



Divorce for
Betrayed Partners
They are not
Casserole
Widows.

Kim Hansen Petroni

Reframing Widowhood: A Trauma-Informed
Approach to Divorce After Betrayal

LET'S CLEAR UP TWO THINGS

Download today's slides here:





WHY IS THIS TOPIC MY PASSION?

Who am I?



SUMMARY OF YOUR NEXT 75 MINUTES

What constitutes a divorcing betrayed partner and what do casseroles have to do with anything?

What does it take to navigate divorce due to intimate betrayal?

What is on the other side?



LET'S START
WITH:
**WHO IS A
CASSEROLE
WIDOW?**

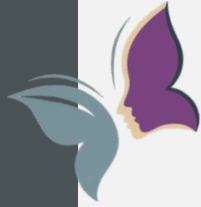


A *Casserole Widow* is a woman who receives casseroles when her partner has died. The casserole is a representation of support, loss recognition, and attempts to diffuse grief.

The most widely cited life stress research consistently places the death of a spouse as the number one life stressor. Divorce ranks second, and marital separation ranks third. Betrayed partners often experience both the grief of losing the relationship they believed they had and the stress of navigating divorce simultaneously.

Adapted from Holmes & Rahe's Social Readjustment Rating Scale and subsequent updates.

THE WIDOW BRAIN



Common Symptoms of *Widow Brain*

- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness and absent-mindedness
- Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted
- Mental fatigue or brain fog
- Impaired decision making
- The feeling of being “in a daze” or disconnected
- (Casseroles delivered)

(<https://widowedcommunity.com/what-is-widow-brain-aka-widow-fog/>)





1. Emotional Symptoms:

- **Depression:** Persistent sadness, hopelessness, or lack of interest in activities once enjoyed.
- **Anxiety:** Excessive worry, fear, or panic attacks.
- **Anger and Rage:** Intense feelings of anger or difficulty controlling emotions.
- **Shame and Guilt:** Overwhelming feelings of self-blame or worthlessness.
- **Emotional Numbness:** Difficulty feeling emotions or a sense of detachment.

2. Cognitive Symptoms:

- **Intrusive Thoughts:** Recurrent, unwanted thoughts or memories related to the betrayal.
- **Hypervigilance:** Heightened awareness and constant scanning for potential threats.
- **Confusion and Disorientation:** Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or experiencing memory problems.
- **Distrust:** Inability to trust others, often leading to isolation or avoidance of relationships.

3. Physical Symptoms:

- **Sleep Disturbances:** Insomnia, nightmares, or difficulty staying asleep.
- **Chronic Pain:** Headaches, muscle tension, or other unexplained physical pain.
- **Fatigue:** Persistent tiredness or lack of energy.
- **Appetite Changes:** Overeating or loss of appetite, leading to weight changes.

4. Behavioral Symptoms:

- **Avoidance:** Avoiding places, people, or situations that remind them of the betrayal.
- **Substance Abuse:** Increased use of alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism.
- **Self-Harm:** Engaging in self-injurious behaviors or suicidal thoughts.
- **Compulsive Behaviors:** Engaging in repetitive behaviors or rituals to manage anxiety.

5. Relational Symptoms:

- **Difficulty Forming Relationships:** Challenges in establishing or maintaining close relationships.
- **Fear of Intimacy:** Reluctance to become emotionally close to others.
- **Isolation:** Withdrawing from social interactions or support networks.
- **Conflict in Relationships:** Increased conflict, arguments, or misunderstandings in relationships.



<https://connectionsoc.com/mental-health/trauma-disorders/betrayal-trauma/>

THE BETRAYED'S EXPERIENCE

Betrayed partners report many of the same symptoms as *Widow Brain* while simultaneously navigating divorce, but no casserole is delivered.

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Impaired decision making

The feeling of being "foggy" or disconnected

<https://widowedcommunity.com/what-is-widow-brain-aka-widow-fog/>



**WHAT IF YOUR SPOUSE DIED...
...BUT WAS STILL SITTING ACROSS FROM
YOU IN MEDIATION?**





THE DIVORCEE'S PREP PLAN

- **Build Emotional Resilience**
- **Acknowledge Your Emotions And Allow Yourself To Process Them**
- **Establish A Strong Support System**
- **Set Realistic Expectations**
- **Prepare Financially For The Transition**
- **Avoid Negative Influences**
- **Develop A Plan For The Future**
- **Manage Communication With Your Spouse**
- **Seek Professional Guidance**
- **Stay Focused On The Bigger Picture**



COMPLETELY BEFUDDLED



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DIVORCE

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IMAGINE



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WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO NAVIGATE DIVORCE DUE TO INTIMATE BETRAYAL?

G.R.I.T.

G = GEAR includes:

1. Google.
2. Values.
3. Logic.





G = GEAR
I. GOOGLE
HOLDS POWER.

- Google is your next best friend!
- Learn to go to Google first, before you call your therapist, friends or attorney.
- Becoming self-sufficient for many partners is a completely new way of thinking.



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G.R.I.T.

