

ALONE

in the

AFTERMATH

support for those
whose relationships
do not survive

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Introduction | Affiliation | Disclosure

GAELYN RAE EMERSON

- Certified Professional Life Coach (CPLC)
- Certified Couples Relationship Coach (CCRC)
- Certified Divorce Recovery Coach (CDRC)
- APSATS Certified Partner Coach (CPC)
- ICF Associate Certified Coach (ACC)

- Private Practice, Women Ever After
- Consulting Coach, Betrayal Trauma Recovery
- Onstaff, CORE Relationship Recovery

- Developed: Avenue D: "Road Through Debridement"
- Developed: DreamGirls: Designing Our New Lives

Objectives

1. To answer the question, “Why focus on divorce,” highlighting **the unique needs** experienced by divorced, divorcing and separated partners of sex addicts.
2. To share **what I’m learning from my clients and colleagues**, as I work intensively with this specific population.
3. To brainstorm **with you** how we, as a field of helping professionals, might better meet these partners’ needs with quality attention, validation and resources.

Bottom Line Goal:

What can we do to **deepen** and **broaden** our collective support for divorced, divorcing and separated partners of sex addicts?

Pause for terminology disclaimer.



workshop objective
number one

WHY FOCUS
on
DIVORCE?

Why Focus on Divorce?

Divorce as FACT:

Many relationships impacted by sex addiction do NOT survive.

Divorce as TRAUMA:

- Not an incidental or “post traumatic” experience. Divorce is an independent relational trauma, one that is often predicated or compounded by previous trauma—including sex addiction induced trauma.
- Trauma occurs in nearly ALL divorces, even those that are also a relief to one or both parties.

Divorce as TRANSITION:

- Divorce represents a life-changing milestone for clients healing from the impact of sex addiction.
- Divorce often represents the line of demarcation between two or more phases of trauma resolution.

Divorce as TRAUMA | Quotes

- From Cathy Meyer, Master Certified Relationship Coach: “Once you go through a high conflict divorce you are never the same. Dana says, ‘I feel as if I’ve been in the middle of a war zone for an extended period of time. I’ve lived with daily fear for years; there has been no relief because some sort of conflict with my ex was always lurking around the corner. I didn’t have time to process one event before I was dealing with another one. When divorced from someone like my ex, you don’t have time to stop, process your feelings, grieve and move on,’ she continued. ‘You have to have your guard up at all times, be focused and ready for what is coming next—and you learn quickly that there will be something coming.’”

Source Author: Cathy Meyer, Master Certified Relationship Coach, Founding Resource Editor for DivorcedMoms.com

Source Article: What It's Like to Suffer from PTSD Post-Divorce

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/07/divorce-post-traumatic- n 4557481.html>

Divorce as TRAUMA | Quotes (continued)

- From Dr. Kathleen O'Connell Corcoran, Ph.D.: "The decision to end a relationship can be traumatic, chaotic, and filled with contradictory emotions. The emotional breaking up process typically extends over several years and is confounded by each party being at different stages in the emotional process while in the same stage of the physical (or legal) process. There are also specific feelings, attitudes, and dynamics associated with whether one is in the role of the initiator or the receiver of the decision to breakup."

Source Article: Psychological and Emotional Aspects of Divorce, June 1997

<http://www.mediate.com/articles/psych.cfm>,

Divorce as TRAUMA | Quotes (continued)

- From Rabbi Perry Netter: “Psychologically, the effects of divorce parallel the trauma of losing a loved one. Divorce is a little death—or more accurately, a series of little deaths. ...Divorce is one of the most difficult decisions any of us ever makes. Deciding to end a marriage is like deciding to amputate a limb. You know there is enormous pain in store for you. You know there will be a long period of recovery. You know you will be changed forever, in ways that cannot be anticipated. One thing is sure: divorce is not, as so many people think, easy. Not ever. Divorce is never the easy way out.”

Source: Rabbi Perry Netter, author of *Divorce is a Mitzvah*

Divorce as TRAUMA | By the Numbers

Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS)

In this study of 43 different life events, each event, called a Life Change Unit (LCU), had a different measurable "weight" for stress.

- 1—**top ranked “stress event” was death of a spouse = 100 LCUs**
- 2—**divorce = 73 LCUs**
- 3—marital separation = 65 LCUs
- 4—jail term = 63 LCUs
- 5—death of a family member = 63 LCUs
- ...
- 41—Vacation = 13 LCUs
- 42—Christmas = 12 LCUs
- 43—Minor violations of the law = 11 LCUs

Source: "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale", Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe, [*Journal of Psychosomatic Research*](#), Volume 11, Issue 2, August 1967, Pages 213-218, Copyright © 1967 Published by Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce granted by the publisher.

