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# Amy Edwards

FAMILY LAW

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## Family Matters

E-newsletter

October 2013

Welcome to our third issue of  
**Family Matters**  
e-Newsletter.

This Divorce e-newsletter is brought to you by Divorce Magazine and Amy A. Edwards, with the law firm of Mattox, Davis, Edwards & Alexander, P.A. We anticipate sending e-newsletters on a monthly basis. We hope you will find the information and articles useful. If you wish to be removed from our mailing list, please reply with the subject "Remove".

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### Pets and North Carolina Family Law

**We're Splitting Up: What About the Pets?**

By Amy A. Edwards

Like many people, I have a cat. Ok, maybe I have a couple of cats. They sleep most

### About Us



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### Web Site of the Month

The [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) is the "nation's clearinghouse on issues related to missing and sexually exploited children."

Their [Family Resources](#) page includes a Child ID kit, a "25 Question Conversation Starter" list about child safety, an

of the time but they are warm and fuzzy and do something that makes me laugh on a daily basis. They are both orange and I have a habit of referring to them as the twins. Today, many people think of their dog, cat or other pet as a family member. These pet owners often have more than one pet.



**The Twins**

*What Happens to pets when a family splits because of separation or divorce?*

In North Carolina, pets caught in divorce generally are considered personal property and the court has the same authority to distribute them to a spouse or former spouse in the same manner as a coffee table.

When there are children in a separation or divorce, the court must consider only what is in the child's best interest when determining who has custody of that child, regardless of what the parents want or need. In contrast, when the court determines which person will keep which pet, there is no *legal* requirement that the judge base his or her decision on the best interest of the animal. Moral or ethical standards are not necessarily the same as legal requirements. In marital property cases, judges will assign a value to an animal and grant ownership of it to one of the parties as he or she sees fit. The reasons a judge has for ruling on who keeps a pet are his or her own, made in his or her discretion.

There is a trend in the legal world towards animals having a meaning greater than the coffee table or some other piece of property, even if the trend starts with baby steps. In child custody cases, a judge may require the pet to go back and forth with a child for visitation at each parent's home, which is presumably done because that would be in the child's best interest. North Carolina has created very specific legislation to allow the court to consider the pets when there is domestic violence in a family, even where there are no minor children. NC Gen. Stat. §50B-3 says the court may "Provide for possession of personal property of the parties, including the care, custody, and control of any animal owned, possessed, kept, or held as a pet by either party or minor child residing in the household."

Most of the time, people can reach some agreement about who keeps the dog or the cat. It is uncommon for people to leave it to the judge to award a pet to one spouse or the other. But what can pet owners do to resolve these disputes based on what they think is in the pet's best interest? If both people agree, they can enter into a contract concerning their pets. They can specify where the animal(s) will live or be pastured, set aside regular visitation times for each person to see the pet, and even arrange for the costs and medical care. The great thing about a contract is people can customize it to fit their needs instead of relying on a judge and the law.

## Fathers and Divorce Bond With Your Children

*Fathers and Divorce: Bond with your children. Bonding on your own.*

By Douglas C. McKee

Bonding with your children is something that every parent needs to do. This is not new information. But now you must learn to bond with them on your own, without mom

emergency contact organizer and more.

### Tip of the Month

Stay on top of your finances and guard against identity theft.

You are entitled to one free credit report from each credit reporting agency each year.

Access and print your free credit report from the non-commercial web site

[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)

Access one report at the time, from one credit reporting agency. In a few months, access a credit report from another of the three agencies, so you can monitor your credit report status all year.

Check out their [FAQs page](#) for more information about your rights as a consumer.



### Legal Trivia

Did you know that in North Carolina, any adult may adopt any other adult as long as the two adults are not married to each other?

NC Gen. Stat. 48-5-101

### Legal Term of the Month

#### Civil Law

In simple terms, civil law applies to any lawsuit that is not a criminal case.

There are two types of law.

