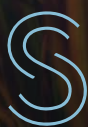


**Helping Men  
prioritise their  
mental health  
when going  
through divorce  
or separation.**

---

Brought to you by:



Simple  
Separation



MANTLE





## Helping Men prioritise their mental health when going through divorce or separation.

---

At Simple Separation we prioritise the wellbeing of our separating couples. In this e-book we have partnered with Mantle for valuable information on how men can look after their mental wellbeing during the separation process.

Separation and divorce are increasingly common in Australia, **with between 42 and 45 per cent of all marriages coming to an end**<sup>1</sup>. Remarriage following separation and divorce is also common, but these marriages have the highest risk of ending. In Australia, approximately 50 per cent of all divorces involve children under the age of 18 years. While separation and divorce appear to be a common phenomenon in the community today, we shouldn't underestimate the significance of this life stressor for **all the individuals involved**. That said, the focus of this resource will be on helping men to navigate this tough life experience.

# Why focus on men?

## A broad explanation.

---

It is important to note that not all men are the same and there is plenty of diversity between men and within each man, depending on a range of factors.

It is equally as important to note that there are salient differences between men and women; how men experience the world compared to women, how men respond to life's stressors compared to women, and the differences between men and women, not just in terms of their willingness to seek support from others, but also their unique preferences when engaging and staying engaged with professional mental health support.

Many of these differences between men and women can be accounted for by expectations of masculinity (that is, perceptions of what it means to be a man), which act as something like an invisible cape guiding how men should think, feel, and behave. While it seems fair and equal to offer gender neutral information here, gender neutral information can fail to recognise the unique experiences of men and women in the world.

*"Everyone knows that there are differences between men and women. The marketing and retailing industries spend many millions of dollars on market research to understand the needs and preferences of men and women so that they can gender-target their messages to both adults and children. They wouldn't do it if the evidence told them that gender-blind strategies would work just as well."*

*(Rosemary Calder, AM, Director of the Australian Health Policy Collaboration).*

Therefore, it is important to consider these factors when providing mental health information and support.

# Why focus on men?

## Specific to separation and divorce.

---

Research indicates that divorced men have a higher rate of mental ill-health when compared to men who have never been married, widowed men, as well as divorced women.

In fact, studies have found an increased risk for depression and suicide in men after divorce. In one study, men were found to have a 6-fold increase in risk for depression after a divorce<sup>2</sup>. Another study found that divorced men were eight times more likely to die by suicide compared to divorced women<sup>3</sup>.





# Men's reactions to separation and divorce

## – what might you experience?

---

Separation and divorce can be painful for all individuals involved, though especially painful for men, having been identified as one of the most stressful life events we may ever have to deal with.

Specifically, men report a huge range of reactions and feelings during and after separation, including:

- Anger, aggression, irritability (often used by men to mask underlying vulnerability)
- Increased alcohol and/or drug use
- Risk taking and impulsivity ('f\*\*k it' mindset)
- Somatic symptoms (disrupted sleep, loss of appetite, aches, and pains, declining physical health)
- Loneliness, isolation and withdrawal from social networks, family (including your children), or work commitments
- Bewilderment, disbelief, and denial
- Feeling ashamed, guilty, or sad
- Grief
- Loss of identity ("who the hell am I now?")
- Unfairly internalising the breakdown of a relationship as a weakness or a failure ("I'm not good enough", "there's something wrong with me")
- Feeling pressure to 'man-up', 'stay strong', 'jump back on the horse'/ move forward as if nothing has happened
- Relief

Some of these reactions may be normal initially and tend to settle over time. However, it is important to know when they might be more problematic and require more targeted intervention (e.g., self-support, social support, professional support – which we'll explore shortly)



## When your reactions might be more problematic.

---

- If reactions/symptoms continue to worsen with minimal improvement over time.
- If how you are feeling is causing you significant distress – “why can’t I shake this?” “I want these feelings to stop”.
- If the way you are feeling is preventing you from doing things you can usually do (activities of daily living/ things you need to get done) or the things you usually enjoy doing.

