



## Seven things NOT to do when getting Divorced or breaking up

As the producer of the first UK divorce fair, the Starting Over Show, I have become very involved in the practical and emotional consequences that beset those of us who have been through divorce and significant relationship break ups.

I decided to ask my friends for advice that they might share based on their own personal experiences.



**Suzy Miller**  
The Starting Over Show  
[www.startingovershow.co.uk](http://www.startingovershow.co.uk)

The Starting Over Show was the first event of its kind in the UK and has been designed to provide useful information, expert advice, resources and support to anyone who has experienced a relationship break up or significant life crisis or change, all under one roof.

To find out when our next live events are planned, visit [www.startingovershow.co.uk](http://www.startingovershow.co.uk)

Or checkout our resource site at [www.sos-village.org](http://www.sos-village.org)

Feel free to contact us direct for guidance and to contribute to our 'personal stories' section: email me at [suzy@startingovershow.co.uk](mailto:suzy@startingovershow.co.uk)

## 7 THINGS NOT TO DO WHEN GETTING DIVORCED

## 1 Be careful what you agree to

For example, a settlement that has the condition of spousal maintenance payments ending on the remarriage (or cohabitation) of the ex-partner, can be an ultimately destructive agreement. Even if you swear blind you will never marry again, try not to create a financial incentive to stay single. If your ex-spouse paying out the maintenance is able to cohabit and marry again, why should you risk financial hardship if you should fall in love with an impoverished artist? A fair settlement should not be dependent on remarriage, and Family Finance Barrister Elissa Da Costa tells us that courts in London rarely consider cohabitation a reason to terminate periodical payments for the very reason that the cohabitation relationship is far more tenuous than marriage. However, your ex spouse may reasonably want to put a limit on the duration of the spousal support.

*Expert advice:*

*“If you are a wife, likely to receive periodical payments, make sure that your divorce proceedings are issued in the Principal Registry in London as the judges there do not approve of cohabitation as the trigger to stop periodical payments.”*

*Elissa Da Costa, Family Finance*

My friend E:

“I agreed to a maintenance settlement that included my maintenance being subject to me remaining single, but despite money for my young children, I need my own spousal maintenance to keep a large house going (I have 4 children from the marriage) and as they are still young, I am unable to earn enough to keep the house going on my own.

As soon as the ink was dry on the divorce papers, my ex-spouse remarried, while I meanwhile, cannot even consider living with someone else unless they are able to support me and my family. Most wives, based on earning capacity, age of children etc, have to accept a limited period of spousal maintenance (maybe 3 or 5 years) although she MUST stick out for the option to go back to court at that time to have this period extended if necessary.

My advice is to be extremely wary of cohabitation but accept that maintenance isn't forever. Try to secure other things not relevant to whether you stay single or remarry, like equity in the house or a portion of the pension. ”

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**2 Don't accept a poor settlement  
just to 'stay out of court' or 'get it all over with'.**

The temptation to just end the whole horrible process can mean accepting a settlement that will, when the dust has settled, lead to resentment and a real sense of injustice, which will do nothing to improve the post marital relationship.

*Expert advice:*

*"This is indeed correct and spouses should consider carefully the financial ramifications of certain outcomes. However, this is not to say that it is always wrong to settle rather than hold out for more money. Money is not always everything and depending on the reasons for the marital breakdown, the need to get on with life and the emotional fall out from the divorce process, it may be worth taking less and in effect paying for finality and peace of mind."*

*Elissa Da Costa, Family Finance Barrister*

My friend FM:

"A few years after my divorce I wrote to the legal expert in the Guardian to ask if I could go back to court and change my bad divorce settlement which I had agreed to because I wanted to let go of the past and move on.

The consequence of which, is that my ex-husband now has a large 'stake' in the house without any responsibility for paying the mortgage, or maintenance of the property. With two children I am not in a position, only being able to work part time, to buy him out, and I receive only a small amount of money for the kids but nothing for me.

I realise now that I should have stood up for myself at the time and insisted on a fairer settlement, which the courts were likely to have backed, and now I have an extra source of grievance with my ex that I could have avoided. The advice printed in the Guardian was that I am stuck with my original settlement."

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### 3 Don't agree to a settlement that is not linked to inflation by a pre-agreed formula

Even though my good friend JT agreed a maintenance arrangement with his ex-wife that was index-linked to inflation, poor drafting by both parties' barristers meant that what is meant to be an annual increase was able to be asserted just 12 weeks into the agreement. Further dispute erupted consequent to there being several different ways to make the fiscal calculation.

My friend JT:

"What this means is that despite the decree absolute being long past, financial wrangles, which would be costly and threaten to lead us straight back into court, continue to blight my life.

I would recommend that a clear formula of how to evaluate any future maintenance adjustments be defined as part of the divorce settlement, and agreement also on when it can be imposed. Otherwise, it feels like the divorce is never over and the healing cannot begin."

### 4 Don't go on dating sites until you have finished being angry with your ex

I see countless online dating profiles (not just all 'research', I confess!) where the profiles ask to meet people through the site who are 'honest' (which I usually interpret as 'won't commit adultery like their last partner) and openly tell future dates that they are 'overweight' or 'don't have much money' which are not only going to read as 'don't love myself' and 'have no ambition', but which show that online sites are better used to widen your social circle where such personal descriptions become irrelevant, rather than looking for a new partner when you are still suffering low self esteem and fear of further rejection.

My friend FS:

"When I split up from my long term partner I was in a vulnerable place of no self confidence with relationships and feeling very needy. The last thing I needed was to meet other people in the same place!

Later on I did online dating and had fun meeting new people, but made sure they were ready to meet me!"