Criminal law is prosecuted by the State, by a district attorney (also known as a prosecutor)

being there. This may seem a little awkward especially if you haven't spent a lot of time alone with your children. This is a whole new experience for all of you. A single parent plays the roles of both mother and father to the children and this takes some getting used to for them as well. They need to see that you are comfortable in this situation. Taking them on ordinary outings gives them the feeling that things are okay. Grocery shopping, for instance is an ordinary outing. It allows them to see you in a normal, everyday activity. It also allows you to get to know what they like and don't like if you don't already know. For younger kids this can be a fun adventure. Let them pick out dinner and dessert and if they are old enough, let them help prepare it.



[Child support before the court makes a ruling](#)

[Keep in contact with your ex about the children](#)

[The Children's best interest counts most.](#)

Taking a walk is a great way to bond with your children. If they are too young to walk you can pull them in a wagon or push them in a stroller; either way, walk with them and talk about the things around you. Ask them questions about things they like and answer any questions that they may have for you. It is important to let them know that you enjoy spending time with them. They need to know that you love them and are there for them when they need you. So make yourself not only physically available but emotionally available as well. This emotional support is vital to their stability.

Not only is bonding important for the stability of a child/parent relationship but it will also become an important factor in the court room. The judge may order psychological evaluations for both you and your ex. This is something that you need to prepare yourself for. This evaluation will require your meeting a psychologist with the children. The psychologist will evaluate your playing together, how you handle situations with each other and whether or not you are bonded with each other. This bond will be one of the most important factors in his/her recommendation to the court regarding custody. If there is no bond between you and your children the psychologist will see it and report these findings to the court. You need to create this bond if you haven't already done so. Creating this bond doesn't begin the day before you go see the psychologist either. It takes months and even years to build this bond but once it is established it creates a bridge of trust between you and your children that will last a lifetime.

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This excerpt from "A Father's Journey To Custody" by Douglas C. McKee is re-printed in DivorceMag.com with permission. Douglas C. McKee, a father of five beautiful children; two of whom he was awarded primary physical custody from a previous marriage, knows first hand, the heartache of a divorce that involves children and the benefits of maintaining ongoing contact with them during this rough time. The book is available at the author's website, [www.fathersseekingcustody.com](http://www.fathersseekingcustody.com).

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For more articles on fathers and divorce, visit <http://www.divorcemag.com/articles/Fathers-and-Divorce>

## Co-Parenting Divorce Guide (Free Download)

Parents have a tough job, even under the best circumstances. Parents who

on behalf of victims of crime.

A civil law case is a lawsuit brought by any individual or entity against another individual or entity.

Civil cases often seek payment of money damages. Other times, civil cases ask the court to require certain behavior or actions.

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Contact us at 252-758-3430 to schedule a presentation for your group.

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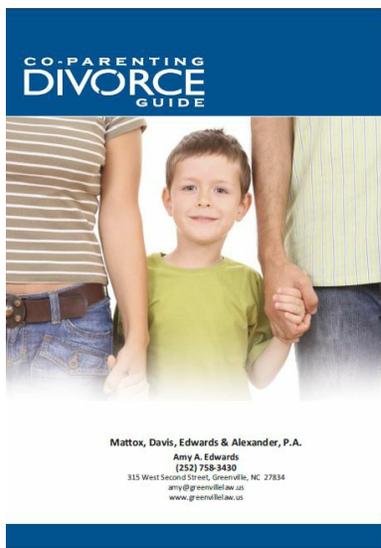
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must parent apart face numerous challenges.

### [Coparenting Divorce Guide](#)

includes many articles, including:

- \* Mom's House, Dad's House
- \* The Co-Parenting Relationship
- \* Conflict and Parenting
- \* My Time vs. Your Time: Scheduling
- \* What to Include in Your Parenting Plan
- \* Nine Strategies for Effective and Healthy Co-Parenting

## Divorce Recovery

**Recovering from divorce is like climbing a mountain, one challenging step after another. For most of us, it's a difficult journey -- but the rewards at the end of the climb are worth it!**

***By Dr. Bruce Fisher and Dr. Robert Alberti***

Are you hurting? If you have recently ended a love [relationship](#), you are. Those who appear not to hurt when their love relationships end have either already worked through a lot of hurt, or have yet to feel the pain. So go ahead, acknowledge that you're hurt. It's natural, expected, healthy, even okay to hurt. Pain is nature's way of telling us that something in us needs to be healed, so let's get on with the [healing](#).

