



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lauren Fair

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

You're listening to *The Sensible Split* podcast, Episode 25.

Today, I'm talking about whether the reason you want a divorce is a good enough reason to actually get a divorce. If you've been questioning whether your feelings are valid or whether your reasons are good enough, this episode is for you.

The Sensible Split is a podcast for smart but overwhelmed women in search of a roadmap to a successful separation and divorce. If you are looking for guidance in navigating the practical, legal, and emotional aspects of divorce with confidence, this is the show for you. Here's your host, Master Certified Life and Divorce Coach, Divorce Attorney, and Mediator, Lauren Fair.

Hey there, welcome back to the podcast. We're getting ready for Thanksgiving here soon. As I record this podcast, we're about, I don't know, a week and a half out maybe before Thanksgiving. I am getting ready to travel to Colorado this year for Thanksgiving, to spend some time with my family and my in-laws. I'm really looking forward to that.

I've been reflecting on what else I'm grateful for this year. One of those things is you, my podcast listeners. Thank you so much for tuning in this year. I have really enjoyed connecting with you in this way, and I hope that you have learned some things about the divorce process as well. Yeah, thank you so much for tuning in.

I've got another great episode for you today, and it is something that has come up in a lot of conversations that I have had with women. It's the pressure to have a "good enough" reason for divorce. I often speak to women who are on the fence about whether to end their marriage. And one of the things I hear them do is question whether they have a "good enough" reason to divorce. I'm going to use "good enough" in air quotes for reasons we're about to talk about today. But it's a real concern that many women have.

Are the things that are going on in my marriage really a "good enough" reason for me to end it? Society often tells us that unless there's something like infidelity or abuse, that leaving a marriage might seem selfish or impulsive. This can

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

make women feel guilty for simply wanting maybe more peace, fulfillment, or connection in their lives.

As women, we are socialized to second-guess ourselves and that could not be more apparent than in the context of deciding whether to get a divorce. Let's talk first about some reasons why women second-guess themselves around this decision.

One of them is the narrative about being a good wife. What does that mean, to be a good wife? Because we're supposed to be those, right, good wives. Women are often raised with the expectation that they have to nurture relationships at all costs. We have to be emotional caretakers and prioritize family stability over our own happiness.

And when a woman considers divorce, she may feel like she's failing as a wife or a mother. Even if she's deeply unhappy. And this conditioning can make her question whether her reasons are selfish or valid.

The second reason why women second-guess themselves around this decision is just the general stigma of divorce and other people's thoughts. What other people think about the decision to divorce, things that are happening in the divorce, is something that comes up a lot in clients that I work with. Societal judgments, they're a big concern for people.

Divorce is still stigmatized in many communities, and oftentimes women end up bearing the brunt of the blame for a divorce. The fear of judgment from others can make women stay in unhealthy marriages, or dismiss their own needs as less important than maintaining appearances.

People are going to have their thoughts about your decision, they just are. You can't control that. But their thoughts are not facts. Their thoughts are their own opinions, which are just sentences in their mind about your decision, that are formed from their own life experiences. Some of those thoughts will be positive. Some of them will be negative. Some might be somewhere in the middle.

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

You can't please everyone with your decision. Someone is bound to be unhappy with your decision, no matter what it is. Should that person be you, I want you to think about that.

The third reason why women second-guess themselves around this decision is the myth of “sacrifice equals strength.” Women are frequently celebrated for their sacrifices, whether it's for their children, their spouse, their family. This creates the belief that enduring unhappiness is noble or strong. And a woman may internalize the idea that leaving her marriage is a sign of weakness, even when staying is emotionally or mentally draining.

A fourth reason that we second-guess ourselves in this arena is the fear of being “too emotional”. So what we're really talking about here is gender stereotypes. Society often dismisses women's feelings as overreacting or being too emotional, which can lead to women doubting the legitimacy of their own feelings.

When a woman considers divorce, she might second-guess whether she's blowing things out of proportion, for example. Even if her unhappiness is persistent and deeply felt.

A fifth reason why we second-guess ourselves here is unrealistic depictions of marriage. What I'm talking about here is, we see relationships depicted in movies, books, and social media as this happily-ever-after ideal where love conquers all, love's all you need, and challenges are easily overcome with a tiny bit of effort.

And a woman might feel like, if her marriage doesn't look like this idealized version that she's been conditioned to expect, that maybe the problem is her, right? Or that she simply hasn't tried hard enough.

The sixth reason that we second-guess ourselves is having guilt about breaking with family traditions, or just societal traditions in general. For example, many women are raised to see marriage as the cornerstone of a successful life. We hear messages like, “Marriage is forever.” Makes me think of that tagline, I don't know, what is it, from De Beers or something? The diamond folks. Where

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

“Diamonds are forever.” “Marriage is forever. You need to keep the family together for the kids.”