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**5 Don't think ex-partners have to hate each other**

Yes, you may go through stages where that is how you feel, but hang onto a belief that people who once loved each other and were friends, can have a harmonious post break up relationship.

This `dream' (as it may seem at the time) is worth working towards, but if children are involved the damage of break up can be compensated for, to some degree, by both parents acting in a respectful and grown up way with each other, and not just in front of the children either.

My friend S:

“You can be angry with someone and with yourself but that is not an excuse to behave badly to someone that you need to maintain a long term relationship with because of the children.

This is not about putting yourself second or compromising – it is just about clear boundaries and honest and respectful communication.

Even with no children involved, how much better will your next relationship be if the last one is not still haunting you?”

*Expert advice:*

*“Something I have found really helpful to process the pain and anger is a goodbye process – it can help the movement to the more optimistic ‘starting over’ phase. It is great if it can be done with the ex partner but if that not possible then with the help of a therapist - or alone.”*

*Julia Armstrong, coach, author and therapist*

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**6 Don't pretend you're not angry**

Break ups involve anger and pain, and you need to find ways to release those emotions in a healthy way. Write your ex's name on a squash ball before a strenuous game. Watch sad films and let yourself cry (a great way to relieve stress, by the way), tell your friends and anyone else who will listen how you feel (use “I feel...” instead of “He/she did this or that” - try it).

But don't shout at your ex. Their reaction will fuel your rage and so the game goes on.

My friend J:

“When complaining about my ex I learnt to say “I feel...” and then express my feelings without needing to blame anyone in the process. So I'd say what I feel, then listen (that's important) to what they say back. If they started ranting or trying to lay blame on me, I stopped communications for a while till they got the message. I always tried not to react immediately.

It's really important to learn how to share experiences without making the other person feel guilty (which is what you tend to do if you are angry with them). This is a great thing to practice for future relationships and if you're really clever, you will get someone to help you. There are counsellors who can guide you through `break up' without venting all your anger on each other in the process.”

**7 Never Never Never slag off your ex-partner in front of the children**

If you see anyone else doing that – stop them. This will cause unbelievable harm to the kids, even very young ones, who already feel confused and guilty (sorry, but they do, whatever you may tell them) that their parents are separating.

Don't burden them with even more angst and unhappiness than they are already having to deal with. Instead, show them how relationships don't end just because people are not living in the same house, and that treating others with respect should hold true even if they are driving you nuts at the time.

My friend SW:

“Do you know that children call `Childline' so that they can have someone to talk to about their parents' break up, because they don't want to talk directly to their parents in case they upset them?

They protect us without us realising, so even if we say “I'm really angry about what is happening to my life” by not being derogatory or unkind about someone whom the child loves, that is going to make it easier for the children to safely express their own feelings about how they feel about the break up.”

## OUR PARTNERSHIPS:



wikivorce  
the divorce support community



For a full list of our current partnerships, see <http://www.startingovershow.co.uk/index.php/home/our-partnerships/>

So where has the SOS concept come from?

Austria and Holland have already staged similar shows. Around 500 people and 20 exhibitors attended the first ever divorce fair at the Vienna Marriott Hotel in October 2007.

But Starting Over Show is very different from previous and copy-cat events - we focus on the 'starting over', so there are no private detectives or DNA testers at our SOS events!

**A new and ongoing survey by professional services directory 'Certain Shops – Professionals Online' supports anecdotal evidence that, following a relationship break up, people are more likely to buy new properties, update their wills and insurances, and spend money on themselves.**

Results to date show that in the three years following the break up of a relationship:

- 26.5% rented a property more than once
- 36.7% bought a new property
- 51.0% went on a foreign holiday more than once
- 27.3% joined a gym
- 20.0% changed their appearance
- 35.3% changed their job

Financial advice and legal advice were considered 'definitely important' for people going through

a relationship break up (53.1% and 50% respectively) with well-being advice also as a definite at 45.5%.

The highest score for 'definitely important' was 82.8% for 'people to listen to them sympathetically'.

See our current press page here, which includes articles and features in **[Eve Magazine, The Telegraph and The Mail](http://www.startingovershow.co.uk/index.php/sos-15-march-2009/press-coverage/)**

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## MORE ABOUT THE SHOW



Suzy Miller (featured in September 08 Eve Magazine) is the creator of the Starting Over Show, an event designed to give people going through relationship breakdowns access to a wide range of resources and specialists who can help them break up without breaking down.

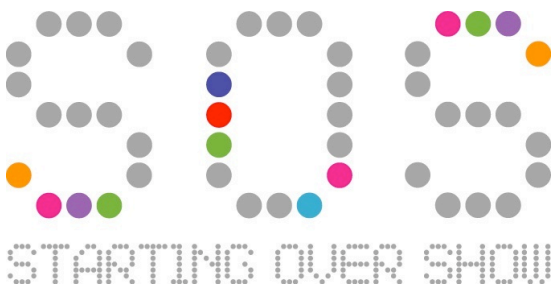
Find out more about me here: [http://www.sos-village.org/SOS\\_Village/About\\_.html](http://www.sos-village.org/SOS_Village/About_.html)

SOS is the first UK event designed to help people bounce back from relationship break ups and life crises. It will be a safe haven in which soon-to-be singletons can take professional advice to build the confidence and skills they need to go it alone. The philosophy behind the show is useful information, honest communication, personal transformation.

[www.startingovershow.co.uk](http://www.startingovershow.co.uk)

Suzy has also created an independent online resource hub - SOS Village <http://www.sos-village.org>, which allows people to access a range of resources and to share personal stories to help them through a break up.

To find out more about our Starting Over Show events go to:  
<http://www.startingovershow.co.uk>



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