



Your

Catholic Coach

Be transformed! Rom 12:1-2

dating after divorce

Did you ever try to teach your children how to swim?

Little Sara feels safe, secure, and enjoys the pool sitting on the steps or hanging onto the side. But try to drag her away into the scary deep waters where she can't touch bottom, and you invite pure panic!

Kicking, screaming, and clawing her way across your face and out of your arms, she will try to thrash back to the side to the steps, where she was happiest. It is far too terrifying to be alone in that water when she does not know how to handle it.

Now fast forward a year or so and Sara has learned to hold her breath and kick her feet; she's put on her floaties and is underwater, splashing merrily in the deep end. But suddenly the rough-housing older boys in the pool have pushed her under, she's gulping in water, and with her fear threatening to weigh her down she almost drowns.

Miraculously she makes her way to the steps, climbs out, and wraps herself in a towel. After a few tears she doesn't want to be left out and wants to go back into the pool—and that's when you step in.

She's not ready to swim again right now

She's not ready. She's exhausted and her muscles are still weak. Even though she feels better, you see that it's probably a good idea that she stays

in the shallow end and get rid of the floaties. To get back in the deep and survive, she'll need to develop some stronger swimming skills.

This is a good image of two dynamics that often happen after divorce:

(1) some don't have enough sense and want to jump right back in, and
 (2) others want to get out of the pool altogether—too afraid to ever go in again.

For some divorced people who have barely made it to the side and are clinging to the steps, they do NOT want a new relationship. The trauma from almost drowning was too much. No way are they ready to leave the safety of the steps in a world of relationships where emotionally you can't touch bottom and can't catch your breath.

Some people can't wait to jump back in!

Good Lord, divorced people have taken such a hit! They feel unloved, ugly, old, undesirable, and they just want to feel good about themselves again. They want to be with someone; they want love, affection, affirmation, and security—God hard-wired us for those good things. No one wants to leave the goods that married life offered and head out into the deep waters of loneliness, anxiety, fear, and the unknown.

Now you can understand why someone may want to rush back, as it were, into the perceived safety of a new relationship. They loved being married, being a family, or having sexual intimacy. They are too impatient to sit on the side and allow themselves to fully recover or to examine what went wrong and how to avoid similar problems in the future. They often fail to see that they need to make interior changes and develop better skills before they are ready to get back into the dating scene.

Some just want to be friends

Some admit it's not wise rush into a romance but maybe they can just be "friends." Just some casual company of the other sex to feel like we are still lovable, right? Wrong. Here's when dating after divorce will usually end up as another disaster:

Be truly available first

If you haven't petitioned for or received an annulment, you are still married. Neither you, nor anyone who may fall in love with you, can move toward marriage. That usually sets you both up for disappointment, frustration, and a sinful using of each other. It also leads you right into sexual expressions of intimacy which are reserved only for marriage. Yes, they are "natural", but they are not good. This is sin, and sin brings deep wounds and even some kind of death. That's not love. And you both usually begin to resent the Church, scoff at her rules, and make excuses for your lifestyle.

Learn from the past to protect your future

If you haven't thoroughly (and I mean thoroughly) examined why your marriage failed, what part you played in it—even back in the beginning—and taken the time to make great efforts to grow and mature through your divorce, you risk bringing all those disordered dynamics into another relationship. (The annulment process helps you process these things, by the way.) Is that fair to the other person ... and his or her children? No, and it's not true love, either.

Don't use others--even "benevolently"

If you are anywhere from simply antsy to deeply desperate to rebuild a family, replace a parent for your children, or otherwise avoid the discomfort of being single, you are probably reducing the new person to an object—like a patch over a hole, a plug in a socket, or a pill to take to feel better. Healthy relationships only spring from two people who are free to remain single and still be content, but who choose each other out of authentic love, not loneliness. And who both want holiness for themselves and the other.

Don't rush

The fear of being alone blinds you. Relationship red flags are meant to protect you and when you ignore, rationalize, or minimize them, you almost invite another divorce upon yourself and your children—and the new person and his/her family. The 50% average national divorce rate is increased greatly for second marriages, at 65-75%. This is usually due to not taking the time and making the effort to do what is necessary for full and lasting recovery. When you rush back in the pool with floaties you'll never be able

to really “swim”—and when the waters get too rough, you risk drowning again.

Don't play with emotional and sexual fire

Dating is never really ‘casual.’ Most people who meet at the coffee shop have at least some hopes and desires for love and their hearts can easily be broken, despite casual exteriors.

Even if YOU are “fine” with it, you never really know what is in the heart of the other. Risking a broken heart is never casual. Many are guarded and taking their time, and rightly so, but many can prefer the safe and endless “dating” to a move toward marriage.

This type of relating has some immediate benefits that soothe the ego, but it can also be a mutual using of each other until someone better comes along. Sexual frustration is usually relieved with various levels of conditions and guilt. That’s not love, either—even among “friends.”

Let your heart be broken

After divorce, your broken heart should continue breaking—ever more widely to receive the love God wants to pour into it. He made you for himself, and he is the ONLY one who can fully satisfy your heart, even if you don’t feel like it or believe it.

Have you made a false idol out of marriage or relationship? Has it become your primary purpose for being, and without it you’re lost? If so, it may have become the most important thing in your life and has thus replaced God himself. Marriage, success, power, wealth, security, our children, our careers, and many other “strange gods” hold too high a place in our hearts. They are good things, but they must take second place to God.

Take advantage of the solitude

Whether you’ve wrongly worshiped relationships, or have rejected them altogether, the alone-time after a divorce can be a HUGE blessing. Don't waste it! It should help us unclasp the firm grip we had on all that we lost and move us gently and slowly out into the “deep” of knowing God, ourselves, and his true purpose for our lives.

Remember your true purpose

What is our true purpose? You may have learned it “by heart” as a child: first to come to KNOW God, and then to LOVE him. Everything else should flow from that intimate love so that when we SERVE him it will be by seeing and loving others rightly, not using them.

That’s the power that will move you into the deep, out past your little pools and into the endless ocean of God’s love.

You can learn to swim again

Despite the wounds of divorce, you can be like real-life, “Soul Surfer” Bethany Hamilton who lost her arm to a shark, but who spent enough time healing that she could relearn how to “swim”. If you will do the same, the waters of life will be deep blue and cool, where freedom from our fears keeps us afloat.

And then ... you will ride the waves!

Do you need help with:

- Processing your emotions?
- Wondering about the future?
- Helping the kids?
- Dealing with an ex?
- Dating right this time?

Get the wise, experienced support of a Catholic Coach!

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