



# How To Love a Friend Going Through Divorce





# 10 Ways

## To Help a Friend Going Through a Divorce

By Janna Kasza

If you told me a few years ago I would know what it feels like to be going through a divorce, I would've told you, "No! That will never be me."

Fast forward to today—I know exactly how it feels.

Let me give you a mental picture. Think of the greatest devastation you've ever experienced, the kind of situation that left you clinging to every breath and left you grasping fistfuls of Jesus, wondering how you could face another day. This is the pain of divorce, and it lasts a long, long time. For me, this pain was unlike anything else I ever experienced. Like watching my heart be removed from my body and being helpless to stop it.

While every divorce is unique, they are all painful. Some are particularly more devastating than others, but none are easy or pain free. That's by design ... God's plan for marriage never included divorce. "What

therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9).

Every marriage is different, and every divorce will be different. But one thing is the same—a bond God created for life has been severed, torn apart, and forever broken.

### How to help a friend going through divorce

So how can you come alongside your friend and walk with them on this road?

#### 1 Listen.

Listen, listen, listen. Did I mention listen? Don't offer your opinion unless it's asked, but provide your friend opportunities to share. Sometimes that looks like showing up with coffee or inviting them to take a walk with you. Other times, it's a regular phone call or just a simple text of "Hey, how can I pray for you today?"



There were moments I was unable to respond with anything more than a “thank you,” but knowing they cared enough to check in regularly was a blessing.

Above all else, while you listen, don’t say, “It’s for the best,” or “It’s time to move on now.” Let them feel the pain and experience the struggle so they can heal. It’s never for the “best.” Yes, maybe divorce was necessary for safety, or maybe their spouse was the one that filed for divorce. But the “best” would have been healing, redemption, and restoration. Yes, sin happens and sometimes there’s no other way but out. But it’s still not the BEST. Those words stung when I heard them.

## 2 Don’t ask a friend going through a divorce if they are okay.

They’re not okay, not by a long shot. Asking this forces them to come up with an answer on the spot. Instead, ask them what they are planning for dinner. If they don’t know, offer to drop something off or invite them over. Or ask if they want to join in your weekend plans, because they are living breath by breath and probably haven’t planned anything.

I always appreciated the people who didn’t start every conversation with “How are you?” because I was not okay, and they typically weren’t up for hearing the real answer.

## 3 Help them pack.

There’s always a transition involved with going through a divorce. Maybe it’s packing up their things to relocate or maybe it’s packing up their former spouses items to move them out.

I’ll always appreciate the friends who helped me pack up my children’s and my things. I would have never gotten through it alone. I

would probably have tossed it all in a dumpster and regretted it later. Instead, all of my items were carefully packed, labeled, and loaded into a moving truck. The entire process was a blur to me, but the practical love shown still brings me to my knees with thankfulness.

## 4 Don’t forget the kids.

If your friend is a parent, offer to watch the kids or invite them to join your family for a few adventures. Do this OFTEN. You might think you’re being annoying, but trust me, you’re not.

Remember, their parents are living moment to moment in the beginning of a divorce and probably don’t have much to offer their kids right now. Offering to care for the kids is just as much a blessing to the kids as the parents, as it’s likely the kids’ emotional cups are running on empty.

If you want to take this one step further, ask your friend if you can text or message the children. This gives the kids one more safe person to check in with and helps to balance the load on the single parent. My kids loved this, and I appreciated knowing they had another adult investing in them.

## 5 Help your friend prioritize self-care and soul care.

Have you heard of “pregnancy brain”? Well, “divorce brain” is a thing, too. We aren’t thinking clearly and can’t remember to do basic things like schedule a hair appointment before the split ends rage or take care of those calloused feet before sandal season.

Offer to watch their kids or handle school pickup so they can take care of their personal needs. If they say no ... persist. They’ll thank you for it later.



For soul care, offer to memorize Scripture with your friend. Send them daily verses via text to encourage. These were life-giving to me as fuel to make it through the day.

And of course, pray. The sweet words of many friends, “Can I pray with you?” or “How can I best pray?” were heard so often at the end of a phone call, in a text, or before we parted ways. They meant it, and I felt it.

## 6 Feed them.

In the first few months of my divorce, I made the same kid-friendly meal on repeat: tots, over-easy eggs, and burgers, sans buns. Sounds strange, but this was my kids’ favorite meal. I could make this meal without thinking about it, and I did ... too much.