Divorce as TRANSITION

- o **The Outreach**

At the decisive crossroads of divorce, our clients require extreme measures of healing support and continuity of care—and **they're going to begin reaching for it within spaces where they already feel a secure connection and professional attachment.**

- o **The “Roadmap Gap”**

Clients often feel marginalized, disconnected or even dismissed—all at **a point when they MOST desperately need trustworthy resources for connection and support**, both (a) from their existing recovery communities, and (b) from new or different healing environments.

- o **The Result?**

Quote from an APSATS colleague: “Too often, when these clients seek support from leading experts in sex addiction therapy, all they find are resources for women who are staying within their relationships. The result? Further isolation. Further invalidation. Further sense of marginalization.”

Case Study: Meet “Bella”

- 27 years old
- Raised in a very conservative and insular religious environment
- Latina, middle-class family, middle of 3 sisters
- Successful career in corporate communications
- Married for 3 years to her high school sweetheart
- Emotional “disconnect” from her husband, attributed to stress and work obligations
- No children yet, “but maybe soon”

Bella’s Discovery Day

- Instagram photo and caption
- Discovered her husband’s multi-year affair
- **Bella’s Twist: “Well, now that you know the truth...”**

Bella and the M-PTM

APSATS Multidimensional Partner Trauma Model

M-PTM based upon Judith Hermann's Three Stage Model for Trauma Resolution
M-PTM Developed by Dr. Barbara Steffens, President of APSATS (The Association of Sex Addicts Trauma Specialists)

Bella's First Six Months

STAGE ONE of THREE:

Seeking Safety and
Stabilization

aka "Surviving the Crisis"

Bella's Next Six Months

STAGE TWO of THREE:

Remembrance and
Mourning

aka "Coming to Terms"

Bella's Vision for Her Future:

STAGE THREE of THREE: Reconnection, aka "Integration"

Bella's Relational Needs (Stage Two)

Remembrance and Mourning—aka “Coming to Terms”

- By Stage Two, Bella's most notable presentations of trauma symptoms were **existential** and **relational** in nature—evidence that betrayal trauma had injured her sense of self within her relationships. This was in contrast to her Stage One presentations, symptoms that were primarily focused on **personal survival**.
- Bella intuitively knew that, in order to resolve this evolving second phase of her betrayal trauma, she would need a community of souls who could both (a) witness her pain AND (b) experientially relate to it.
- **From author Danielle Bernock:** “Trauma is personal. It does not disappear if it is not validated. When it is ignored or invalidated, the silent screams continue internally, heard only by the one held captive. When someone enters the pain and hears the screams, healing can begin.”
—*Emerging with Wings*
- Bella understood this—she needed **more** and **different** support. So what did she do? In my notes: “Bella got badass.”

Bella's Quest... and Bella's Question

- Bella stopped seeing her religious counselor—especially in light of her divorce, Bella felt even less understood than before. She began seeing me as a divorce recovery coaching client shortly thereafter.
- Bella began to distance herself from friends she'd made within her twelve step recovery group—and it took me awhile to figure out why...
- It's Important for us practitioners, especially for those of us who lead groups, to recognize this potential for inadvertently compounding our divorcing clients' trauma, by expecting them to integrate within a world where they no longer fit.
- Bella solved one problem. AND, that solution created a new problem...
- **Now Bella began to ask, "Where's a support group for women like me?"**
- Bella DIDN'T EVEN TRY to begin grieving without a surrounding sisterhood. She intuitively knew better.
- Bella DID encounter that transitional "Roadmap Gap."
And in true Bella fashion, she didn't take "no for an answer.

Instead, Bella got busy.



workshop objective
number two

LESSONS
from the
AFTERMATH

The Road through Debridement

Addressing the Unique Needs of Divorced and Divorcing Partners of Sex Addicts

Wikipedia defines debridement as: “the medical removal of dead, damaged or infected tissue, to improve the healing potential of the remaining healthy tissue.”

- [de] a prefix used to indicate a removal, a separation,
 a negation, a descent or a reversal
- [bride] a betrothed or married woman
- [ment] a concrete suffix, denoting an action or resulting state.

From *Avenue D*: By the time a woman reaches the end of her life with a sex addict, **she’s undergone an excruciating process of debridement and “de-bride-ment,”** often becoming an antithesis of the woman who once entered into that relationship. Staring down this road of **debridement** and **de-bride-ment**, she bravely dares to wonder...

