

Group's
EMERGENCY RESPONSE
Handbooklet:
DIVORCE



Loveland, Colorado
www.group.com

Group's Emergency Response Handbooklet: Divorce

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Introduction

It's not easy going through a divorce. But it doesn't have to be lonely.

Christians should never have to face trials on their own. Those around them—their Christian brothers and sisters—should rise up and support them.

“Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Although it isn't easy to go through a divorce, it's also tough being on the outside and trying to help.

You don't know what to do. You're worried about hurting their feelings or stepping on their toes or saying the exact *wrong* thing.

Of course you care—you love them! It isn't that you don't want to help—it's just that you don't know how.

Group's Emergency Response Handbooklet: Divorce will help you come alongside your friends and those in your small group who are facing tough times. From care and counseling tips, to practical ideas for your small group, to what to say and what not to say, this booklet offers insight after insight into how to care for those who are struggling with divorce.

Of course, it'd be great if you never had to pick up this booklet! But the reality is that many couples end their marriage in divorce—including your friends and the people in your small group. And they need your help.

So when someone you love is facing divorce, it's time to pick up this guide. Use the table of contents to find the specific section that gives you what you need to be successful in helping them.

In this handbooklet there is a **real life narrative**—a story from someone who's been there. You'll find a section on **care and counseling tips** that will give you practical ideas for reaching out in love. The practical ideas in the **group tips** section will help your entire small group support your hurting friends during their trial. An invaluable section on **what to say and what not to say** to your friends. This section will help you avoid the hurtful comments and use the helpful ones.

You'll also find useful boxes that offer Scripture help, guidelines for referring your friend to a professional counselor, and additional resources, such as books and Web sites, that you can use as you support your hurting friends.

Our prayer for this booklet is that it will help you help your friends during a difficult time.

Divorce

Helping Your Friend Cope With All of Its Difficulties

with counseling insights from TERRI S. WATSON, PSY.D.

+ ministry tips from JOY-ELIZABETH F. LAWRENCE

After almost 30 years of marriage, Maria made the difficult decision to file for divorce from her husband, Kevin. Although Maria believes that marriage is for life—through the good and the bad—Kevin had a history of marital infidelity and had not changed despite several years of counseling and church discipline.

Emergency Response Handbooklet: *How did your church respond to your divorce?*

Maria: The church called a congregational meeting since Kevin was the head elder. Kevin hadn't been attending the church for a while because of what was happening between us and because he traveled, which I'd used as a handy excuse when people asked where he was. Anyway, at the meeting the pastor said, "We called this meeting because we want to tell you that Kevin is under church discipline for moral failure." He asked the congregation to pray for my kids and me and also told them to address all questions to himself rather than to my family or me.

ERH: *How did your small group and Christian friends respond?*

Maria: There were times when I needed to talk about what I was going through, and this is what taught me who my friends really were. I

had one friend who was really close, but she totally backed away. Another friend would talk about anything *but* what I was going through. Everything was all “hush, hush” and under wraps, but I didn’t really want that. Also, when you’re a couple and you do things with other couples and then are divorced, you don’t get included in couple things anymore.

I did a Bible study together with a core group of female friends (a different Bible study than mentioned earlier). Those ladies were my support group. They prayed for me diligently, and there was no way that I would have been able to walk that path and go through what I went through without them. I had seen other women go through divorce and wind up very angry, malicious, and ugly.

ERH: *How did you feel being a divorcing—and now divorced—Christian?*

Maria: Well first, there are the shame issues. That’s a huge thing in Christian circles. I really had to work through that and was helped a lot by passages in Isaiah and Psalms.

Secondly, I was embarrassed. For what my husband had done, that I’d gotten myself in this situation, and that as a Christian I was going through divorce. Being divorced carries a stigma. Not that when I look at other divorced women I think of them badly, but it’s hard being divorced. When you’re a widow, there’s definitely more sympathy. It’s OK to be a widow, but you have control over whether or not you’re divorced.

I was angry, too, but I was careful of how and when I expressed it. I know that unwillingness to forgive slides a person into bitterness really quickly. But it was hard. I kept thinking, “This is horrific. This is my whole life. My married life was a lie.”

ERH: *Do you have advice for others regarding forgiveness in the situation of infidelity and divorce?*

Maria: Forgiveness is a two-part thing. First, forgiveness isn’t about the other person, it’s about yourself. You have to let go of the right to retaliate, the desire to hurt him as badly as he hurt you. It doesn’t happen all at once; it’s a process that comes in stages; it ebbs and flows. There are layers to it like an onion. You get through one layer; then something will happen, and you’ll have to peel the next layer.

Secondly, I had to understand that forgiving him didn’t make what he did OK or mean that I condoned it. In the end I didn’t forgive because of

him, I forgave because it was a step of help for me. I told him, “As much as I know to this point, I forgive you.”

ERH: *How would you summarize your experience of divorce?*

Maria: To me, divorce is a death. It’s the death of a relationship. A lot of people will quote Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (New International Version). I don’t believe that the divorce was “good”, but I believe that “all things” means the big picture—everything, the bad and the good, rolled into one. It means that eventually God works it for good.

WHEN TO REFER

Most individuals going through a divorce can benefit from some professional counseling at some point in the process, particularly if they have children. Don’t hesitate to encourage your friend to seek professional help immediately if any of the following signs and symptoms are present.

- + References to self-destructive or suicidal thoughts or feelings**
- + Isolative behavior**
- + Continuous “bad-mouthing” of the ex-spouse in the presence of others, particularly the children**

Offering to sit with your friend during the initial call or accompanying him or her to an appointment can ensure that your friend receives the immediate help he or she needs.