To this day, my kids still can’t eat it. Sorry, kids!

Spare your friend’s kids and set up a meal train. It doesn’t have to be daily, but a schedule of knowing the days you don’t have to worry about food is a lifesaver. Plus, your friend might actually eat if they don’t have to prepare it. #SelfCare. Yeah, we need all the help in that space.

## 7 Offer practical blessings.

For the first year or so, your friend probably won’t notice the flower beds are dying and the lawn needed to be mowed last week.

This was me. I had trees down over fences, a gate falling off the hinge, and just a hot mess everywhere. My sister organized a “work day” at my house and gathered up volunteers to help me get back on top of home maintenance. It was such an unexpected blessing.

Consider getting a crew together to help with basic maintenance around their house. See if you can help fill those gaps in the short run, or consider taking up a collection between friends to help pay for a handyman or cleaning service if that would be a better fit. This is the literal meaning of the “hands and feet of Jesus.”

## 8 Understand that holidays hurt.

Holidays have memories and traditions all their own, and now many of them have been burned up in the fire of divorce. Family gatherings will be different or nonexistent. Kids might be with the other parent.





The first few holiday seasons after a divorce will be exceptionally hard. Start early and help them come up with new traditions or modifications on the old ones. They might want to join your family in the first year, and if you can, let them! Depression is a monster during the holidays. So even if they decline your invitation, make sure you at least drop in to check on them with a peppermint mocha and a hug.

### 9 Let them be needy.

Be prepared for your friend to be needy, very needy. Coffee dates and more coffee dates, and did I mention coffee dates? If it's not coffee, find whatever it is your friend needs to unplug, unwind, and share their heart with you. That might be going for a walk, working out together, working in the garden together, or maybe it's helping them clean their house. But it's probably mostly coffee.

We're needy in the beginning—there's suddenly a giant hole in our lives. Eventually we figure it

out, but we'll probably test the boundaries of friendship in those early days of trying to get our footing in this new life.

With your response, remind them, “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18 ).

### 10 Remember their anniversary.

They won't want you to bring it up by name, and they don't want to celebrate. But remember the day—you know they do. Be there so your friend doesn't get stuck inside their own head. Plan something, keep their mind busy. Don't you dare let your friend spend that day alone for the first year or two.

---

This list is really just the beginning of how God showed up through friends and family during my darkest moments. I'm still walking through them in many ways, but I know I'm not alone. I'm forever grateful to those who chose to walk alongside me.





# 5 Things

## Your Divorcing Friend Needs

By Garrick Conner

Another friend called to let me know his wife filed for divorce. He's devastated his marriage has failed—despite several attempts at counseling. Still, he's looking forward to turning the page on this dark and tumultuous chapter of life. I empathized with him and wondered what my divorcing friend needed from me most.

In my counseling office, I encourage couples to make every effort to work it out before splitting up. But divorce still happens. It is a product of living in a broken world. For too many of us, it's a topic we rarely discuss. Sometimes it feels like the only options are celebrating the split—which seems weird and wrong—or avoiding the topic altogether. So we're quick to overlook what our divorcing friends need most when going through the painful process.

I talked with a number of people who have experienced divorce for a variety of reasons.

Their feedback, while not surprising, highlights the sadness, loneliness, and lack of support from their family, friends, and church.

Based on my conversations, here are the things they say your divorcing friend needs too.

### **1** Nonjudgmental friends.

Over and over again, those I spoke with expressed sadness when long-standing friendships changed or ended upon the announcement of their divorce.

In Paula's case, one friend couple insisted she should stay the course no matter what her husband did or didn't do. She said, "Judgment and condemnation, in my opinion, is very different from Christian love and holding people accountable with truth and love. When Christians stand in judgment against others in an unloving way, it causes deep pain."



Paula ultimately left her church because she felt abandoned there. She needed friends and a body of believers to lean on more than ever.

## 2 Friends who stay.

Bill was incredibly isolated after his nine-year marriage came crashing down. He told me, “I had no friends that I could just talk about it with. I was lonely and needed people to share, discuss, and talk about what I was going through.”

Melanie and her husband divorced after more than 35 years of marriage. They had long-term relationships with several couples in their church—people they traveled with all over the country. She said the divorce completely surprised them all. And as a result, those friends just stopped making contact. Melanie eventually unfriended them all on Facebook because, as she put it, “Let’s not pretend we’re friends when that’s clearly not the case anymore.”