“Where will I be when this marriage is dissolved?”

Eight Key Areas of “De-Bride-Ment”

1. Divorce: The “D” Word
2. Disintegration? Disconnection? Detachment?
3. Death Spiral: The Grief Goes Deep
4. Divorcing Homes, Dividing Hearts
5. Does Divorce Equal Failure
6. Discovering Me: Who Am I, Anyway?
7. Date Night? Yes? No? Maybe? Someday? Never?
8. Dreamgirls: Designing Our New Lives

Divorce: The “D” Word

How did I decide to divorce? Or, How was my divorce decided for me?

- **This topic cuts straight to the heart and soul of each client's journey—the DECISIVE aspects of her SA relationship.**
- This decision point often represents a partner's determination to act in defiance of others' convictions.
- There is an incalculable number of factors that fold into this decision for each and every individual client.
- IT IS **CRITICAL** that we practice extreme sensitivity regarding our individual clients' power of choice—freedom to make decisions in their OWN timing (if at all).
- **Quote from an APSATS colleague:** “What partners need—and what they rarely get—is complete respect and space, good hearty space, to make their own decisions in their own timeframe. Too often, partners feel railroaded. They disclose the truth about their marriage to a pastor or a counselor or a mentor, and next thing they know, they've just bought themselves a one-way ticket on a fast train to divorce. As coaches, we cannot push women into a situation that WILL change their lives. Those are decisions women must make for themselves, on their own terms.”

Divorce: The “D” Word | Timeline Survey

How long after my first “S” discovery did we separate (permanently) or divorce?

- 35% = less than 1 year
- 35% = two to five years
- 10% = five to ten years
- 20% = ten to twenty-four years

Which statement reflects your truth most accurately?

- 50% = I ended our relationship at just the right time.
I neither hurried my decision, nor waited too long to make it.
- 25% = I wish I'd ended my relationship more quickly than I did.
- 10% = My ex ended our relationship; it didn't happen on my terms or within my timeline.
- 15% = Other (some variation of “both” or “it's complicated.”)
- 00% = I wish I had waited longer before ending my relationship.

Divorce: The “D” Word | Quotes

Survey Question: If I could go back and change ONE thing about my timeline (discovery, the decision to divorce or separate, the length of time I fought to recover within my relationship, duration of the legal process), what would it be?

- For me I acted quickly when I realized my ex husband did not want to work to change his addictions... so I feel like with regards to the timeline of how things happened, I would not change anything.
- [I would change] the length of time I fought for the relationship.
I wish I had loved myself more and not denied the lack of recovery/remorse/responsibility on his part for so long.

From author Danielle LaPorte: “When you stop struggling to make something go the way you’ve wanted it to, you shift the energy grid of your life. Facing the fears is liberating (even though it can be wrenching)—and with that truth, comes a major power surge. *When you're done fighting, you're.done.fighting.* It's a bittersweet relief. Focus on the sweet.”

Disintegration? Disconnection? Detachment?

How do I relate to my ex husband? How do I renegotiate my role within this devolving relationship?

- Clients explore past, present and future dynamics between themselves and their exes. What challenges will these dynamics present going forward? What resources do these women have to meet and/or overcome those specific challenges?
- Clients identify representative encounters that demonstrate key “dis-integration” dynamics, from the most painful to the most empowering.
- Boundaries—these get tricky quickly during divorce, especially for women attempting to co-parent or “parallel parent.”
- Concept of closure—do we have it? Do we need it? Is it elusive or possible?
- Complicating factors, often indicators leading to “high conflict divorce”—includes problematic personality disorders, strategies and styles; varying degrees of psychopathology; deception, gaslighting and relational abuse.
- **Three of our six “Aftermath F Words”—forgiveness, fairness and friendship.**

Death Spiral: The Grief Goes Deep

How am I experiencing the different kinds (and stages) of grief, in response to my divorce? Have I given myself permission to grieve? Have other women witnessed and understood my grief?