# Here are some tips to help you find your feet and get going again:

01

## YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO IT ALONE – REACH OUT TO YOUR MATES.

In some cases, your partner may have been one of your closest allies and a person who you could turn to about anything. When this person is no longer a part of your life, it can be hard to work out who else you can talk to when things aren't going so well, and even harder to take action and actually catch up with your mates.

According to Movember, one in five Aussies (22 per cent) have not arranged to catch up with a close friend in six months or more<sup>4</sup>. When we are going through challenges in life it can be hard enough getting out of bed and brushing your teeth let alone leaving the house to catch up with friends. Social connections bring meaning and joy to our lives and have a positive effect on our mental health and wellbeing, and it is also one of the greatest predictors of a long and healthy life<sup>5</sup>. The good news in this case is that it's not about quantity - most people need only a couple of quality mates in their life to experience these benefits.

**Some ideas to reconnect when you're feeling low are as follows:**

- Continue to remind yourself of the benefits of spending time with your family and friends.
- Don't overcommit yourself – keep it brief at first.
- If getting out and about is a bit overwhelming initially, chat with your mates on the phone or online.
- Banter can be helpful and, despite going through a tough period in your life, give yourself permission to have a laugh.
- Schedule regular catch ups – physically lock these into your calendar.

If you are struggling right now, grab your phone and reach out to that one mate (via text or call) who you know has your back and see how it makes you feel. "Hey mate, I'm struggling a bit, can we have a chat?"

Resist the urge to isolate. Reach out to people in your life who care about you and who make you feel good about yourself. Spend less time with people who leave you feeling shit.

# 02

## BACK TO BASICS – WHAT'S YOUR BLUEPRINT FOR FEELING GOOD?

**Routine:** After a relationship ends your routine will likely change – living in a new place, taking care of tasks that your partner used to sort out can be overwhelming. So instead of looking too far ahead and trying to solve the next months' worth of responsibilities in the here and now, take a short-term focus – what needs to be done in the next hour or two – create a schedule, a to-do list and try to take things moment by moment, slowly ticking off what needs to be done.

**Self-support:** When things in your life might seem a little bit out of control, it's important to really narrow in on the basics to give yourself a solid foundation.

- Eat healthy – less microwave meals and take-out.
- Exercise – do the exercise you enjoy and/ or the exercise you can commit to consistently.
- Manage stress – it can be useful to reflect on what has helped you get through difficult periods in the past, and then double down on these tried and tested strategies that work for YOU.
- Be mindful of how much you're drinking (and using) – blocking out the pain with drugs and alcohol may be a tempting short-term solution, but it'll only prolong the heartache. If you keep numbing the pain, pushing it away, trying your best to pretend it doesn't exist, it will only be a matter of time before it bubbles to the surface. The more you suppress the pain, the greater the build-up of pressure and the bigger the potential explosion.





# 03

## YOU AND YOUR 'EX' – TRY YOUR MIGHTIEST TO NEGOTIATE A PEACEFUL SEPARATION – FOR YOU, FOR YOUR EX, FOR SO MANY REASONS.

No doubt if you have reached the point of separation or divorce, in a lot of cases emotions may be running hot and there might be some 'bad blood' between you and your ex. But holding onto this negative energy can be disastrous not only for your health and wellbeing, but for your life overall.

Here are some suggestions toward achieving a civil and respectful separation:

- Separated people do sometimes rebuild a friendship together, however, this may take a long time. In the early stages of separation, restrict contact with your ex (e.g. one call per week or fortnight) and in the lead up to a conversation take a moment to set the intention that you will try your hardest to make it civil – set the intention to remain calm and composed.
- If the situation is complex and you don't agree on much, get an outside perspective from a trusted source, such as a Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner. Family Dispute Resolution is an effective, less stressful, and cost-efficient alternative to help parties reach agreement. Best of all, an FDR Practitioner is a neutral party who can remain impartial in all discussions, and help you avoid getting into (yet another) argument. [Click here to read 'Achieving an amicable Property Settlement'](#)
- If it's over, it's often over for good. Holding onto false hope will only prolong the pain and suffering:
  - Don't have sex with your ex
  - Try not to be each other's emotional support, instead lean on other trusted supports
- If you do seek legal representation, be sure to research patiently, and find a lawyer that will try to avoid aggressive litigation. Be wary of law firms whose aim is to 'win' your case by taking it to court, as this will present drastically increased costs in billable hours.

