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The Perfect Divorce

Your family is going to look different after divorce, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing. Here are ten steps to help you re-create your family as a happy, functional, two-home family post-divorce.

By Karen Winter

I have been asked frequently how my family has such a great relationship. People are often astonished by the incredible relationship I have with Javier, my former husband. They have recommended others speak to me, because I had what they called the "perfect divorce". This always made me smile, because I came to realize that I did indeed have the perfect divorce. It led me to where I am now and sent me on an inward healing journey.

The reality of my divorce is that it was no different from most marriages that end. We had tremendous feelings of loss, fear, anger, hurt, and sadness. However, my current relationship with my children's father functions almost like a marriage. It requires time, consideration, and clear communication because we are still a family; we are a two-home family. I finally realized that even after our divorce, my children's father and I would be together forever; we would be grandparents together. I know both of us would wish to remain very much a part of our children's lives. This key realization led me to imagine a vision for what I wanted to create in my family.

The following steps illustrate the path I took to re-create my family after divorce and get back to a place of love.

Step 1

The first step in the re-creation process is setting intentions for who you are and what you want. You must decide and declare this to the universe to receive support for your vision. Do not confuse setting an intention with setting a goal for success. This is about who you are, not what you do. It is important to understand the ramifications of focusing your thoughts and energies in a direction. If you want to see your intentions, look at the results of your life. This practice erodes the power of excuses, "victim" or otherwise, that we often use. This is the moment to claim the power of responsibility and to create consciously. There are no limits to this power. The impact of setting an intention is enormous. The universe cannot respond to you until you give it direction. We are made up of energy: our thoughts are energy we send out into the world. The universe will respond to the energy we send out. Your thoughts create your reality. And a thought can be changed.

Step 2

The next step is letting go of the old vision of your family. Human beings want three things: to be loved, to belong, and to be valued. A divorce puts all three in question and is therefore an enormous, painful rupture. We must process the loss that occurs at the end of a marriage. There is grief and we must let ourselves feel this sadness fully in order to let it go. We had expectations of what our love relationships would bring to us. After a divorce, it is time to let this old vision go in order to move forward in a healthy way. We must acknowledge and deal with any fear that might arise with the enormous changes we are going through.

One way to release anger and hurt is to step into your partner's shoes. Try to see your relationship from his/her perspective. This exercise is not to judge him/her but to understand where they have come from and what they might be feeling. The objective is to move from anger to compassion. Often, we find they were feeling the same things that we had been feeling. I no longer felt angry toward my husband when I took the time to see his perspective. Somewhere under the anger is hurt, and beneath that is the feeling of being unloved. If we can get to this level the real work can begin.

Step 3

An enormous part of the re-creating process is learning to accept the gifts of a relationship. In order to do this, we must first take responsibility for our part in a relationship. We, just as our partners, are responsible for what we create. Just after my divorce, I blamed Javier for most of the hurt and anger I was experiencing. I now know I contributed to the nature of our relationship. Taking responsibility for me meant making it safe to really look at who I had been in my marriage. Only by doing this work could I truly move forward, begin to heal, and then make changes. I'd had many fears and unrealistic expectations of what marriage would bring. This had greatly impacted my relationship with Javier. I realized that he and I mirrored each other emotionally. We attract those who mirror who we are or our beliefs about ourselves. The presentation might be somewhat different, but there will be similarities between us and our mates.

We must understand why we chose the mates we have. Only through understanding ourselves and our needs can we begin to heal the part of us that was open to this experience -- and insure that we will not have to experience this rupture again.

Step 4

Getting back to a place of love requires forgiveness. Most people assume this is for the other person's benefit, but it is for our own. Forgiveness frees us from pain and anger. If we do not let go of the past, we carry that negativity into all our present relationships including our primary relationship with our children. If we do not process anger and release it over time, it can make our physical bodies ill and take away our power to be fully present in our lives. Forgiveness helped my parenting partner and me to move forward. I no longer blamed either one of us for my actions. Instead, I began to have compassion for who we were when we were married. This helped us to re-create our relationship in a positive manner without the past continually coming between us.

Step 5

Re-creating families after divorce requires releasing old labels and mindsets. We must reform our often negative views on divorce and consider the unlimited possibilities of re-creating in a positive way. Much of the judgment toward divorce stems from an attachment to form and arbitrary numbers. We have collectively agreed that long-term marriages are better than short-term marriages, regardless of whether they are fulfilled or happy. A relationship is not diminished in value due to its ending. When a marriage ends, it does not preclude a meaningful relationship between the two people involved. However, it must be acknowledged that this is a choice.

A crucial part of creating change is support. Creating change requires commitment, attention, and focus. A key element is a support system of some kind. This may be a formal group led by a professional, a church group or your own family who can support your vision and help you stay on your path. My family and friends were integral to my successfully re-creating my family. I shared with them the vision I had and asked them for help in getting to a positive place. They helped as much as possible during challenging times to keep me focused on my long-term plans.