- **FAVORITE New Resource!**

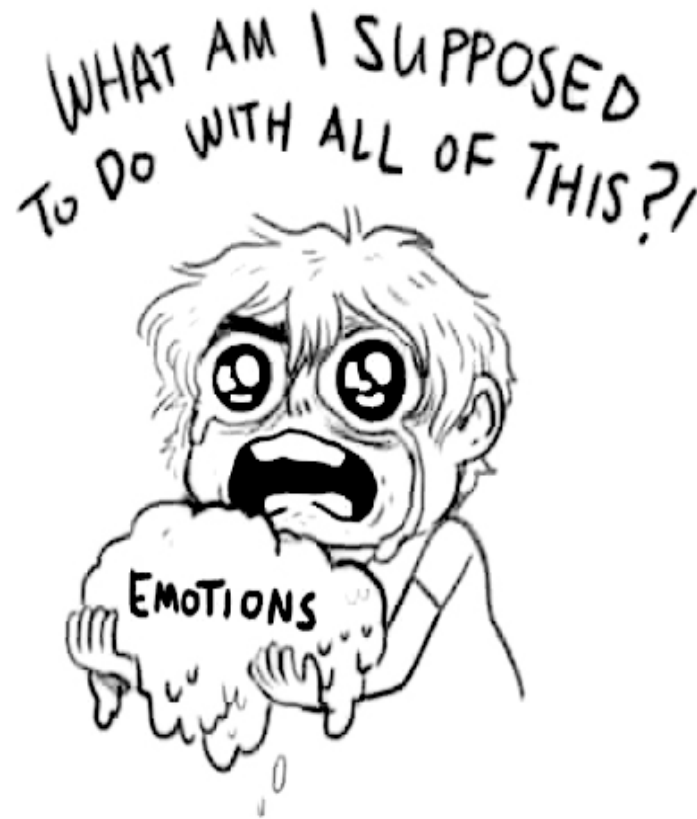
Journey from Abandonment to Healing, Surviving through and recovering from the five stages that accompany the loss of love
by Susan Anderson

- **Five Stages of Abandonment Grief, aka "SWIRL"**

- Shattering
- Withdrawal
- Internalization
- Rage
- Lifting

The Grief Goes Deep | continued

From an APSATS colleague: “We need to give these partners **permission to reengage their grief**, even if they find themselves grieving years beyond specific incidents—or even, years beyond the end of their entire relationships.”



Divorcing Homes, Dividing Hearts

How is this divorce affecting my children, my parents, family relationships and friendships?

- Like all couples whose lives are impacted by sex addiction, **it doesn't just affect the life of the addict and partner**; it also impacts that couple's children, extended family, friends, neighborhood, faith communities and businesses.
- **Kids get a lot of attention in this area—as well they should!** Remember that unrecognized casualties include parents, grandparents, siblings, in-laws, etc. This can weigh heavily on partners who value peace within their relationships.
- **IMPORTANT NOTES about parenting time, child support and spousal support calculations:** Partners **MUST** learn and understand how parental custody and parenting time calculations operate in their state.
 - Partners **MUST** recognize that “classic” paradigms have been replaced by contemporary ones.
 - Partners **MISTAKENLY** believe that they will automatically receive custodial rights based upon the fact that their husbands are sex addicts. This is categorically untrue—and it's a painfully rude awakening.

Does Divorce Equal Failure?

His? Mine? Ours?

If my marriage failed, what does that say about me?

- **Failure** as another “Aftermath F Word.”
- Failure is a concept drenched in self-incrimination.
Remember “internalization” as one of the abandonment grief stages from Susan Anderson? This is an example of that.
- **CPR Equation: Copy, Paste + Renegotiate**
 - Feelings of failure experienced by ALL partner clients
 - Magnify that sense of failure by factors of finality, permanence and publicity.
- Concept of “Wasted Time”
 - Work with Aftermath clients to identify, leverage and re-invest their recovery skills—anything healthy they learned and practiced within the duration of the relationship.

Discovering Me: “Who Am I Beyond Betrayal Trauma?”

What's my identity in the aftermath of this experience?
Who am I? Who do I want to be?

Aftermath clients have a love-hate relationship with labels.

- Labels are **personal** and **powerful**. Labels can be **used** or **abused**.

Question I'm actively discussing with my clients:

- After my relationship ends, am I still the partner of a sex addict?

Quote from “Grace,” one of my DreamGirls clients:

- “What do I call myself? Two words come to mind: Warrior and road-kill.”

Quote from Suzanne Reeves, author of *The Christian Chick's Guide to Surviving Divorce: What Your Girlfriends Would Tell You if They Knew What to Say*.

- “I hate how you are often forced to define yourself by your marriage status. I never really cared or noticed before. Now, I have to check the 'divorced' box on whatever form I'm filling out. **But all they give you is a box. No place to clarify. No place to explain how hard you fought. No place to say how painful it is. Only a label: Divorced.** I had to make the decision that I will not be defined by my marital status. My divorce will always be a part of my history, but it is not me! I will always bear the scars, but they are NOT who I am.”

Discovering Me | continued

Am I a Victim? Or Am I a Survivor?