There's an adjustment process after a divorce -- with a beginning, an end, and specific steps of learning along the way. While you're feeling some of the pain, you're more anxious to learn how to be healed. If you're like most of us, you probably have had some destructive patterns of behavior for years -- maybe since your childhood. Change is hard work. While you were in a love relationship you might have been comfortable enough that you felt no need to change. But now there is that pain. What do you do? Well, you can use the pain as motivation to learn and to grow.

The steps of the adjustment process are arranged into a pyramid of "Rebuilding Blocks" to symbolize a mountain. Rebuilding means climbing that mountain, and for most of us it's a difficult journey. Let us assure you that the climb is worth it! The rewards at the top make the tough climb worthwhile.

How long will it take to climb the mountain? Studies indicate that on the average it takes about a year to get up above the tree line (past the really painful, negative stages of the climb), longer to reach the top. Some will make it in less time, others in more. Some research suggests that a few in our climbing party will need as long as three to five years. Don't let that discourage you. Finishing the climb is what counts, not how long it takes. Just remember to climb at your own rate, and don't get rattled if some pass you along the way. Like life itself, the process of climbing and growing is the source of your greatest benefits!

The rebuilding blocks are a guide and a map prepared by others who have already traveled the trail. As you climb, you'll discover that tremendous personal growth is possible, despite the emotional trauma you've experienced from the ending of your love relationship. Beginning at the bottom, we find denial and fear, two painful stumbling blocks that come early in the process of adjustment. They can be overwhelming feelings, and may make you reluctant to begin the climb.

### **Denial: "I can't believe this is happening to me"**

The good news is we humans have a wonderful mechanism that allows us to feel only as much pain as we can handle without becoming overwhelmed. Pain that is too great is put into our "denial bag" and held until we are strong enough to experience and learn from it. The bad news is some of us experience so much denial that we are reluctant to attempt [recovery](#) -- to climb the mountain. There are many reasons for this. Some are unable to access and identify what they are feeling and will have difficulty adjusting to change of any sort. They must learn that "what we can feel, we can heal." Others have such a low self-concept that they don't believe they're capable of climbing the mountain. And some feel so much fear that they're afraid to climb the mountain. How about you? What feelings are underneath your denial? Nona talked hesitantly about taking the ten-week seminar, and finally was able to describe her hesitation. "If I took the divorce seminar, it would mean that my marriage is over, and I don't want to accept that yet."

### **Fear: "I Have Lots of It!"**

Have you ever been in a winter blizzard? The wind is blowing so hard that it howls. The snow is so thick you can see only a few feet ahead of you. Unless you have shelter, it feels -- and it can be -- life threatening. The fears you feel when you first [separate](#) are like being in a blizzard. Where do you hide? How do you find your way? You choose not to climb this mountain because even here at the bottom you feel overwhelmed. How can you find your way up when you believe the trail will become more blinding, threatening, fearful? You want to hide, find a lap to curl up in, and get away from the fearful storm. How do you handle your fears? What do you do when you discover your fears have paralyzed you? Can you find the courage to face them so you can get ready to climb the mountain? Each fear you overcome gives you strength and courage to continue your journey through life.

### **Adaptation: "But it worked when I was a kid!"**

Each of us has many healthy parts: inquisitive, creative, nurturing, feelings of self-worth, appropriate anger. During our growing-up years, our healthy parts were not always encouraged by family, school, church, or other influential experiences, such as movies, books, and magazines. The result was often stress, trauma, lack of love, and other hindrances to health. A person who is not able to meet his or her needs for nurturing, attention, and love will find ways to adapt -- and not all adaptive behaviors are healthy. Examples of adaptive responses include being over-responsible for others, becoming a perfectionist, trying to always be a people-pleaser, or developing an "urge-to-help." Unhealthy adaptive behaviors that are too well-developed leave you out of balance, and you may try to restore your balance through a relationship with another person.