This can make women feel guilty for wanting something different, leading them to question if their reasons for divorce are worth disrupting their family or tradition, kind of intergenerationally what they may have been told is the way that they are supposed to live.

You know, when I'm thinking about this concept of marriage being the cornerstone of a successful life, it makes me think about the checklist that we create for ourselves from what we learn from society growing up, that these are all the things we need to have to be successful. And usually, for many women, marriage is on that list.

And so what does it mean if you have that marriage now and you have thoughts about it that aren't positive? You're not always going to have positive thoughts about your marriage. We're not talking about it being a perfect situation, right? Or do we have expectations that it's going to be perfect?

But I'm talking about when you have those really persistent thoughts. That intuition that this is not something for you. What is the impact of this being something that's on your life checklist? How is that impacting what your thoughts are about having those thoughts and feelings about your marriage?

Okay, seventh reason: Fear of independence. We're kind of led to believe that we're reliant on other people for financial security, social status, or maybe even emotional identity. So we become wrapped up in our relationships. We become, sometimes, dependent in different ways on the other person.

Now I work with a lot of women who actually are the breadwinners, sometimes the primary breadwinners in their marriage. So it doesn't always have to be a financial dependency, but it could be other forms of dependency, right? What does it mean about me, as a person in society, if I am no longer a married person? What if I'm a divorced person? What does that mean?

So the fear of stepping into independence can make a woman second guess whether she's truly unhappy or just scared of change.

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

The eighth reason we second-guess ourselves about our reasons for divorce is the 'what about the kids?' consideration. So women are often told that divorce harms children, which can make mothers feel like they're prioritizing themselves over their kids' wellbeing. This can lead to staying in a toxic marriage out of fear. Even though research shows that children fare better with happy, emotionally healthy parents, even if the parents are divorced.

And this goes back to what I talk about from time to time on the podcast, that children's experience of divorce is largely impacted by their parents' handling of it. How much conflict is there between the parents? How are the parents modelling for the children the adjustment to that transition rather than the transition itself?

So if we are told that we're being selfish, or that we're going to harm the children because we have a desire to no longer be married, what is the impact that that's having? When we think about that, sometimes we tune out other really important information, including objective evidence.

Research has shown that there are other considerations that should go into our decision-making process here, which is that divorce itself is not the reason for there being harm to children. It's the conduct that occurs in the context of that.

So how does all of this conditioning impact us when we're thinking about our reasons that we want to divorce, and we're thinking about our marriage and what we want to do with it? What happens is we tend to overanalyze our reasons for wanting a divorce. Weighing them against these societal expectations and wondering if they are "good enough." We constantly question whether our unhappiness is valid.

And that can lead to diminished confidence and a tendency to stay in situations that don't serve us. This is something I see a lot with clients when they're starting the divorce process and we're starting to learn more about where they are. They start to share things about how they feel that their confidence has diminished over the course of the relationship. That they find themselves not trusting themselves in the way that they used to, and second-guessing themselves more, right? This is something that is very common.

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

And so if you are experiencing that, know that you are not alone and that is a common thing for women in this position. And also, this kind of self-doubt can cause women to endure years of dissatisfaction before taking action, which further impacts your mental and emotional health. So delayed decision-making because of getting stuck in overanalyzing, “Is what I'm thinking and feeling about my marriage a ‘good enough’ reason to make a different decision now?”

But here's the truth. Your feelings are valid. Your thoughts are valid. Persistent unhappiness, or a sense that the relationship is no longer serving you, is a meaningful reason. You're not obligated to stay in a situation that doesn't align with you and who you are or who you want to become.

For some women, the reasons are very clear-cut, like with abuse, betrayal, neglect. Maybe there's some kind of very clear event that happens, some disclosure of some kind of conduct by their spouse, that makes that decision easier for them.

But what I want you to notice in those situations is that it's not the abuse, the betrayal, or the neglect that automatically makes that a “good enough” reason. It's the way that that disclosure of the behavior, them learning about a betrayal or enduring abuse, they're having thoughts about that experience that allow them to feel justified.

Two women may respond very differently to the disclosure of a betrayal situation. So you find out that you got cheated on. The cheating, in and of itself, for many of you, might be a “good enough” reason. But for others, it may not be. Others may choose to stay. And so even for some of these reasons that seem more clear-cut, or for you would be more clear-cut, they're not. It's just the way that you're *thinking* about those reasons that makes you feel justified or unjustified in whether it's a “good enough” reason or not.

Other reasons that might be more subtle than those kinds of events but are equally valid are: Maybe you feel emotionally disconnected from your partner. Maybe communication has broken down and efforts to rebuild it haven't worked. Or perhaps you've grown in ways that your spouse hasn't, leaving you feeling unsupported or misunderstood.

