering those questions.

Really make an attempt to relax in the moment and open up to what may be presenting itself that you're not seeing at first. You can ask, “I wonder what opportunity is here that I haven't seen yet?”, “I wonder how I can change this situation by being more compassionate, or more understanding, or more relaxed, or asking questions, or just listening?”, “I wonder what the other person needs right now from me so they can feel more relaxed?”, “I wonder why that person is so angry?”, or “I wonder what led to this situation?”

Start practicing and see what develops. See how your perspective changes using curiosity and how that changes your life.



Keep a Journal

(and don't hold back)

“I write entirely to find out what I’m thinking, what I’m looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.”

~ Joan Didion

Keeping a journal may seem simple, or even silly, but don't underestimate the power of writing. By putting your thoughts and feelings into words, you will gain clarity and insight, learn about your inner self, and be able to release some of what you've been holding inside.

What you write is not important. And how you write it is even less important. All that matters is that you write. Get quiet for a few minutes, take some deep breaths, then write down anything that comes to mind. It doesn't even need to make sense to you. Just write it.

Nobody else will read it (so keep it in a safe place), so don't worry about how crazy it may sound or how personal it is. In fact, if there are things you're uncomfortable sharing with others, a journal is a wonderful way to get them out. It's not good for you to keep everything inside, so let it all out. And if you feel like crying as you write, then cry.

If poetry is your thing or you feel like drawing a picture, go for it – it's your journal and there are no rules.

If your ex pisses you off, write about it so you can avoid reacting and fighting about it. If your child does something that really moves you, write about it. If you're scared about your finances and don't know what you're going to do, write about it. If you have a positive interaction with your ex, write about it. Write what happened and why.

Periodically go back and read older entries to discover patterns and themes, and to see the progress you've made.

Journaling can be done any time you feel the urge and it can also be a regular routine if you like. You can journal before bed or when you first wake up. You might want to journal at lunch time or every Sunday. Do what works best for you.



Co-Parent Like You Mean it

(but don't try to out-do the other parent)

“Some parents really bring their children up;
others let them down.”

~ unknown

Co-parenting is incredibly important for your children's wellbeing. This means, whether your kids are with you most of the time, with their other parent most of the time, or split their time evenly between you, *both* of you need to be involved in the kids' lives and in any decisions that are made about them.

Having one parent do all the real parenting while the other one just takes the kids for fun outings, is not really co-parenting. Buying your kids lots of things every time you see them is not strong parenting either and can put the children in the middle between you. You may think that by doing really great things for your kids that they'll like you better or want you more than their other parent, but it rarely works like that. In fact, it can actually cause your child more pain and confusion, because they may now feel that they're obligated to show you extra love or they may feel very protective of the other parent who perhaps can't afford such gifts.

Your children will love you both if you both simply love them, spend time with them, listen to them, laugh with them, and reassure them that you're there for them. In other words, just be their mom or dad. It's not a competition and you can't buy love. Also, don't decide that rules go out the window because you feel sorry for your kids or feel guilty about getting divorced. This will not benefit them and will lead to more issues down the road. The more consistent you can be, the better. This lets them know that just because you aren't married anymore, not *everything* has changed.

The more your children feel like the two of you are on the same page, the better. They will feel more secure and they will be less likely to try to play you against each other. If you are both involved in making decisions about the kids and the kids know that you are in agreement on the decisions, they will feel more connected to both of you and less confused about what's going on and who's in charge.

In other words, your children will still feel like they have two parents, and that will mean the world to them. So put aside your differences and give your kids what they really want and need to grow and thrive – both of you.



Choose Happiness

(and happiness will choose you)

“I’ve learned from experience that the greater part of our
happiness or misery depends on our dispositions
and not on our circumstances.”

~ Martha Washington

When it comes to divorce, do your best to steer away from negativity. Yes, divorce is difficult. Yes, divorce is incredibly painful and sad. Yes, divorce is complicated. Yes, divorce can be heart-wrenching. But it doesn't mean your life is over. It certainly shouldn't mean your children's lives are ruined.

It all comes down to a choice. How do you choose to respond to your circumstances? Do you want to be angry and stressed and miserable for many years to come because your marriage ended? Is that what you choose? Or do you want to be able to laugh and teach your children how to enjoy life, no matter the situation? We all have this choice, every day, every minute.

And what you focus on, expands. So if you focus on the negative in your life, you'll get more of it. Notice the people you spend the most time with. If most of them are unhappy/negative/complaining a lot, then chances are good that you are too. If this is the case, try elevating the conversation and mood and see what happens. If they'd rather whine and complain, it might be time to find some new folks to hang out with.

What does "happily ever after" mean? Certainly not the everything's-always-perfect ideal that fairytales seem to promise. Nobody's life is perfect. Life is ever-changing and we all have our share of challenges. It's how we respond to them that makes all the difference. Happiness doesn't mean having lots of money, or living in a fancy house, or even having great friends. True happiness comes from within and it's about your attitude, your outlook on life. It's more of a constant. I am very happy. I have rough days sometimes and my life is far from perfect, but I am happy. Am I smiling and laughing **all** the time? No. Will I ever love cleaning the house? I doubt it. But I know that life is so much better when I choose to be happy over unhappy.

I make a conscious choice that my external circumstances will not determine my overall well-being and love for life. And I continue to make that choice over and over again.

Marci Shimoff wrote a book called "Happy for No Reason" in which she shares tips and habits of happy people. She explains that everyone has a happiness set-point that is their natural level of happiness. So, yes, some people are just naturally happier than others, but there are habits you can practice that will increase your happiness level, no matter where you are starting out.

My challenge to you: Choose to live happily. You won't regret it. ☺



About the Author

Marlene Clay is a certified coach, author, speaker and founder of Divorced Happily Ever After, an organization dedicated to transforming the divorce process from a battle to a more harmonious experience that allows people to move forward with dignity and confidence.

Using her experiences as a child of divorce and as a divorced parent, along with her coaching expertise, Marlene works with couples or individuals to create a vision of the life they want for themselves (and their children if they have them), with strategies and steps to get from where they are today to their own happily ever after.

She firmly believes that we all create our own realities and that happiness is a choice. All that Marlene does is based on the premise that we choose (consciously or subconsciously) and create our lives as they are. Her goal is to help empower people with this knowledge and awareness so they can be more conscious of their decisions and desires. Compassion, gratitude and forgiveness play a huge role in this and are integral to what she teaches and shares with others.

Visit www.DivorcedHappilyEverAfter.com to learn more about Marlene's personal story, services, products, and programs.