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**MOVING ON  
AFTER DIVORCE**

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# Moving On After Divorce

BY DAVID J. GLASS, ESQ., PH.D



# Embracing Your Second



*You can't go back and change the beginning,  
but you can start where you are and change the ending.*

— C. S. Lewis

# Chance at Happiness



It's done. The property squabbles, custody battles, and court dates that felt like they would never end are finally over. You're divorced.

Life often feels as if it's in limbo during the divorce period, but now you've reached the light at the end of the tunnel. You have a chance to pick up the pieces and create a new life for yourself. You're ready to move on.

The question is, how do you do that? What does life after divorce even look like? If you're like most recently divorced people, your head



is swirling with questions. Where are you going to live? How is your social life going to change? How will you raise your kids? Will there be enough money? When should you reenter the dating pool?

I understand. These and countless other questions hounded me as I emerged from my own divorce more than a decade ago. It was a time of uncertainty, but also a time of hope. Here was my chance to push the reset button, to examine the different areas of my life, and to make them better. But where to start? To begin making sense of it all, I created a chart with six boxes, one for each pressing life question I had. Putting it on paper took the worries out of my head, allowing me to separate my concerns into categories, define them, and tackle them one at a time. A year later, I had built a stronger network of friends than I'd ever had before, committed to a better relationship with my kids, and found new love with a caring, compassionate partner. Divorce can truly be your second chance at happiness.

## ASSESSING WHERE YOU ARE NOW

The first step in moving on after divorce is assessing where you are today and deciding where you want to be tomorrow. Realizing that strategy and carrying it out, however, are vastly different endeavors. If you're looking for the best way to get started, here's my advice: start with yourself.

New divorcees rarely ask, "What did I do wrong?" It is unfortunate that most of them don't take a moment to ask themselves this question.

In almost every divorce, both parties have contributed to the dysfunction. Your ex-spouse may have had problems, but chances are, you're not perfect either. Following that logic, if you want to move on from your divorce, it's imperative that you start with some self-reflection. **Ask yourself questions like:**

- **What did I do wrong?**
- **How did I add to this?**
- **How could I have helped fix it?**
- **What did I do to drive my ex-crazy?**
- **What did I do that may have caused my ex to treat me poorly in return?**

If you skip the self-assessment phase, you risk making the same mistakes based on the same bad behavior—and as a result, your next relationship will be far more likely to end poorly, too. No one wants that. That's why you need to investigate the many ways you can make the most out of the opportunity divorce has given you for growth and reflection.

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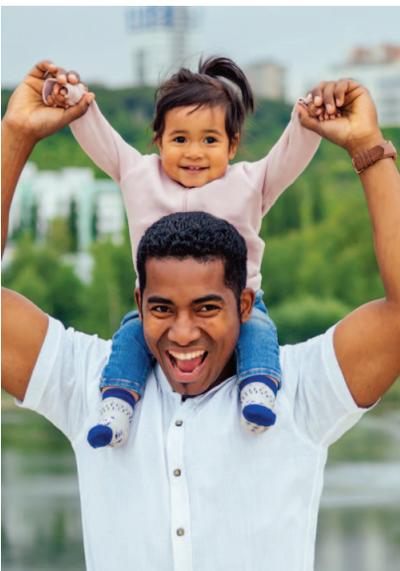
**“Therapy is the easiest and most efficient way to move on from your divorce, and I strongly recommend it to all my clients. It’s the perfect environment to dig in and begin the process of self-reflection.”**

Therapy is the easiest and most efficient way to move on from your divorce, and I strongly recommend it to all my clients. It’s the perfect environment to dig in and begin the process of self-reflection. Think of it as a weekly chance to speak with someone who is completely neutral on the subject of your divorce; your therapist is there to listen to you and offer advice—nothing else.

### **BACK TO BASICS**

Don’t rush the moving on process. This is one of those life events that you need time to process. In the early going, learning to get some perspective on your divorce is enough. Take the first six months to take a deep breath and just be. Focus on work, being a parent, and being a friend. It’s Henry Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in action: at the bottom level of the pyramid is safety and security, and at the top is self-actualization.

That means when you’ve got the basic stuff down and you’ve settled into a new routine, you can begin to expand your self-assessment. In



each area of your life, you’ll be able to ask yourself, “Am I happy doing this?” If you’re not, is there something you could change?