Simple Separation is a complete mediation and legal information service that assist couples to legally finalise their separation from start to finish online. All legal services are provided by a preferred panel of the best independent legal practitioners, estate planning lawyers and conveyancers who share the same philosophy - to separate fairly and respectfully. <https://www.simple-separation.com.au/>

Witnessing parents separate can be tough on children of any age, but there are things you can do to make this a smoother and healthier process for everyone involved. Remember that those closest to us often learn how to behave from observations – how would you like your children to behave in their relationships in the future?

**Some other important points include:**

- Parental conflict is more harmful for children than the actual separation. Again, it's extremely important to try to negotiate a peaceful separation for the sake of your kids.
- Talk and act in a respectful way with your ex.
- Talk openly with your children about the separation in a way that they will understand and make sure they feel safe and loved by both parents. Remind them it's not their fault. Don't get them to take sides. Don't speak horribly about your ex to your children.
- Consider creating a comprehensive Parenting Plan. A mutually agreed Parenting Plan is one of the most useful tools for helping families preserve a respectful post-separation relationship. Creation of a plan is also incredibly effective for safeguarding the wellbeing of the children, fostering harmonious co-parenting, and avoiding serious mistakes during and long after the separation and divorce has occurred. Depending on the level of conflict between parents, a Parenting Plan is agreed upon via direct conversation, or via mediation with the assistance of a Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner.

At Simple Separation we work with you and your former partner to develop a Parenting Plan that will be in the best interests of your children for now and into the future. Click here to read ['The Importance of a Parenting Plan'](#)

# 05

## PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT OPTIONS – THERE ARE PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE READY TO SUPPORT YOU ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

Trusted GP for a chat, Mental Health Care Plan, and referral to Mantle or another psychology practice:

**Mantle Health** – 1-1 professional telehealth psychology support for men:  
1300 646 753; [www.mantlehealth.com.au](http://www.mantlehealth.com.au)

**Lifeline** – 13 11 14 – free crisis support 24/7.

**MensLine** – 1300 78 99 78 – free crisis-oriented phone and online counselling.

**Relationships Australia** – 1300 364 277 – relationship support for individuals, families, and communities.

**Mr Perfect** – men's health and well-being resources  
[www.mrperfect.org.au/pages/mens-health-directory](http://www.mrperfect.org.au/pages/mens-health-directory)

**Simple Separation** - Separate quickly and amicably at a fraction of the cost of legal fees <https://www.simple-separation.com.au/>

Options for boys and teenagers:

**ReachOut** [www.au.reachout.com/mental-health-issues](http://www.au.reachout.com/mental-health-issues)

**Head to Health Chatstarter**  
[www.headtohealth.gov.au/covid-19-support/chatstarter](http://www.headtohealth.gov.au/covid-19-support/chatstarter)

“

“Reaching out for help was daunting and I was extremely nervous, but I remember thinking after my first appointment, ‘that was nowhere near as bad as I had built up in my own head’. Speaking with someone was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”

*(Tony, recently divorced, 42 years of age)*

If a man in your life is struggling and you’re not quite sure how to best support him, check out this valuable resource - [helping the men in your life who might be struggling](#).

# References

---

<sup>1</sup> [Parenting after separation](#) | The Australian Psychological Society

<sup>2</sup> [Depression risk higher for divorced men: Statistics Canada](#) | CBC News

<sup>3</sup> [Divorce and suicide risk](#) | A J Kposowa. Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health

<sup>4</sup> [One in five hasn't seen mates in six months or more](#) | Movember Press Release

<sup>5</sup> [Good relationships = better predictor of people's health](#) | Harvard Second Generation Study



Brought to you by:



MANTLE