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

None of these are insignificant reasons. They're signals that something isn't right. And it's okay to listen to those signals. Don't fall into the trap of comparing your situation to others. You might look at other people's stories and think, "Well, their reasons seem more serious than mine. At least I don't have it as bad as so-and-so."

But here's the thing, this isn't about anyone else. Comparing your situation to others can make you second-guess your own instincts. Divorce is a deeply personal decision. What matters is whether your marriage feels right for you, not how it looks from the outside to someone else.

Another question to consider is how staying in the marriage impacts your quality of life. Are you consistently unhappy or feeling stuck? Are you sacrificing your emotional or mental health just to maintain the status quo? Staying in an unfulfilling relationship can have long-term consequences. It can chip away at your self-esteem.

Like I said about seeing that so often with clients who've had their self-esteem eroded and they've questioned themselves all of the time. It can increase stress. It can even affect your physical health. Your wellbeing matters and it's okay to prioritize that.

You might be thinking, "But what if I haven't tried hard enough to fix those things that are wrong in my relationship?" And that is where reflection and communication come in. So before deciding on divorce, if you want to, look at more closely, have I tried hard enough? Is there anything left I can do? It's important to assess whether you've explored solutions.

For example, have you had conversations with your spouse about your feelings and your needs? Do you have a plan for having your needs met, whether it's by your spouse or by changes you make for yourself? Are you seeing positive changes in that regard? Have you considered counseling or maybe even marital mediation? Ooh, I should do an episode on that.

But you can address these issues together in different ways. Have you exhausted all of your options? Only you know the answer to that. If you've put in the effort and still feel that your marriage isn't meeting your needs, that's just

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

valuable information for you to have. Sometimes, despite your best efforts, things don't work out and that's okay.

Divorce can be about choosing yourself. It's not selfish to want a life where you feel fulfilled, valued, and free to grow. Sometimes we stay in marriages because we're afraid of judgment, or because we think it's what's best for everyone else; our kids, our families, even our partners.

But here's something to ask yourself, what kind of role model do you want to be? Would you want your daughter or your best friend to stay in a marriage where they maybe felt small, unseen or unhappy? And when those concerns were voiced, and nothing changed despite best efforts, time, whatever it is that you've tried.

Choosing yourself doesn't mean you're giving up. It means you're prioritizing your happiness and health, which ultimately benefits everyone around you. What I want you to take away from today's episode is there is no standard threshold for what makes divorce justifiable. Your marriage is unique and so are your needs. You want to feel justified in your reasons, of course you do. This is an important decision that should not be taken lightly.

The only way you will feel justified about your reasons is by how you choose to think about them. Consider this, write them down. Write your reasons down on a piece of paper, as factually as you can. So take out the judgments and try to strip down the reasons to be as factual as they can be.

And then notice how you can think about those reasons in a way that judges them negatively or judges them positively. If you can only think one way about them, maybe think about that person whose opinion you think is going to be contrary to yours. What would they say? That's just for the purpose of you being able to see that there are different ways of thinking about the exact same reason.

The reasons are not objectively “enough” or “not enough.” What determines whether they're “enough” is the way that you think about them. Do you want how you think about your reasons to be dictated by societal programming and other

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

people's opinions? Or do you want them to be determined by your own independent thoughts, desires, and intuition?

So let's let go of the idea of a “good enough” reason for divorce. If you've been reflecting deeply, trying to make these things work, and still feel like this chapter of your life needs to close, trust that your thoughts about your marriage are valid. And then decide what impact that information has on your next step.

Thank you for joining me on this episode. Only you get to decide whether your path, in staying in your marriage or leaving it, is right or wrong. And if you need help sorting out your thoughts on this, I'd love to help you. Remember, divorce coaches are not divorce advocates. We are not here to encourage someone to divorce. We're here to help them live their life fully and on their terms.

Thank you so much for tuning in. I'll see you in the next episode.

If you've enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could share the podcast with others who you think could benefit from it, and leave a rating and review to let me know what you think. I would love your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that is helpful to you.

Visit www.TheSensibleSplit.com/podcastlaunch for step-by-step instructions on how to follow, rate, and review.

Thank you so much for tuning in to this episode of *The Sensible Split*. If you're looking for more information and guidance to help you successfully navigate a divorce, please visit www.TheSensibleSplit.com.

Please remember, the information provided in this podcast is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be and should not be taken as legal advice on any particular matter. The content of this podcast is not tailored to your specific, unique circumstances, and its transmission does not create or constitute an attorney-client relationship.

Ep #25: The Courage to Choose Yourself: Moving Beyond the Fear of Judgment in Divorce

Listeners are strongly advised to seek the advice of qualified legal professionals regarding their individual situation.