### **RELATIVE STABILITY VS. HAPPINESS**

All of our decisions require us to make choices between relative stability and happiness. Relative stability is something most of us are familiar with. Think of it as the way we’re used to doing things — this is who I’m married to, this is how we spend money, these are my friends. There is stability in that, even if you’re not truly happy, and that status quo will continue unless you make a change. Sometimes, however, you have to ask yourself whether this stasis brings happiness or whether you’re just relying on that stability because it’s easier than uprooting your life.

Now that you’re divorced, the life that you once knew has already been uprooted. You might as well make the most of it. Take a look at every aspect of your life and ask yourself: Are you just doing things because that’s how you’ve always done them? Or, is there a different way you could do things that could make you happy and feel good? If you aren’t pushing for happiness in all aspects of your life, you’re missing out.

### **ENGAGE IN CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING**

So how do you figure out what you want to change and how to change it? Engage in Creative Problem Solving (CPS). CPS is a framework for individuals to identify the problems they have in their lives, generate and analyze many different options, determine the outcomes of the various potential solutions, and choose the best option to pursue. >>



To do so, you need to first figure out what your problems are. I recommend taking a sheet of paper and dividing it into 6 squares. You will label those 6 squares as follows: Lifestyle, Work, Financial, Children, Social, and Romantic. In each square, list the parts of your life that are anything other than ideal. Later, you will come back to these problems and pick them off one by one.

Next, pick one of these problems to work on. Try to generate as many solutions as possible. You can't edit yourself in this step. Don't start second-guessing your potential solutions with statements like: "That makes no sense," or "That will never work," or even "That's just plain dumb." You need to brainstorm. You need to write down anything that comes to mind. Once you get to 12-15 possible solutions, it is time for assessment.

For each of those 12-15 solutions, you need to ask yourself: "What would likely happen if I did this?" Write down the answers for all of the potential solutions. Once you have finished, the best one or two possible solutions will naturally rise to the top.

Then, it is time to act quickly. Don't overanalyze the situation. Just choose one of those options. Even if your first choice doesn't turn out to be a true solution, you can always double-back and choose your next-best potential solution.

It is not a crime to choose the wrong path. It is a crime to give up trying if you make a mistake.

CPS is relatively simple, but it works. You can work your way through all of the line items in the six boxes on your chart. And once you have cleared them out, you can create another chart and see if you can re-populate each of the boxes. Making CPS part of your life will provide you with something to fall back upon whenever you are feeling link things are not as good as they can be.

### MOVING ON

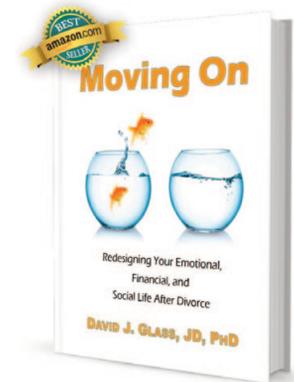
After a divorce, you have a second chance to redesign your life in every aspect. You can adjust your mental and emotional functions, financial strategies, where to live, who your friends are, and the way you see your family. Look at each of these and decide what works and what doesn't work, keeping in mind that only partly working isn't good enough. It's either working or it's not—and it can always be improved.



David is the Managing Partner and Chair of the Family Law Department at ENENSTEIN PHAM & GLASS, a bi-coastal, 33 attorney law firm. He has written numerous articles and book chapters on the intersection of law and clinical psychology. He is the incoming Editor of the Los Angeles Psychologist magazine, and he Chairs the Board of Directors for the Alzheimer's Association's Southern California chapter. He is a regular contributor to Divorce magazine, Good Morning America, CNN, and Fox's Good Day L.A.

Often, this process of auditing your life means making some tough choices. You'll likely find yourself parting with many other habits, possessions, and people other than your ex-spouse. As you ask yourself whether you want something in your life or not, just remember that as you ditch the stuff that no longer serves a purpose, you're replacing them with things to try.

So here's to second chances. Here's to new opportunities and experiences, whether at work, with your family, or in your love life. Here's to moving on. ○



When **DAVID J. GLASS** went through his own divorce over a decade ago, he was surprised at how few resources were available to help guide him through the process. Drawing from his own post-divorce journey, as well as from over two decades of experience first as a psychologist and currently as a family law attorney, David wrote *Moving On* to help others pick themselves up, set a new course, and start moving forward.



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