For example, if I am over-responsible, I may look for an under-responsible love partner. If the person I find is not under-responsible enough, I will train her to be under-responsible! This leads me to "polarize" responsibility: I become more and more over-responsible, the other person becomes more and more under-responsible. This polarization is often fatal to the success of a love relationship and is

a special kind of co-dependency. Jill stated it clearly: "I have four children: I'm married to the oldest one." She resents having all of the responsibility, such as keeping track of the checkbook and writing all of the checks. Instead of blaming Jack for not being able to balance the checkbook, she needs to understand that the relationship is a system, and as long as she is over-responsible, chances are Jack will be under-responsible. Adaptive behaviors you learned as a child will not always lead to healthy adult relationships. Does that help you understand why you need to climb this mountain?

### **Loneliness: "I've never felt so alone"**

When a love relationship ends, the feeling is probably the greatest loneliness you have ever known. Many daily living habits must be altered now that your partner is gone. As a couple, you may have spent time apart before, but your partner was still in the relationship, even when not physically present. When the relationship is ending, your partner is not there at all. Suddenly you are totally alone.

The thought, "I'm going to be lonely like this forever," is overwhelming. It seems you're never going to know the companionship of a love relationship again. You may have [children](#) living with you and friends and relatives close by, but the loneliness is somehow greater than all of the warm feelings from your loved ones. Will this empty feeling ever go away? Can you ever feel okay about being alone?

John had been doing the bar scene pretty often. He took a look at it and decided: "I've been running from and trying to drown my lonely feelings. I think I'll try sitting home by myself, writing in my journal to see what I can learn about myself." He was beginning to change feeling lonely into enjoying aloneness.

### **Friendship: "Where has everybody gone?"**

As you've discovered, the rebuilding blocks that occur early in the process tend to be quite painful. Because they are so painful, there is a great need for friends to help one face and overcome the emotional pain. Unfortunately many friends are usually lost as one goes through the divorce process, a problem that is especially evident for those who have already physically separated from a love partner. The problem is made worse by withdrawal from social contacts because of emotional pain and fear of rejection. Divorce is threatening to friends, causing them to feel uncomfortable around the dividing partners.

Betty says that the old gang of couples had a party this weekend, but she and her ex were not invited. "I was so hurt and angry. What did they think -- that I was going to seduce one of the husbands or something?" Social relationships may need to be rebuilt around friends who will understand your emotional pain without rejecting you. It is worthwhile to work at retaining some old friends, and finding new friends to support and listen.

### **Guilt/Rejection: Dumpers 1, Dumpees 0**

Have you heard the terms "dumper" and "dumpee" before? No one who has experienced the ending of a love relationship needs definitions for these words. Usually there is one person who is more responsible for deciding to end the love relationship; that person becomes the dumper. The more reluctant partner is the dumpee. Most dumpers feel guilty for hurting the former loved one. Dumpees find it tough to acknowledge being rejected. The adjustment process is different for the dumper and the dumpee, since the dumper's

behavior is largely governed by feelings of guilt, and the dumpee's by rejection.

### **Grief: "There's this terrible feeling of loss"**

Grieving is an important part of the recovery process. Whenever we suffer the loss of love, the death of a relationship, the death of a loved one, or the loss of a [home](#), we must grieve that loss. Indeed, the divorce process has been described by some as largely a grief process. Grief combines overwhelming sadness with a feeling of despair. It drains us of energy by leading us to believe we are helpless, powerless to change our lives. Grief is a crucial rebuilding block.

### **Anger: "Damn the S.O.B.!"**

It's difficult to understand the intensity of the anger felt at this time unless one has been through divorce. Here's a true story from the *Des Moines Register* that helps us find out if an audience is primarily composed of divorced or married people: While driving by the park, a female dumpee saw her male dumper lying on a blanket with a new girlfriend. She drove into the park and ran over the former spouse and his girlfriend with her car! (Fortunately the injuries were not serious; it was a small car.) Divorced people respond by exclaiming, "Right on! Did she back over them again?" Married people, not understanding the divorce anger, will gasp, "Ugh! How terrible!"

Most divorced people were not aware that they would be capable of such rage because they had never been this angry before. This special kind of rage is specifically aimed towards the ex-love partner and -- handled properly -- it can be really helpful to your recovery, since it helps you gain some emotional distance from your ex.

