

Ep #27: Navigate Difficult Divorce Emotions During the Holidays



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With Your Host

Lauren Fair

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You're listening to *The Sensible Split* podcast, Episode 27. Today, I'm talking about what to do if the holidays are hard for you this year.

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.

Hi there. Welcome back to the podcast. I have a short but important episode for you today. I want to talk to you about what to do if the holidays are hard for you this year.

I know that for many of you, the holidays may look different or feel different or both. And so it's important that we acknowledge that, and I want you to have some tools to manage the holidays as best as you can this year, okay? I look forward to sharing those with you in just a few moments.

I wanted to tell you first, a little update on what's happening with me. I am actually moving my office over the holidays. And as much as that doesn't sound like a lot of fun ... Who wants to pack up and move an office while we're celebrating and such? ... it's actually a slower time of year for the divorce industry. Because, typically, people who are thinking about divorce tend to push pause on initiating them until after the holidays.

So we decided that December would be a better time to just get that move done. I'm moving just to another office in San Diego. It's beautiful. Our new construction was just completed, and I'm really excited to get over there. My team is super excited. So we will be doing that probably, let's see, the weekend before this episode airs, I think. We should be all moved in by the time you're listening.

I am going to be ready to go in January for the kick back up of the divorce season. And if you are thinking about getting divorced in 2025, the time to get your ducks in a row for that is now, okay? Even if you're waiting until after the holidays to move forward ... totally understandable and very common ... before you say that word "divorce", it's important to have your ducks lined up so that

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you are approaching it in a smart way. So if you're thinking about that, I would love to talk with you.

All right, so let's talk about the holidays, right? So the holidays are supposed to be, we think, joyful and full of togetherness, and it's just a great time to be had. But when you're going through a divorce, the holidays can bring up feelings of loneliness, sadness, even anger.

So if the holidays are not all eggnog, parties, and fun for you this year, then I want you to know that that's a very normal thing. It can feel like, when you're going through it, that you're the only one that's not enjoying the holidays. Or you're the only one that doesn't have somebody to hang out with on Christmas Day, or whatever religious holiday that you celebrate in the season.

But I promise you that there are many others just like you and that it will not always be this way, okay? But I want to give you some actionable things that you can do to help yourself feel better. I'm not talking about slapping a happy face sticker on the fact that you don't have your kids for Christmas this year. Or that maybe your spouse is totally checked out, and while you're still in the house with them, they didn't get you a Christmas gift or they're saying terrible things about your Christmas baking.

Whatever it may be, where you are on your divorce path, there are different challenges. And whatever those may look like, that is leading to you kind of feeling like this holiday season is just not it, you are not alone in that. And there are some things though that you can do to take care of yourself and make the best of the holidays for you in a new way.

So let's talk about how you can do that. The first step is: You've got to acknowledge your feelings. Whatever those feelings are about the holidays, it's important to bring those into your awareness. Generally you might just be feeling really off, icky, sad; those just might be kind of general feelings that come to mind. But it's important to remember that it's okay to feel a mix of emotions, and it could be helpful to figure out specifically which ones are those. And it's probably a mixture of a number of different ones.

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You might feel relieved, for example, if you've just gotten out of a challenging relationship. Like maybe you just moved into separate residences and you're relieved to not have all of the tension that you did in the house before. But you might also be sad about the traditions that you're no longer a part of.

Maybe you're angry about how things have turned out. Or worried about what the holidays are going to look like for your kids. Whatever you're feeling, give yourself permission to feel that without judging yourself.

A quick exercise you can do is just to write down all of your thoughts about the holidays. So if you're feeling a certain way, whatever that looks like, you're going to write down, what am I thinking right now when I'm feeling this way? And then, based on how you're thinking about this, how are those feelings, that the mix of feelings I have going on, how do those match up with this?

Because we know that our thoughts create our feelings. And particularly around this holiday issue, that's true. When you felt joyful about the holidays in the past, it was because of how you were thinking about them. Because, probably, your circumstances were different, the relationship was different. Maybe you had your kids with you, so you were thinking positive thoughts that generated a positive feeling.

