

# Do You Complain Too Much About Your Divorce?

## Objective

To identify if you are complaining too much, to become aware of the function complaining serves, and to find alternatives to this behavior.

## What to Know

Talking about your struggles with someone you trust can be helpful, and sometimes you just might need to vent. But habitually complaining can be counterproductive, and research has shown that compulsive complaining harms your brain and overall health. There is a difference between constructively processing your feelings and complaining. How can you tell if complaining has become a habit? Here are some signs:

- you frequently talk about your divorce or ex-spouse in negative terms
- you discuss your divorce-related struggles with people who are not equipped to support you, like your children or acquaintances you run into in public
- people avoid you or quickly change the subject when you bring up your divorce
- you are getting tired of thinking about and talking about your divorce

If you think you complain too much, avoid beating yourself up. Instead of judging yourself, examine why you might have developed this habit and offer yourself compassion. Check off if you can relate to any of the following:

You want or need something to change – you are just unsure what to do.

You bond with others who are going through a divorce or complain about their ex-spouses.

You want others to know how much you are suffering and understand what you are going through.

You hope others will agree with your perception of events. When others agree with you, you feel your actions are justified.

Complaining has become a habit.

Complaints can be in your head as well as in conversations with other people. Check off the statement that best describes how often you complain.

I never complain.

I occasionally complain.

I complain more often than I would like.

I have perfected the art of complaining.

The good news is you can train yourself to stop complaining. It is a choice to complain – not an automatic or uncontrollable reaction. Follow these steps.

**1. Define your complaints.** Focus on what is bothering you, and whether you have valid reasons for complaining.

**2. Monitor and track your complaints.** Determine how often you complain and track triggers. You might quickly realize you complain more often than you believed! In addition to writing down your complaints, note who you expressed these grievances to, how they reacted, and how you felt after complaining. After a week or so, you will be able to identify your patterns.

**3. Remove yourself.** One of the easiest, most effective ways to stop complaining is to remove yourself from stressful situations and stop engaging with toxic or negative people. Take a break, but if you cannot leave a situation, schedule time to clear your head. For example, take a walk or meditate for a few minutes. Evaluate the people you spend time with because you may begin to mirror the negative traits of others who whine or complain.

**4. Turn complaints into action.** Learn to complain constructively, where you do something about what is bothering you. Try:

- focusing on feelings instead of facts to invite others to understand.
- talking through what is frustrating you so the listener can relate and empathize with you.
- sandwiching your complaint by placing it between two positive statements.
- telling others how a situation affects you so they understand where you are coming from and how they can potentially help.

**5. Find the positives.** Do something positive to replace the negative. Write about the problem and how it makes you feel in a journal. Include possible solutions and any positive aspects of the situation. Get into the habit of practicing gratitude, which can help you appreciate what you do have and recognize that things may not be as bad as you think.

**6. Use thought-stopping.** When you start to complain, visualize a stop sign and move on to a different thought. Change how you communicate by using the "but-positive" technique. For example, you might say, "My divorce was brutal, but I'm grateful it's over."

Complaining is a sign that something needs to change, so focus your energy on what you can do. This worksheet will help you find alternatives to over-complaining.

## What to Do

Take a few moments to write down your complaints.

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Do you have valid reasons to complain? If yes, list them.

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Perhaps you are unaware of how often you complain. Check with loved ones who are willing to give you honest feedback. Who can you ask? Talk to them, then write down what they said.

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Can you think of more effective ways to get your needs met (other than complaining)? If so, write them down.

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Use the chart on the next page for one week. Write down every time you catch yourself complaining. Describe the complaint and what triggered you. Note if the complaining happened inside your own head, or if you complained to another person. Describe how you felt after complaining, and if you did anything to stop yourself. Finally, write down what happened, such as whether you solved the problem.



## Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you reduce your complaining? Why or why not?

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Did you feel better when you chose an alternative to complaining? Explain.

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What are some ways you can remind yourself to avoid over-complaining?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

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