### **Letting Go: Disentangling is hard to do**

It's tough to let go of the strong emotional ties that remain from the dissolved love union. Nevertheless, it's important to stop investing emotionally in the dead relationship. Stella came to take the seminar about four years after her divorce. She was still wearing her wedding ring! To invest in a dead relationship, an emotional corpse, is to make an investment with no chance of return. The need instead is to begin investing in productive personal growth, which will help in working you way through the divorce process.

### **Self-Worth: "Maybe I'm not so bad after all!"**

Feelings of self-worth and self-esteem greatly influence behavior. Low self-esteem and a search for stronger identity are major causes of divorce. Divorce, in turn, causes lowered self-esteem and loss of identity. For many people, self-concept is lowest when they end the love relationship. They have invested so much of themselves in the love relationship that when it ends, their feelings of self-worth and self-esteem are devastated.

As you improve your feelings of self-worth, you're able to step out of the divorce pits and start feeling better about yourself. With improved self-worth also comes the courage you'll need to face the journey into yourself that's coming up.

### **Transition: "I'm putting out the trash"**

You want to understand why your relationship ended. Maybe you need to perform an "autopsy" on your dead relationship. If you can figure out why it ended, you can work on changes that will allow you to create and build different relationships in the future.

At the Transition stage of the climb, you'll begin to realize the influences from your family of origin. You'll discover that you very likely married someone like the parent you never made peace with, and that whatever growing-up tasks you didn't finish in childhood, you're trying to work out in your adult relationships.

You may decide that you're tired of doing the "shoulds" you've always done, and instead want to make your own choices about how you'll live your life. That may begin a process of rebellion, breaking out of your shell. Any stumbling block that is not resolved can result in the ending of your primary love relationship. It's time to take out your trash, to dump the leftovers that remain from your past and your previous love relationship and your earlier years. You thought you had left these behind, but when you begin another relationship, you find they're still there. As Ken told Bruce, "Those damn neuroses follow me everywhere."

Transition represents a period of transformation, as you learn new ways of relating to others. It is the beginning of becoming free to be yourself.

### **Openness: "I've been hiding behind a mask"**

A mask is a feeling or image that you project, trying to make others believe that is who you are. But it keeps people from knowing who you really are, and sometimes even keeps you from knowing yourself. Bruce remembered a childhood neighbor who always had a smiling face: "When I became older, I discovered the smiling face covered up a mountain of angry feelings inside the person."

Many of us are afraid to take off our masks because we believe that others won't like the real person underneath the mask. But when we do take off the mask, we often experience more closeness and intimacy with friends and loved ones than we believed was possible.

Jane confided to the class that she was tired of always wearing a happy face. "I would just like to let people know what I am really feeling instead of always having to appear to be happy and joyful." Her mask was becoming heavy, which indicates she might be ready to take it off.

### **Love: "Could somebody really care for me?"**

The typical divorced person says, "I thought I knew what love was, but I guess I was wrong." Ending a love relationship should encourage one to re-examine what love is. A feeling of being unlovable may be present at this stage. Here's how Leonard put it: "Not only do I feel unlovable now, but I'm afraid I never will be lovable!" This fear can be overwhelming.

Christians are taught to "Love thy neighbor as thyself." But what happens if you don't love yourself? Many of us place the center of our love in another person rather than in ourselves. When divorce comes, the center of our love is removed, adding to the trauma of loss. An important element in the rebuilding process is to learn to love yourself. If you don't love yourself -- accepting yourself for who you are, warts and all" -- how can you expect anybody else to love you?

### **Trust: "My love wound is beginning to heal"**

Located in the center of the pyramid, the Trust rebuilding block symbolizes the fact that the basic level of trust is the center of the whole adjustment process. Divorced people frequently point their fingers and say they cannot trust anyone of the opposite sex. There's an old cliché that fits here: when you point a finger at something, there are three fingers pointing back to you. When divorced people say they don't trust the opposite sex, they're saying more about themselves than about the opposite sex.

The typical divorced person has a painful love wound resulting from the ending of the love relationship, a love wound that prevents him/her from loving another. It takes a good deal of time to be able to risk being hurt and to become emotionally close again.