Paula offered some compelling advice: “Do not avoid a friend who is going through a divorce because you don’t know what to say. They are hurting deeply. I thought it would kill me, and most days I lived hour by hour and felt as fragile as glass.”

## 3 Specific, practical help.

“Let me know if you need anything,” you might say to your divorcing friend. That’s a statement thrown around like candy, especially in church contexts. It’s a lovely sentiment, but the reality is that very few people really take it to heart. And those experiencing the pain and grief of divorce aren’t up to assessing another person’s availability and skill set.

The individuals I spoke with—especially the



women—talked about the importance of offering specific, practical help during this time.

Jennifer reflected on the time her husband filed for divorce, “Meals would have been nice. Your mind is so messed up that it’s difficult to figure out what you even want to eat, much less fix it yourself. For the longest time, I didn’t want to cook, and when I did, I ate on paper plates.”

She pointed out something else worth mentioning.

“I see people with children get more help from the community than those of us without kids. We’re hurting really badly too.” She suggests taking the initiative to invite your newly single friends to holiday activities—and even kids’ activities—to help ease the pain of being alone, if only for a little while.



## 4 Pastoral support.

I've served on church staffs for many years, so I've seen this approach play out many times. Pastors are afraid to get too involved. They don't want to be perceived as taking sides with either the husband or wife. And most of the time, the truth of what's really going on lies somewhere in the middle.

One pastor expressed it this way: "As pastors, we know we need to do something to help couples who are struggling. But finding a pathway to help that is not viewed as somehow partial to the husband or the wife is a lot harder than it might seem. It can get particularly sticky in smaller churches where there are several generations of family in the congregation. It doesn't take much for things to backfire spectacularly."

As a counselor myself, I know how easy it is to become triangulated, drawn into the toxic relationship dynamic that has become normal for the couple. The nature of dual relationships in the church family, where one or both spouses serve alongside pastors in some capacity unrelated to their counseling, can further inhibit the kind of objectivity and boundaries needed to keep the therapeutic relationship safe.

It's important for pastors to get to know the counselors and therapists in their communities so they can confidently make appropriate referrals. Of course, counseling is rarely provided as a free service.

## 5 Church support.

"I was so crushed by the way my home church handled my heart during my divorce,"

Paula said. She and her husband divorced after nearly 12 years, citing her husband's unaddressed mental health problems and addiction cycles. Her husband was unable to work, coparent, or support the family in any way. And he refused psychological help until the relationship had fallen completely apart.

I encourage churches to set aside funds each year that can be used to help church members offset counseling-related expenses. Most counselors are more than happy to make third-party payment arrangements that preserve the integrity and confidentiality of their services. Churches can also provide support groups, like DivorceCare, to help those walking through this dark season of life.

---

I know you're facing it with at least someone in your circle right now. Divorce is all around us and likely even something you or a family member is currently facing.

To be honest, the timing of everything gets a little tricky. While a person is not technically divorced until the judge signs and seals the papers, the marriage off-ramp can be long and bumpy for many months. A friend going through it needs support and encouragement all along the way.

While judgment, trite clichés, and awkward avoidance are commonly provided, what your divorcing friend needs most is love and care. It's a care that can be active but quiet, offering grace, mercy, time, and space to grieve, re-group, and begin again.

*Copyright © 2019 Garrick D. Conner. All rights reserved.*





# 27 Ways

## To Care for Your Friend After a Divorce

1. Babysit



2. Offer to help with something their spouse typically handled (i.e. car repairs, teacher gifts).

3. *Listen*. Say “I’m sorry,” but don’t try to fix their emotions.

4. Bring over a home-cooked meal.

5. Encourage *self-care*.

6. Order takeout or pizza.

7. Pray for your friend, their ex-spouse, and their kids.

8. If they’re moving, host a goodbye party—and a packing party.



9. Listen some more.

10. Your friend still craves physical comfort. Offer hugs or even a gentle shoulder squeeze.

11. You’re not expected to have answers, so avoid the clichés. (*When God closes a door...*)

12. Schedule a massage or something else just for them.



13. Advise wisely and prayerfully, but only when asked.



14. When it comes to their ex, acknowledge wrong—but don’t make them your enemy.

15. Help them plan a quick getaway to think and *pray*.



16. Without bringing it up, acknowledge your friend's wedding anniversary with a dinner or coffee date.

17. Help your friend find healthy ways to manage anger. Maybe suggest the two of you try a kickboxing class.

18. Remember divorce can feel like death. Offering to "celebrate" can feel tone-deaf.

19. *Welcome them* on days when they're bitter, ugly-crying, and/or can't stop talking about it.