Quote from *Broadly* journalist Molly Oswaks, September 1, 2016:

- "In writing and talking about sexual violence, **people must make a linguistic choice in describing someone who has endured an assault: victim or survivor.** Elizabeth [Smart] uses both terms seemingly interchangeably, as in 'rape victim' or 'survivor of sexual assault.' Though she uses both words, Elizabeth maintains that they're not synonymous. "I don't think they're the same thing; I think they are different stages, actually," Elizabeth says. "A victim is someone who is still going through the abuse, and a survivor is someone who survived it. I'm not saying that they don't have hard moments still, or things to work through, but it's more about making that choice: that they want to survive, that they no longer want to remain the victim and they're taking the steps to move on in their life."

Quote from "Grace," one of my *DreamGirls* clients:

"Now that I'm separated, I feel like I've been cheating on myself with my ex."

Date Night? | Yes? No? Maybe? Someday? Never?

- How has this divorce impacted my concepts of sex, intimacy and womanhood?
- Where am I at (or not at) with the idea of future love, romance and relationships?

Another “CPR” Equation: Copy, Paste + Renegotiate

- Like for all partners of sex addicts, **this is Ground Zero** for insecurity, self-incrimination and self-depreciation.
- For women starting over, this can be a striking “both/and”
 - Intimate betrayal has forced these clients to **deconstruct** old ideas about sexuality, intimacy and womanhood—usually across periods of years, sometimes decades.
 - Independent recovery (in the absence of their SA partner) is inviting them to reconstruct new ideas about those very same areas.
 - It's one of the most intimidating experiences faced by recovering partners.
It's also one of the most mind-blowingly beautiful

Date Night? | Continued

This is one of my favorite coaching topics, it calls upon me to **hold the client's agenda**.

- If the client tells me, HELL NO, I honor that.
- If she can't wait to make this happen, we take that bull by the horns and begin working in that direction.
- Regardless of IF or WHEN it happens, I've never seen an easy "reentry."

Example of a very "cliché" approach to reengaging future romance:

FidelityDating.com | <https://youtu.be/a5dBiKYM5Ps>



Example of a very "REAL" approach to reengaging future romance:



I ask all of my Aftermath clients, "What's your biggest FEAR about a new romantic relationship. **They all have the same answer.**

Second biggest fear is also a popular one: That I'll never be able to trust someone again.

- FEAR is the fifth "Aftermath F Word... and the sixth is FAIRYTALES. Check it out:

Lori Rubenstein: "Trust is a big thing. In the aftermath of betrayal, it's any woman's number one concern. But let's stop selling these women any more fairy tales. Telling women to trust others? It's a serious non-starter. It's insane to say "trust somebody" after everything these clients have been through. Instead, let's stop taking the easy road, stop speaking in the language of romantic fantasies, and start teaching women how to trust themselves."

DreamGirls: Designing Our New Lives

What kind of post-SA life do I want? And how do I get there?




Quote from Lori Rubenstein:
What if dreams die hard because they often aren't supposed to die?"

(Source: Transcending Divorce)

Works with clients to isolate and identify the core values at the heart of their lifelong dreams—beneath and beyond all the DETAILS of those dreams—then “re-vision” new dreams to inspire their life in the aftermath of divorce or separation from an SA relationship.

From Glennon Doyle Melton:
When one is burying a dream, one might want to plant a new one.

(Source: Unknown)



workshop objective
number three

Resource Roundtable

Top Takeaways:

I asked my clients, colleagues and other contacts, **"How can clinicians, coaches and clergy improve the support they provide for partners whose relationships do not survive?"**

- Less pressure upon clients to make or execute decisions to terminate the relationship, and more sensitivity toward clients who take a long time to make those decisions
- Nurture relationships with local legal, financial and real estate entities within your community. Think PRACTICAL support!
- Normalize clients' shifts in support systems, relational needs and peer relationships
- Empower clients to focus on trusting themselves, not trusting others
- Share resources with fellow practitioners
- Understand the Aftermath F words: fear, failure, finances, fairness, forgiveness and fairytales
- Inspire clients to manage progress and accountability
- **MOST IMPORTANTLY: PLEASE give yourselves credit for the incredibly valuable support you provide for ALL of your clients—including those you escort to/through the decision to divorce or separate.**

Resource Roundtable

What resources do YOU recommend for divorced, divorcing and separated partners of sex addicts?

- What concerns do you have about the current “Roadmap Gap” in available resources?
- What tools, methods, books, exercises group dynamics have YOU used with your own *Aftermath* clients?
- Would you be willing to contribute time to further research in this area?

Please contact me for further conversations on this topic!

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