### **Relatedness: "Growing relationships help me rebuild"**

Often after a love relationship has ended, you find another relationship: one that appears to have everything the previous union lacked. You think: "I've found the one and only with whom I will live forever. This new relationship appears to solve all of my problems, so I'll hold onto it very tightly. And I believe the new partner is the one who is making me happy." You need to realize that what feels so good is that you are becoming who you would like to be. You need to take back your own power and take responsibility for the good things you're feeling. The new relationship after a breakup is often called a "rebound" relationship, a label that is partly true. When this relationship ends, it is often more painful than when the primary love relationship ended. For instance, about 20% of the people who have signed up for the divorce class didn't enroll after their marriages ended: they enrolled after their rebound relationships ended.

### **Sexuality: "I'm interested, but I'm scared"**

What do you think of when the word sex is mentioned? Most of us tend to react emotionally and irrationally. Our society over-emphasizes and glamorizes sex. Married couples often imagine divorced people as oversexed and free to "romp and play in the meadows of sexuality." In reality, [single people](#) often find the hassles of sexuality among the most trying issues in the divorce process.

A sexual partner was available in the love relationship. Even though the partner is gone, sexual needs go on. In fact, at some points in the divorce process, the sex drive is even greater than before. Yet most people are more or less terrified by the thought of dating -- feeling like teenagers again -- especially when they sense that somebody has changed the rules since they dated earlier. Many feel old, unattractive, unsure of themselves, and fearful of awkwardness. And for many, moral values overrule their sexual desires. Some have both parents telling them what they should do, and their own teenagers who delight in parenting them! ("Be sure to get home early, Mom.") Thus, for many, dating is confusing and uncertain. No wonder sexual hang-ups are so common!

### **Singleness: "You mean it's okay?"**

People who went directly from their parental homes into "marriage homes," without experiencing singleness, often missed this important growth period entirely. For some, even the college years may have been supervised by "parental" figures and rules. Regardless of your previous experience, however, a period of singleness -- growth as an independent person -- will be valuable now. Such an adjustment to the ending of a love relationship will allow you to really let go of the past, to learn to be whole and complete within yourself and to invest in yourself. Singleness is not only okay, it is necessary!

### **Purpose: "I have goals for the future now"**

Do you have a sense of how long you are going to live? Bruce was very surprised during his divorce when he realized that at age 40 he might be only half-way through his life. If you have many years yet to live, what are your goals? What do you plan to do with yourself after you have adjusted to the ending of your love relationship? It's helpful to make a "lifeline" and take a look at the patterns in your life, and at the potential things you might accomplish for the rest of your time. Planning helps bring

the future into the present.

### Freedom: From chrysalis to butterfly

At last, the top of the mountain! The final stage has two dimensions. The first is freedom of choice. When you've worked through all of the rebuilding blocks that have been stumbling blocks in the past, you're free and ready to enter into another relationship. You can make it more productive and meaningful than your past love relationships. You're free to choose happiness as a single person or in another love relationship. There's another dimension of freedom: the freedom to be yourself. Many of us carry around a burden of unmet needs, needs that may control us and not allow us freedom to be the people we want to be. As we unload this burden and learn to satisfy these needs, we become free to be ourselves. This may be the most important freedom.

### Looking Backward

While climbing the mountain, one occasionally slips back to a rebuilding block which may have been dealt with before. The blocks are listed here from one to nineteen, but you won't necessarily encounter and deal with them in that order. In fact, you're likely to be working on all of them together. And a big setback, such as [court litigation](#) or the ending of another love relationship, may result in a backward slide some distance down the mountain.

### Rebuilding Your Faith

Some people ask how religion relates to the rebuilding blocks. Many people working through divorce find it difficult to continue their affiliation with the church they attended while married, for several reasons. Some churches still look upon divorce as a sin or, at best, a "falling from grace." Many people feel guilty within themselves, even if the church doesn't condemn them. Many churches are very family-oriented, and [single parents](#) and children of divorced people may be made to feel as if they don't belong. Many people become distant from the church since they are unable to find comfort and understanding as they are going through the divorce process. This distance leaves them with more loneliness and rejection. There are, happily, many churches that are actively concerned for the needs of people in the divorce process. If your church doesn't have such a program, we urge you to express your needs. Organize a singles group, talk to an adult class, let your minister know if you feel rejected and lonely. Ask your church leaders to help you educate others about the needs of people who are ending their love relationships.