And now, if you're feeling more of a negative feeling, it's coming from a change in the way that you're thinking about the holiday. And of course it does, right? Of course you'd be thinking differently about the holiday if it looks different in a way that you don't like this year.

But the first step is really bringing some awareness to where your feelings are coming from. We want to just write down all of our thoughts about the holidays. Sometimes just getting it out on paper can bring some clarity and relief and also give you some distance between you and your thoughts.

And your thoughts are just sentences running through your mind based on what's happening for you this year. It's not a permanent thing. They're not permanent. You're not always going to have those thoughts and feelings; that's what you're experiencing this year.

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And I want you to note too, in those thoughts that you're writing down, if you're experiencing a loss of some sort this year. I suspect that you are. It might be loss of certain traditions, loss of being included in certain holiday activities, or loss of time with your kids over the holidays, right? It can be important to get clear on what those are.

We're not wallowing here, okay? We're not doing this to wallow in all of these thoughts and feelings. We're doing it to get clear about them. And sometimes just naming the feelings that we have can reduce their impact by up to 50%, which is crazy. But also, it can be helpful, when we're grieving the loss of certain aspects of our life, to get clear on what those are.

And I want to talk to you really quickly about what's called "the dual process model of grief". The dual process model of grief suggests that people who have lost something oscillate between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping. What does that mean?

It means that you can go back and forth between honoring the losses. And by that, I mean identifying them and being with your feelings. If you've lost something this holiday season, and that's bringing up a certain feeling, allowing that feeling to be there and validating for yourself, "Of course I feel this way, because I've lost this thing; this aspect of my life that I had before, that I enjoyed about the holidays."

So going between that and then restoration-oriented coping, which is like finding ways to adjust to your new circumstances. It suggests that healthy coping involves balancing, confronting, and avoiding different aspects of grief. So if we're talking about avoiding the different aspects, what we mean by that is doing things to take you out of focusing on the grief.

We want to, on one hand, acknowledge it, honor it, be with it. But we want to balance that. We don't want to stay there too long. To the point where we are just getting deeper and deeper in the feelings of that. To the point where it's becoming not helpful, right?

So I want you to think about where that line is for you. "How can I balance honoring the loss, understanding it, and validating it for myself? Not avoiding it.

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Not pushing it down.” But shifting out of that and into behavior that gets you kind of into action; into taking care of yourself, into developing a new way of adjusting to the holidays.

I want to give you some examples of what that might look like. If you're feeling down about the holidays, I want you to ask yourself, what do I need right now? Listen to what comes up for you. And if you're not sure, I like to come up with a set of questions to prompt myself to think about how I'm really feeling today and have kind of an idea of what I might do to help myself feel better.

Actually, I got this idea for myself from another coach. Truthfully, I don't even remember who it was, or I would give credit. But I'm going to share it with you because I think it was so helpful.

In particular, you can think about, do I feel yucky today? Do I feel icky? Then maybe I want to take a shower and wash it off.

Do I feel disorganized or out of control? That one, I tend to feel more often. If I'm feeling icky, I'm kind of like... Not so much icky, I guess. If I'm feeling, just generally, not in a good state, and I try to drill down on what exactly is going on, sometimes it's like a feeling of disorganization or out of control. And if I'm feeling like that, maybe I'll go and pick a place in the house to declutter and organize something. So it's kind of the antidote. What can I do? How can I get into some action in order to get out of that feeling?

Do I feel emotionally activated? Maybe the emotions feel like too much today. I might listen to music, watch YouTube, or maybe Netflix.

Do I want to unplug from this day? Do I feel way too plugged in? Perhaps I want to jump into bed and read a book. Or maybe just be under some blankets on the couch, in some pj's.

Do I want to stop handling responsibilities today? If I do, do I want to watch a Lindsay Lohan Christmas movie maybe? I watched one of those last night, by the way. I don't know. I've never really been a big Lindsay Lohan fan, but her Christmas movies are... It's very light entertainment and a distraction sometimes. The Hallmark Channel is another example.

