



A few months ago I told you all about my experience **getting divorced at 32**. Well, I'm back with the sequel. It's time to talk about dating after divorce. As any single woman will tell you, dating is hard with a capital H. Add the "Oh yeah, I'm also divorced" bombshell to the mix, and it takes on a whole new level of **challenges**. But in the time I've spent navigating this tricky and unique space, I've come up with a few major takeaways. So, I wanted to share what I've learned — as well as advice from experts and other women who are in the same boat as I am — in the hopes that, like that first article, this is helpful for anyone else going through something similar.

There's no rule book

There's no such thing as 'normal' when it comes to divorce, nor is there for the aftermath. There's no rule book, no standard timetable to follow, no standard operating procedure. "Everyone's journey through loss is different," says Chicago-based psychotherapist **Alexandra DeWoskin**, LCSW. "So when it comes to what is the 'right' process or amount of time to wait until you start dating, there is not a set standard — what's right is what is right for you." Consider that your permission to stop comparing yourself to other people and how quickly they did or didn't move on. Maybe you're ready to get married again after two months. Maybe you're not ready to date for two years. Either way, if it works for you, it's okay.

One interesting thing about dating after divorce is that you should *play the field. Stay away from dating until you heal yourself. Date, but not seriously. Don't get into another relationship too quickly.* It's a lot," says **Nicole Wells**, who recently got divorced. "You have to just trust your own judgement, because there is no right way to navigate this stuff," she adds. Amen to that.

I'm currently in a serious relationship (with an amazing, supportive man who has been more understanding about all of this than I could ever imagine, I should add) six months after getting officially divorced, a year after being separated. For a while, I



loss of my marriage. I had to get to a point where I accepted that ~~every one is going to miss me~~, but at the end of the day, the only one that matters is mine. I know in my heart and gut that this is the right thing for me, at the right time. And that's it.

Rebounds are a thing

"I see the rebound effect a lot. No one wants to feel the **pain of a breakup**," says DeWoskin. "Some people distract from that pain by throwing themselves immediately into new dating experiences or relationships without processing their emotions. Those feelings of a new partner are initially intoxicating and can mask the painful symptoms of loss," she explains. "Being single again can be a big lonely pill to swallow. This can lead to diving heart first into the first person that turns your way," adds relationship expert Rachel Federoff of **Love and Matchmaking**.

I can vouch for that. The first "relationship" I had post-divorce was fun and exhilarating, and I didn't think it was a rebound at all. It was a distraction from all of the pain I was in — which isn't a rebound. It's just something to be self-aware of. A rebound is when you're not masking your feelings of loss and grief.

Be prepared for emotional whiplash

Divorce elicits every type of emotion and **dating a major split** does the same. I often swing from one end of the spectrum to the next in the same day, sometimes even the same hour, feeling excited and happy about the future and possibilities with my



new boyfriend, and then grieving the massive loss that I've suffered. It's disorienting and jarring to say the least, which is why I started calling it emotional whiplash.



and refreshing. Finding a balance between that dichotomy is difficult," says Cristina Cacciatore, who is also recently divorced. "I often had to navigate through days that included both grief from a failed marriage and the hope of finding a new partner. Was it normal to feel sad about my ex-husband at the same time I had butterflies in anticipation for an upcoming date?"

Feel the feels and be totally present in whatever emotions you're feeling at any given moment. Sometimes I'd cancel a date when it was a day that my grief outweighed my hope, says Cacciatore. I've also done the same. On the flip side, when there are times that you're happy and excited and can see a bridal magazine at the grocery store or doctor's office without bursting into tears (you better believe that was my norm for a while), embrace it. Don't question it. Allow that positivity back into your life. Because dammit, you deserve it.

Dating can be whatever you make it

sly, date in whatever way is going to serve you best. trangely awkward at first, but I met a lot of : romantic feelings," says Wells of her experience. iore intentional with whom I was dating. It still is a bit of guessing game, but I know more what the 'non-negotiables' are and so it made finding someone I wanted to commit to seriously much easier."

See also





My goal when I started dating was to stay as present as possible. As I moved into the new relationship I'm in, thinking about the future was initially scary and overwhelming. But I think a large part of the reason why it is so strong and healthy is that I let it develop organically and focused on taking things one day at a time. And then suddenly, thinking about the future and all the possibilities wasn't so scary anymore.

Be wary of falling into the comparison trap

"We're all guilty of **comparison**," says Federoff. Yes, your dates may have some similar qualities as your ex, but remember that they're not the same person and that's a good thing, she adds. Along with comparing person-to-person, it can be tempting to compare past and present experiences. "A lot of times, people feel compelled to compare their new experiences to past experiences or new partners to old. But it's a new experience and can't be compared. And in comparing the two, you run the risk of getting in the way of allowing feeling to develop organically," cautions DeWoskin. Plus, not only is the other person and experience new, but *you* are a new person now, too. To that point...

Remember that you've changed

When my marriage ended, my heart didn't just break, it shattered into something completely unrecognizable. It's slowly being put back together, but it's taken on a whole new shape. This experience has changed me and forced me to evolve mentally and emotionally in ways I never could have imagined. I am now more confident than ever in knowing what I need from a partner and what I want in a **marriage**. Cacciatore agrees: "I have become a more conscious dating partner as a result of my divorce. I'm more aware of the things that make me feel loved and cared for in a relationship. And in knowing myself deeper, I also find a greater trust in my ability to choose a future partner wisely and to build a fresh foundation successfully."

And, at the end of the day, that's what dating after divorce is: a fresh start with lots of possibility for something new.

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