The way each of us lives reflects our faith, and our faith is a very strong influence on our well-being. Bruce likes to put it this way: "God wants us to develop and grow to our fullest potential." And that's what the rebuilding blocks are all about -- growing to our fullest potential. Learning to adjust to a crisis is a spiritual process. The quality of our relationships with the people around us, and the amount of love, concern, and caring we're able to show others are good indications of our relationship with God.

### Children Must Rebuild Too

"What about the children?" Many people ask about how the rebuilding blocks relate to children. The process of adjustment for kids is very similar to that for adults. The rebuilding blocks apply to the children (as they may to other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and close friends). Many parents get so involved in trying to help their kids work through the adjustment process that they neglect to meet their own needs.

If you're a parent who is embarking on the Rebuilding journey, we recommend that you learn to take care of yourself and work through the adjustment process. You will find that your children will tend to adjust more easily as a result. The nicest thing you can do for your kids is to get your own act together. Kids tend to get hung up in the same rebuilding blocks as their parents, so by making progress yourself, you will be helping your children, too.

### Homework: Learning by Doing

Millions of people read self-help books looking for answers to problems in living and relationships. They learn the vocabulary and gain awareness, but don't really learn at a deep emotional level from the experience. What we learn emotionally affects our behavior a great deal, and much of the learning we have to do to adjust to a crisis is emotional relearning.

Some things you believed all of your life may not be true and you'll have to relearn. But intellectual learning -- thoughts, facts, and ideas -- is of value only when you also learn the emotional lessons that let it all make sense in your life. Here are some exercises to get you started:

1. Keep a journal or a diary in which you write down your feelings. You might do it daily, weekly, or whenever it fits your schedule. Start a lot of the sentences in the journal with "I feel" -- that should help you write more feelings. Writing a journal will not only be an emotional learning experience that will enhance your personal growth, but it will also provide a yardstick to measure your personal growth. People often come back months later to read what they wrote and are amazed at the changes they have been able to accomplish. Every report we've heard from those who have kept a journal has described it as a worthwhile experience. You may want to write in your journal after reading each chapter, or perhaps once a week, or on some other regular schedule. But "regular" or not, do make this a part of your rebuilding process.
1. Find a person you trust and can ask for help, and learn to ask. Call someone you'd like to get to know better and start building a friendship. Use any reason you need to get started. Tell the person about this homework assignment if you like. You're learning to build a support system of friends. Make that connection when you're still feeling somewhat secure, so that when you are down in the pits (it's tough to reach out when you're down there), you'll know you have at least one friend who can throw you an emotional life-line.

Build a [support group](#) for yourself. Because a support system is so important, this is a key part of your first homework assignment. We suggest you find one or more friends -- preferably of both sexes -- and discuss the rebuilding blocks with which you're having difficulty. This sharing may be easier for you with a person who has gone or is going through the divorce process himself/herself, because many married people may have difficulty relating to your present feelings and attitudes. Most important, however, is your trust in that person.

Be aware that not all support groups are supportive. Choose carefully the others with whom you work through this process. They should be as committed as you are to a positive growth experience, and willing to maintain confidentiality of personal information.

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*This article has been edited and excerpted from Rebuilding: When Your Relationship Ends (3rd Edition) by Dr. Bruce Fisher and Dr. Robert Alberti. This book is exactly what you need to help you put your life back together during and after a divorce. Internationally renowned [divorce therapist](#) Fisher's "divorce rebuilding blocks" deal*

with all 19 stages of recovery in detail, explaining what you'll be feeling, what you can learn, and how to move on the next stage. Step-by-step checklists enable you to assess your own progress.

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Thank you for reading our newsletter.

**Sincerely,**

**Amy Edwards**

*Mattox, Davis, Edwards & Alexander, P.A.*

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