

EXPLORING BEYOND DIVORCE

Coaching Guide • Journey 11 of 12

Relearning Trust After Divorce

Making thoughtful choices about others and yourself

About This Journey

After divorce, you may question whether you can rely on other people or on your own judgment. You may want connection and also feel cautious about promises. Relearning trust does not require ignoring what happened or becoming certain that you will never be hurt again.

This journey offers a practical way to assess trust, make clear agreements, and consider whether repair is possible. It also invites you to rebuild confidence in your own choices. You can take small steps and keep boundaries while you learn what feels appropriate.

What Is Trust

Trust is a willingness to rely on someone in a particular situation, based on what you know about them and the possible consequences. It includes expectations about what they will do and how they will treat you. Those expectations can become clearer through observation, conversation, and experience.

Trust is not a guarantee. You can make a thoughtful decision with the information available and still encounter disappointment. Another person's dishonesty does not prove that you were foolish to believe them.

Three Elements of Trustworthiness

Sincerity: Does the person appear to mean what they say? Look for agreement between their words and actions, including honesty when the truth is uncomfortable.

Competence: Do they have the skills, time, resources, and capacity to do what they promise? Good intentions alone may not be enough.

Reliability: How consistently do they follow through? Notice patterns over time and how they respond when they cannot keep an agreement.

Respect Matters Too

These three elements are useful starting points, not a complete test of a relationship. Also consider whether the person respects your limits, handles private information with care, and allows you to disagree. Keeping some promises does not cancel out threatening or controlling behavior.

Trust Is Specific to the Situation

You may trust someone in one area without trusting them in every area. A friend may be a caring listener but often arrive late. A former partner may reliably follow a parenting schedule while you choose to keep personal matters private. Name the particular responsibility rather than making one sweeping judgment.

Ask a Specific Question

Instead of asking only “Can I trust this person?” try “Can I rely on this person to do this particular thing under these conditions?” Identify what you have observed, what remains uncertain, and what you need to clarify.

Match Your Expectations to the Stakes

Consider what would happen if the agreement were not kept. A missed coffee date and a missed important responsibility have different consequences. As the stakes rise, look for stronger evidence, clearer agreements, and appropriate safeguards. You do not need to take a large risk to prove that you are open to trust.

Building Trust

Make grounded promises: Agree only to what you intend and reasonably expect to do. If you are uncertain, say so before someone relies on you.

Define the agreement: Clarify who will do what, by when, and what completion means. Do not assume that both people understand a vague promise in the same way.

Begin with manageable commitments: Allow ordinary experiences of follow-through to inform your judgment. You can increase reliance gradually instead of sharing everything at once.

Maintaining Trust

Trust needs attention after an agreement is made. Follow through, communicate changes promptly, and check whether expectations still fit the circumstances. If you cannot keep a promise, explain what has changed, acknowledge the effect, and agree on a realistic next step.

An Everyday Example

A friend offers to call during a difficult week. You agree on a day and time. If they cannot call, they let you know and suggest an alternative. Over time, you can observe whether their care is supported by consistent action. One missed call may need a conversation; a repeated pattern may call for a different expectation.

Repairing Broken Trust

An apology can begin a repair conversation, but it does not restore trust by itself. Repair requires attention to what happened, its impact, and what will change. You can listen to an apology without promising renewed closeness or deciding immediately.

Acknowledge the Harm Clearly

A meaningful apology names the action and takes responsibility for it. “I shared something you told me privately. That broke our agreement, and I am sorry” is clearer than language that makes the harm sound uncertain or assumes that good intentions erase its effect.

Agree on Concrete Changes

Ask what repair would involve in practice. That might mean correcting misinformation, changing a pattern, or making future commitments more realistic. The person who broke trust needs to participate in the work. You cannot supply their accountability for them.

Look for Consistency Over Time

Notice whether the promised changes happen without repeated pressure from you. Trust may return slowly, only in certain areas, or not at all. You do not owe someone a deadline for trusting them again, and forgiveness does not automatically restore access to your life.

When Repair Is Not Possible or Wanted

You may decide there is not enough evidence to rely on the person again. Repeated dishonesty, blame, disregard for limits, or pressure to “get over it” can make repair difficult. Limiting reliance or ending a relationship can be a valid choice; renewed trust is not a required outcome.

Where ongoing contact is necessary, consider clear, limited agreements rather than assuming that emotional closeness must return. If contact feels unsafe, prioritize safety and seek appropriate support instead of trying to prove that trust can be rebuilt.

Relearning Trust in Yourself

Self-trust can grow through noticing your needs, checking the facts available, and keeping small commitments to yourself. You can take a concern seriously without treating every fear as proof. Ask what you observed, what you are interpreting, and what additional information would help.

If you regret a choice, consider what you would do differently now without judging your past self by information you did not have. Seeking another perspective or changing your mind can be part of sound judgment. You do not have to make every decision alone.

Reflection Questions

Write here or in a journal. Focus on specific behaviors and situations rather than labeling yourself or another person as entirely trustworthy or untrustworthy.

1. In which areas of your relationship was trust strong? What actions supported it?

2. In which areas was trust limited or broken? What patterns or unclear expectations contributed?

3. What part of repair, if any, was yours to address? What accountability or change belonged to the other person?

4. How do you assess trust in new relationships now? What evidence and boundaries help you decide?

5. What would trusting your own judgment look like this week? Name one small commitment you can keep to yourself.

A Closing Thought

Relearning trust can mean becoming clearer about what you need, what you observe, and what you are willing to rely on. You can remain open to connection while making careful choices. Let trust develop through evidence and experience, at a pace that respects you.

Additional Support

1-on-1 Clarity Sessions • Weekly Zoom Support Groups

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