

Redefining Your Relationship with Your Ex Following Your Divorce

Objective

To define the role your ex-spouse will have in your life after divorce.

You Should Know

When you are going through divorce, the thought of maintaining a relationship with your ex is probably the last thing on your mind. However, you will certainly need to maintain a relationship if you have children, even if they are grown. If you don't have children, there are still many reasons to maintain some relationship with your ex.

There is no simple formula for defining your relationship with your ex, and it is not always an easy process. Several issues must be considered, including the circumstances surrounding your divorce, whether or not you have children, your ex's past and current behavior, and your own preferences. Keep in mind you can always choose to redefine the relationship, and you can establish new boundaries as needed. Here are a few possibilities for you to consider. It is ultimately up to you to decide what is best and how you want to go forward.

- 1. Remain Cordial.** If your divorce was amicable, you can keep your relationship somewhat distant, but polite. You treat your ex like an acquaintance – you are not enemies, yet you are not friends. You might decide to remain cordial because you work with your ex. Remaining cordial and gracious allows you to retain your position in your social circles while establishing firm boundaries.
- 2. Become Friends.** It is possible to become friends with your former spouse, and it is a healthy way to maintain the bond that brought you together. This sort of relationship can only work if the level of emotion has declined, and both people are interested in maintaining a friendship. Of course, there needs to be no risk of physical or emotional abuse.
- 3. Co- or Parallel Parenting.** Co-parenting is a collaborative approach to raising children together after divorce, and it requires maturity and a commitment to prioritizing the well-being and best interests of your children. It is not always easy but it has several advantages. Co-parenting allows both parents to have the opportunity to be part of their children's lives – creating a strong support system for children to thrive. With the help of a detailed custody agreement, shared calendars, and even mobile apps, it is possible to develop a situation where both parents are equally involved in the day-to-day lives of their children. Parallel parenting involves minimal communication with your ex. Rules for children might differ between households, and each parent agrees not to undermine the others authority. There is less of a united front then when you were together.
- 4. No Contact.** If you did not have children together, there might not be a reason to maintain contact. If you prefer to end the relationship, you can detach from your ex physically and virtually. Delete your ex on social media, distance yourself from the social circles you two once

shared, and keep physical distance. In cases where divorce occurred due to domestic violence, abuse, or toxic behavior, it might be safest to cut your ex out entirely to protect yourself. You might want to seek legal or mental health advice on how to do this.

How do you want to redefine your relationship with your ex? List what you want and what you don't want.

Other Things to Consider

Set Boundaries. If you intend to remain cordial or become friends with your ex, be sure to set clear boundaries and rules about behavior. Rules could include how and where you interact and even what you want to talk about.

If you share custody, it is important to keep your children out of the middle, including parental communications and tasks. Ask yourself:

- Am I comfortable with my ex coming into my home, or do I prefer if he/she just honks when outside to pick up the kids?
- How do we negotiate late drop-offs and pickups?
- Am I comfortable with my ex calling me to vent?
- Is it best for us to only communicate via text or email?

Without clear boundaries, you might find yourself engaged in old patterns – arguments, conflict, overreliance, or manipulation.

Let Go. Sometimes it is hard to accept change, even if it is change you want or need. But you are now independent, even if you share the responsibility of raising children together. Cutting the intimate ties that connected you and your ex can be difficult and requires maturity and self-control. If you struggle with this, rely on your support system, family, and close friends.

Remember, nothing is set in stone. You can decide that no contact is best for you as you heal and grieve, but someday you might want to be friends with your ex. You might try a certain type of relationship with your ex and then realize it does not work for you. If you raise children together, you might spend several years co-parenting, and then decide to sever the connection with your ex once your children become adults. You can change your mind and adapt as circumstances change.

What to Do

Consider the following questions as you redefine your relationship with your ex.

Is it safe to continue interacting with your ex? _____

Has your ex shown he/she will treat you with respect? _____

If you answered "no" to the above questions, you might choose to limit or sever contact with your ex.

If you are ready to forgive your ex for some or all of the behaviors that led to the divorce, you can redefine the ways that he/she acted. Use the following chart to question old assumptions about your ex. Briefly describe your past assumptions, or roles you assigned your ex, that were not helpful. Then, redefine the past and your relationship with your ex to help you decide what your relationship will look like moving forward.

Past Assumptions or Roles	New Way to Define My Ex
<i>Example: My ex was a workaholic and he rarely spent time with me.</i>	<i>My ex wanted us to be financially secure and did not realize he was neglecting his family.</i>

Review the chart and reflect on how you can redefine the role your ex-spouse will have in your life moving forward. Be specific.

Considering all of the information above, what role would you like your ex to play in your life? Explain.

What type of relationship do you see yourself having with your ex-spouse (*friends, remain cordial, and so forth*)? _____

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you redefine your relationship with your ex? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?
