

EXPLORING BEYOND DIVORCE

Coaching Guide • Topic 11 of 12

Re-Learning Trust ... a Difficult Challenge

Trust, once broken, can be rebuilt — but only when it is truly re-earned.

About This Topic

After divorce, re-learning to trust — others, the future, and yourself — is one of the most difficult and most important pieces of recovery. This topic explores what trust actually is, how it is built and maintained, when it can be repaired, and when it is right to let it go.

What Is Trust?

A New Way to Think About Trust

Trust is the emotion that allows us to coordinate action with others. This interpretation makes trust less about moral judgment and more about risk assessment — a way of evaluating the likelihood that someone will do what they say they will do.

Most of us don't have a clear definition of trust. We rely on a strategy called "hoping trust will appear." But trust can be proactively created, maintained, and — sometimes — repaired.

Assessing Trustworthiness: 3 Key Elements

When Assessing Whether to Trust Someone, Ask:

- Sincerity — Is this person genuinely committed to doing what they said they would do?
- Competence — Do they have the skills and capacity to actually do it?
- Reliability — Based on their history, how consistently have they followed through?

Trust Is Domain-Specific

Just because you trust someone in one area of life doesn't mean it is prudent to trust them in all areas. Trusting someone as a parent does not automatically mean trusting them as a financial partner. Assessing trust requires being specific about the domain.

Trust Involves Standards

Each assessment of trust is made relative to a standard — and the standard varies with the consequences of unreliability. A late arrival at work once in a hundred times is forgivable. An unsafe pilot is not. Know the stakes before you extend trust.

Building Trust

- Make strong, grounded promises — only those you truly intend and have the capacity to fulfill
- Fulfill your promises according to the conditions you agreed to
- Extend trust as a practice — as Hemingway said, "The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them"

Maintaining Trust

- Trust is not a one-time achievement — it requires ongoing attention
- Check in regularly on your assessment of trust in important relationships
- Making and keeping promises consistently — and being honest when you cannot — maintains high trust

Repairing Trust

If trust has been broken, an apology is a beginning. But a real apology is not just an admission of wrongdoing — it is a declaration that "I believe I have unintentionally done something that may have caused you discomfort or harm." It opens the door to repair.

When Trust Cannot Be Repaired

You cannot repair trust with someone if they have not re-earned it. This does not mean trust will never return — but it may mean that, at this moment, there is not sufficient trust to move forward. And a legitimate and healthy choice may be to declare the end of a relationship due to an irreparable breach of trust.

Reflection Questions

1. In what areas of your relationship was there solid trust — and why do you think that was?

2. In what areas was there little trust — and what contributed to that?

3. Is there anything you could have done differently to repair broken trust in the relationship?

4. How do you assess trust in new relationships now? What do you look for?

5. What would re-learning to trust yourself — your own instincts and judgment — look like?

A Closing Thought

Re-learning trust after divorce is not about becoming naive again. It is about becoming wiser — more discerning, more grounded, and more willing to extend trust carefully and consciously to those who deserve it.

"Trust is a necessary emotion that allows us to coordinate action with others. Re-learning it — after loss — is one of the bravest things you can do."

Additional Support Available

1-on-1 Clarity Sessions • Weekly Zoom Support Groups • exploringbeyonddivorce.org