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If I want to stop kind of having to take on all these serious things today, what feels a little bit more light? Maybe I want to go to bed early. Or maybe I want to tap. I don't know if you're familiar with tapping. It's called EFT. I would actually love to have somebody on to talk to you about that in a future episode. But I'm doing something to ground myself.

Or do things feel really heavy today? In which case, we might write down what is going on. What's going on in your mind? It's kind of like what we talked about earlier, writing it down. What are all my thoughts? How are these making me feel? And then look at it. Separate yourself from it.

Is it possible I'm being slightly overdramatic? If I am, maybe I'll laugh at myself, right? If I'm not, and it really is that heavy, just acknowledging the emotions, like we talked about earlier, and reminding myself that, "Yeah, this is hard. And feelings are transitory. They are things that we experience and then we move on from. They don't stay with us forever. And so it won't always be like this. So what can I do for myself right now that would be the most loving thing?"

The second thing to think about, if the holidays are hard this year is, how can I rethink my traditions? Just because you did something one way in the past doesn't mean you have to do it the same way now. This is your chance to create new traditions that reflect who you are today.

So if you used to spend Christmas Eve with your former in-laws, maybe this year you host a small dinner with close friends. If you're co-parenting, and the kids are spending the holiday with your co-parent, maybe plan a special outing for yourself. Take a hike, watch a movie marathon, or maybe do a short trip to a nearby town.

Think about, if I had to reimagine the holidays, what would I want now based on where I am in my life? If I always, in the past, wanted to be home for the holidays because I had little kids and we were doing gift unwrapping under the tree, we wanted to be home for that, well, now we're at a different place. And maybe now I'd like to wake up on Christmas morning in a five-star hotel. Or in a little cottage I've rented at a little destination that I've been wanting to go to. Or maybe I just want to spend it with a friend locally.

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But it's a great opportunity, when you're forced to revisit the holidays, to really think about, if I could make these traditions mine now, if I could rewrite them for myself ... and if you have kids for them too ... what would I really like?

Because, usually, when you're married there are some traditions that maybe ... there are aspects of them at least ... weren't your idea and maybe you don't love them; some of them maybe you did. You can always keep the ones that you liked and just change them a little bit, in the way that you incorporate them into your life going forward.

But this is your life, and you get to decide what's meaningful to you now, without anyone else's approval, okay?

All right, the third thing that I want you to be mindful of is the self-care that we talked about. This can take different forms, okay? So it could be in the form of what I mentioned earlier, which is doing things that specifically would counterbalance how you might be feeling in a negative way.

But it can take other forms. For example, a form of self-care is setting boundaries. It's okay to say no to events or activities that feel overwhelming. If you don't want to go, don't go. I give you permission. Even if somebody is going to feel a certain way that you're not going to whatever event it is, they can feel that way. It's all right. Decide what you want to do and don't be afraid to say no to things that are just no for you this holiday.

You're going to want to eat and sleep well, and move your body. It's simple things that sometimes we just forget to do or we don't prioritize, and they really do impact your overall mood.

And the last one is practicing some gratitude. Now, again, this is not slapping a happy face sticker on your situation. But the best place to manifest abundance from and to feel abundant, to feel like you have good things, is to appreciate what you do have.

Because even in the worst circumstances of our life, there are still good things that we have. And even if we have way less material things than we once had, we had better relationships at one point than we have, we still have good things.

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And so it can be powerful to focus on a few things that you do have, that you are most grateful for.

Maybe it's your health. Maybe it's your own resilience. Maybe it's your children. Maybe it's friends' support. Maybe it's a family member that you have. Whatever comes to mind for you, just take a few moments to feel abundant by remembering the good things that you do have. Because gratitude can shift your perspective in powerful ways, okay?

All right, this episode is longer than I anticipated. But I had a lot to say, particularly about grief around the holidays. Because I know this is a big issue and I wanted to address this so that you have something that you can do this holiday season to improve it even just a little bit for yourself.

I wish you a wonderful holiday season, and I look forward to talking with you in 2025. Take care.

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