

## Five things I've learned as a divorcee in my 30s

It was the most 'movie' moment of my life.

Me, protagonist one, lying on the couch, a sick, snotty mess. Him, on his day off, relaxing on the chair next to me as we watched something on TV. Then he had a shower. The moments after that shower changed our lives forever.

"I'm not happy," he said from the bottom of the stairs. I felt like I was about to throw up, pass out, laugh, scream, cry and run out the door all at once.

I didn't see this coming. We had our issues, what long-term couple doesn't, but I didn't think we were here.

Over the next few hours there were tears and talking and three times I asked, "Is this it? Are we done?" Every time the answer was yes. Fourteen years together, just shy of our eighth wedding anniversary, and it was done.

We did try to work on it. We committed to three months of marriage counselling and didn't even last four weeks. I kept repeating the words 'separated', 'divorced', 'divorcee' in my head trying to get used to how that felt. All I felt was shame. I was ashamed I couldn't make this work. That I couldn't keep him happy. That I wasn't enough and now the world was going to know it. It was debilitating.

So I kept it quiet. My inner circle knew, some of my colleagues knew, but most people I couldn't bring myself to tell.

Until a moment of weakness and a video on TikTok. Within minutes of posting, people from around the world started sharing their stories of separation in their 30s. The common theme in the hundreds of stories that were shared was a feeling of shame and stigma. When I publicly announced my separation via social media and my daily ABC radio show, the same thing happened again.

So began my mission to shift that shame, to start talking about it because when your relationship has just broken down, the last thing you need is to feel alone.

So with the help of my listeners, followers and therapist, here are the five things I've learnt since becoming a 30-something soon-to-be divorcee.

### **1. You aren't alone in this**

I have no idea where the stigma feeling came from, but it needs to go in the bin! It didn't matter the gender or type of relationship — every single one of the people who shared their stories with me felt this stigma.

Separating from a marriage in your 30s shouldn't come with added shame. It happens — apparently to a lot of us! By feeling like you should go it alone or hide your story or downplay what you're living through, it inhibits your ability to heal and process and grow.

So screw that stigma! Talk about it if you want. Use the word divorcee and if people come at you with judgement, know that's on them and not on you.

## **2. Marriage counselling is hard work**

I have watched every single episode of the documentary series Couples Therapy. Nothing prepared me for the reality of this process. I knew things wouldn't be fixed overnight but I didn't expect them to get so much worse.

Our counsellor was amazing but to put the rawest emotions and deepest gripes that have been brewing for years and to have the mirror reflected back on you as an individual and a couple is really hard.

It stays with you for days after. You end up living in this weird post-session haze as you try to implement the tools you're learning. I can see its strengths and where it could have success. I just want you to be ready, because I wasn't.

## **3. No-one talks about the grief**

I'm grieving for someone who was my best friend. The person who has been there through so much of my life and history.

The memories that have now been tinged in sadness because they will forever be linked to him. I'm grieving my future dreams, all of which included him. Heartbreak is here too, but the grief is what packs the biggest punch.

#### **4. The little things hit the hardest**

I would like to take this time to apologise to the staff member at the Service NSW centre who dealt with my breakdown when they asked who my next of kin is.

"I don't know anymore. I don't think I have one. There's no-one, I have no-one," I cried. I'm now alone in lockdown unable to see my friends or family and that hits me hard — but not as hard as the little moments.

I've learnt to sit with them. These moments of absolute sadness. I never know when they'll hit, but I'm learning a lot about myself as I see what rocks me from day to day.

#### **5. The only timeline you need to worry about is the one that's right for you**

There's no right time to date again. No right time for your partner to leave the house you share. There's no guidebook on how to do this, no matter your age. The only thing that matters is what works for you. I've had some funny comments and some concern about when and how I did things, from dating to managing my solo finances.

People will share their stories and that can be nice, but this is about you. Listen to what you need. From your body to your mind and be kind to yourself.