20. Invite them for coffee, on a walk, or over for dinner.



21. Go to court with them as moral support.

22. Drop them a card, letting them know you're praying for them. Put \$5 for coffee in the card.

23. Check in on them during holidays. Invite them to your own festivities, or just show up with a hot cocoa.

24. Say you're sorry about what's happening.

25. Expect emotion to *ebb and flow*.

26. Encourage them. There may be some disparaging messages coming from themselves, their spouse, relatives, etc.

27. Restate that nothing they tell you will be repeated.



# 6 Ways

## the Church Can Love Someone Going Through a Divorce

### 1 Listen and empathize.

Divorce brings grief over the death of a marriage. Before you start offering “solutions,” take time to hear their story. Be present and listen without interjecting your own thoughts and opinions—unless you’re asked.

The local church has the opportunity to show the love and grace of Jesus when it’s needed most. Follow the call to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).

Divorce is not part of God’s design for the family, but neither is the painful shame and isolation many spouses and children feel as an aftereffect.

### 2 Host divorce support groups.

Following a divorce, isolation can set in. It’s important for someone going through a divorce to know they’re not alone in their

situation. It can be healing to hear the stories of those with similar experiences.

Divorce support groups are a place to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2) and to walk through the healing process together as Christ meets them. There are several Christ-centered divorce programs churches can participate in, such as [DivorceCare](#) and [DivorceCare for Kids](#).

Offer free childcare when the group meets to take the expense and stress off parents.

### 3 Offer to connect them with a mentor.

Many pastors struggle with how to best support the recently divorced. Consider connecting the divorced church member with a mentor who can provide encouragement and guidance on a more personal level. Pastors can then schedule check-ins with that person to see how they are doing.



#### **4 Be their community.**

Everyone needs a community who experiences life with them—people who call just to see how things are going, who invite them and their kids to the next game night or cookout. This doesn't change based on your relationship status.

We set up meal trains for every other situation in the church, but divorce doesn't make the cut. Consider scheduling a meal drop-off for a couple times a month. It doesn't take a lot to make a difference.

Invite them to join you and your family/spouse for lunch after church, or invite them over for dinner. After someone goes through a divorce, they get invited to group events but rarely as the exclusive guest of a couple or family.

#### **5 Advocate for single parents.**

Parenting is difficult enough with two people, so it's important for churches to cheer on single parents. This might mean connecting

the kids with mentors or inviting them to youth group. It could also look like offering the parent a break by making meals or babysitting.

When a single parent feels burnt out, they could often use some time to be present with another adult. Consider inviting that single parent out for coffee and offer to cover the babysitter. Or ask them over for a cup of tea while the kids play. Ask questions to know them better.

#### **6 Offer resources that meet their needs.**

Offer resources for spiritual care (Bible studies and small groups), mental/emotional care (counseling referrals), physical care referrals (if abuse was present), and financial assistance (through benevolent funds, if needed). Consider starting a scholarship fund for things like counseling copays. Whatever the reason for the divorce, it's laden with expenses. Make sure they can get the care they need.



# Need more?

## Check out the following resources.

[FamilyLife Blended®](#) — Did you know we have a ministry focused solely on blended families? Check it out for articles, podcasts, resources, and events tailored for the unique needs of stepfamily life.

What about the kids? FamilyLife Blended’s Ron Deal walks through helping children on this episode of FamilyLife Today®: [“Divorce Care for Kids.”](#)

Have a friend whose marriage is struggling? Grab our free e-book, [“Fighting for Your Friend’s Marriage.”](#)

Know a single parent who’s ready to start dating again? Consider sharing, [“11 Best Practices for Dating as a Single Parent.”](#)

It’s hard for adult children when their parents split. Read, [“My Friend’s Parents Are Divorcing. How Can I Help?”](#) for tips to walk alongside.

Often when a divorced person remarries, the church feels celebrating the marriage would be saying “okay” to divorce. But Ron Deal counters this argument in, [“Loving Mercy: A Theological Basis for Blended Family Ministry.”](#)

