

# Coping Effectively After Divorce or Separation: Strategies for Partners & Parents

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In partnership with *City of Leduc Family & Community Support Services*  
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## Learning Objectives

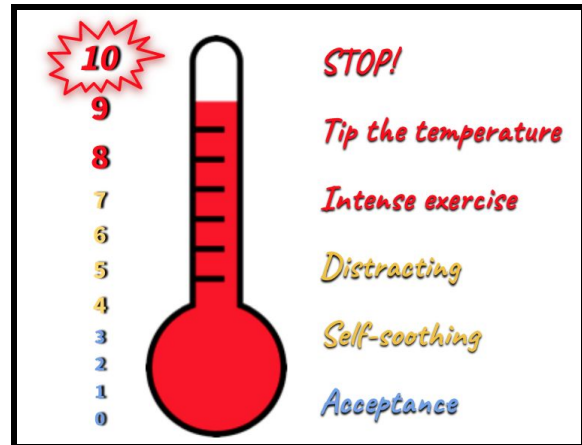
- Manage intense emotions with short-term “crisis survival” skills
- Identify helpful vs. unhelpful urges, and resist acting on the ones that are unhelpful
- Accept realities that may be unpleasant or unwanted
- Model healthy coping and emotion regulation for children

## After Divorce or Separation: Common Challenges

- Custody challenges
- Co-parenting issues
- Division of assets
- Decision to separate not mutual
- History of infidelity or betrayal

## After Divorce or Separation: Common Emotions

- Anger, resentment
- Anxiety
- Sadness, grief
- Jealousy
- Relief
- Stress or overwhelm



## When Emotion Mind Takes Over

- Impulsivity
- Aggression
- Assumptions
- Judgments
- Ineffectiveness

## RED ZONE: The STOP Skill

1. **S**top! Freeze, don't move a muscle. Recognize that your emotions are trying to take control and make you act without thinking.
2. **T**ake a step back and/or take a deep breath. Don't let your emotions make you act impulsively.
3. **O**bserve. Get a clear picture of the situation. What's happening inside your body, and in the environment?
4. **P**roceed mindfully. Think about your goals and whether acting on your impulse is the best way forward.

## RED ZONE: Tip the Temperature

1. Take a deep breath in.
2. Put your face in a bowl of very cold water OR place an ice pack on your temples/upper cheeks.
3. Hold your breath for 20-30 seconds to activate the **Dive Response**, which lowers your body's physiological arousal, slows your heart rate, and activates your parasympathetic (“rest and digest”) nervous system.  
*\*Check with a doctor before using this skill if you have heart problems or an allergy to cold. Wrap ice with a wet cloth or paper towel; do not apply ice directly to skin.*

### **RED ZONE: Intense exercise**

- Work out your body's pent-up emotional energy with short bursts of physical activity.
- Ideally 20 minutes, but do what you can (30 seconds is better than nothing!)
- Examples: Running, power-walking, jumping jacks, climbing stairs, lifting weights, push-ups...

### **YELLOW ZONE: Distracting**

- Engage in new activities to reduce contact with and give yourself space from whatever is triggering your emotional reaction.
- Do something that requires some level of effort, but is not too challenging.
- Participate fully in the activity: Focus 100% of your energy and attention on it.
- Turn your mind back to the activity whenever you get distracted or it goes back to the trigger, over and over again, as many times as necessary in a compassionate and non-judgmental way.
- Examples
  - Activities (exercise, hobbies, tasks)
  - Contributing (volunteering, doing something nice for someone else)
  - Refocusing thoughts (sorting, counting, puzzles, singing lyrics to a song)
  - Sensations (loud music, sour candy, cold showers)

### **YELLOW ZONE: Self-Soothing**

- Find temporary relief from stress or pain by doing things that feel pleasant, calming, or comforting and activate one or more of your five senses
- Highly individual - what is soothing to you may not be to another person
- Can be easily over-used and must be balanced with long-term coping strategies and problem-solving
- Examples:
  - Sight:
  - Sound:
  - Smell:
  - Touch:
  - Taste:

### **BLUE ZONE: Acceptance**

- Choosing to accept reality as it is, not how you think it should be
- An openness and willingness to acknowledge the facts as they are, without being stubborn or throwing tantrums
- Not the same as agreeing, approving, or condoning; doesn't mean giving up hope that the future might be different
- Helps to shift from "I can't stand it" to "This is really hard, but I can cope"
- Ways to practice:
  - Notice that you aren't accepting
  - Remind yourself that reality is just as it is, and was caused by whatever history led up to it
  - Adopt a willing, open posture (e.g., willing hands)  
Allow painful emotions to come and go
  - Visualize what you would do if you did accept the facts
  - Act opposite to unhelpful emotion urges

## **Opposite Action**

<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Action Urge</b>	<b>Opposite Action</b>
Anger	Attack	Gently avoid, act kindly
Jealousy	Snoop, follow, try to control	Avoid (e.g. social media), let go of control, accept reality
Sadness	Withdraw, isolate	Approach, activate, avoid avoiding
Shame	Hide, self-punish, self-harm	Share openly, forgive yourself, practice self-compassion
Love	Approach, show affection, stay close	Remind yourself with the relationship ended, avoid contact with the person and/or reminders

## **Community Resources**

- **Collaborative Divorce Alberta Association:** Increases access for collaborative divorce by providing information for family divorce lawyers, financial advisors, and mental health specialists.  
[collaborativepractice.ca](http://collaborativepractice.ca)
- **coParenter app:** Provides tools to help families manage, organize, and resolve everyday co-parenting responsibilities, with or without the assistance of a coach or mediator.  
[coparenter.com](http://coparenter.com)
- **Parenting After Separation:** Free online course for parents or guardians who are separating or going through a divorce.  
[alberta.ca/pas.aspx](http://alberta.ca/pas.aspx)
- **Access 24/7:** Single point of access for adult addiction and mental health community-based programs, including crisis support.  
Phone: 780-424-2424
- **City of Leduc Family & Community Support Services:** Free, confidential support and resources for residents of the City of Leduc.  
Phone: 780-980-7109  
[leduc.ca/fcss](http://leduc.ca/fcss)
- **The Family Centre:** Low-fee or no-fee counselling and community support services for adults, youth, and families.  
Phone: 780-900-6129  
[familycentre.org](http://familycentre.org)

*If you have questions or feedback, please contact Karen Lemke at 780-908-2376 or [karen@eropsych.com](mailto:karen@eropsych.com)*