Step 6

A crucial element to re-creating is letting our children know what is about to happen and what changes will occur in their lives. This can be one of the most challenging steps for parents to take. We often fear hurting our children and will delay communicating with them for long periods of time. Children need to know what is happening in their families in order to know what to expect. They are intuitive people, and they know when things are well and when they are not. When we share the truth with our children (without adult details), the children will know they can rely on their parents to protect them and prepare them for whatever lies ahead. This lays the ground work for trust in a parent/child relationship.

Our children must continue to feel they are a part of a family. They need to feel loved and valued. In order to give this gift to our children, we must first create it for ourselves. We cannot give what we do not have to offer. When we can accept ourselves and our past marriage partners with love and compassion, we can show our children the way by example.

Step 7

Once we have shared the truth with our children, we need to honor their feelings and reactions. I discovered early on that my children would need to process the changes occurring in their lives just as I did. When my children express anger or sadness over our living arrangements, I use reflective listening skills and allow their feelings to be their experience in that moment. In order to do this I repeat what the children have said in my own words to let them know I have understood them. Children, like adults, need to have their experiences validated. Feelings are neutral, and it is natural to experience a wide range of emotions. Our job as parents is to teach our children how to move through the moment and process emotions rather than judging them. What we most want when we are upset is to be heard. Teaching our children to express their emotions enables them to release them instead of repressing them.

Step 8

Families experiencing divorce often face the possibility of new partners joining our families. When Javier became involved in a serious relationship with Ingrid, we all went through a change. I realized that my choices would greatly affect the road our relationship would take. I chose not to compete with this new woman who was joining my family. This immediately opened the door for Ingrid and my children to establish their own relationship together. It also helped her and me to forge our own positive relationship. Our choices of accepting and working with new partners will have an enormous impact on our lives. I believe our feelings toward another often reflect how we feel about ourselves. One woman in my workshop realized that she would have a stronger bond with her family by embracing her parenting partner's new wife than by resisting her.

The language we use to describe our families has a big impact. Do we use terms such as "broken homes" or "failed marriages," or demean our parenting partners? All of these negative terms will have a negative effect on our thoughts and, subsequently, our emotions. When we go through a divorce, we often succumb to a scarcity mentality, feeling as though there is not enough of anything. This can lead us to act in negative ways, even when this might affect our children. We often fear three things: there is not enough money, time, or love. We then fight over money, material belongings, custody, and the addition of new partners. An important part of my healing after my divorce was to work on releasing these fears and creating a new thought pattern. My new mantras were: there is enough love,

there is enough time, and there is enough money. This practice greatly altered my thoughts, my emotions and my subsequent behaviors. The absence of fear freed me to create in a more positive way.

Step 9

The next step to re-creating your life after divorce is getting in touch with yourself and understanding who you really are. It is important to take care of ourselves just as we take care of our children. If we do not take care of our spiritual, mental, and physical needs, we will not be giving our children a healthy model nor insuring our continued ability to take care of them. The practice of self-care is one of the most challenging to do really well or consistently. I speak about this in every class I teach, really stressing its importance, yet self-care can be the first thing I omit when I have increased stress or become overwhelmed. This is when we most need good care. The patterns that we continue to re-create in our lives exemplify the level of belief in ourselves and the existence of self-love. We seem to spend most of our lives trying to change the image we have of ourselves. Our views are often shown to us in the partners we choose to share life with us. We must learn to thank these partners because they can teach us well about ourselves if we take the time to understand the information revealed. Even though a marriage ends, it can still offer many gifts.

Step 10

This step is the culmination of all the previous steps. This is the knowledge that it is about the journey and not the final destination. Creating a healthy relationship requires time and dedication, but it is possible. Often, our relationships are cyclical in nature, moving through many different stages and cycles, and still we must have our intentions to help guide the way. I have learned so much about myself by sharing life with my parenting partner, Javier. I have discovered many wonderful things about myself. I have learned to shine light on the parts I wanted to hide because I thought they were unlovable. After doing this, I suddenly realized there are no parts that are worth hiding. I have changed how I create in certain ways, because the old patterns no longer work for me. I can release old patterns of expectations, because my needs are no longer the same as when I was married. I am still learning to re-create with my parenting partner, and I continue to learn about myself through this experience with him. I am grateful for this life experience, which has challenged me to grow, move forward, and create a vision for myself. I have learned to respect and love myself and to offer this to others in my life. This is my journey.

Karen Winter is the author of [What Would Love Do Now?](#), a book designed to help ex-spouses create a happy two-home family for themselves and their children. Sharing her personal experiences with divorce, Winter encourages you to re-examine your relationship with your ex-spouse, and to take responsibility: both for the part you played in your marriage breakdown and for the part you can play in creating a great co-parenting relationship post-divorce.



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