G = Gear
2. VALUES.

“Living into our values means that we do more than profess our values, we practice them. We walk our talk—we are clear about what we believe and hold important, and we take care that our intentions, words, thoughts, and behaviors align with those beliefs.” Brenee Brown

What values do you have? Are they your partner's? Are they values due to the situation?

Brenee Brown's list of Values:

<https://brenebrown.com/resources/dare-to-lead-list-of-values/>



G.R.I.T.

G = GEAR

3. LOGIC.

Documenting
validates your
emotions.

Documenting helps
identify patterns of
behaviors.

Documenting offers
tangible evidence so
the brain does not
slip into “abuse
amnesia” or
“betrayal blindness”
or “gaslighting.”

Documenting lets
your hands touch
your reality.



G.R.I.T.

G = GEAR
R = RUCKUS



1. Trauma response.
2. Somatic practices.
3. Consider Support.



G.R.I.T.

R=RUCKUS
I. UNDERSTAND
YOUR TRAUMA
RESPONSE

**MY ENTIRE
PERSONALITY
IS A TRAUMA
RESPONSE**



LEMME HELP YOU OUT OF THE RUCKUS



FIGHT
NARCISSISTS,
BULLIES, RAGES



FREEZE
DISASSOCIATES,
SHUTS DOWN



FLOP
GOES LIMP, FAINTS,
LOSS OF PHYSICAL
CONTROL



TRAUMA RESPONSES



FLIGHT
DISTRACTED, PERFECTIONISTS,
ADDICTS, OVEREATS,
STAYS BUSY



FAWN
PLEASERS, ACQUIESCES,
CODEPENDENT, SILENCES
AND REPRESSES SELF

G.R.I.T.

R = RUCKUS



2. SOMATIC PRACTICES HELP REGULATE



Breath work



Cold plunge



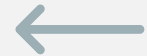
Walking



Bilateral
Music



Weighted
blanket



Vagus nerve
support

R = RUCKUS

3. CONSIDER SUPPORT

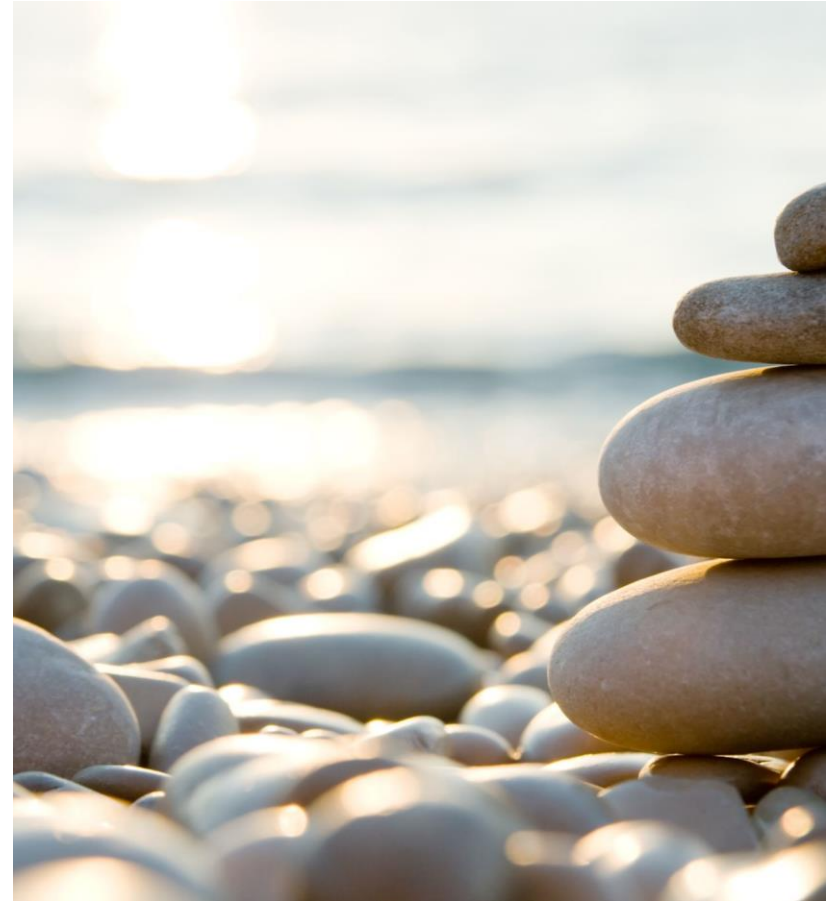
Trauma therapy looks back into the pain so it is recognizable, allowing healing.



Divorce Prep moves forward with new tools to balance pain and place it in a safe space until the timing is appropriate to explore.



Being fragile, questioning decisions, reviewing choices in the past does not build confidence while preparing for divorce. Those insights will always be available to tend to and balance after, or later in the healing journey.



G = GEAR
R = RUCKUS
I = INTEGRITY



Integrity:

Partners who feel betrayed
desire authenticity and
honesty.

1. Tactics or Dishonesty.
2. Communicate Styles
3. Self-confidence.

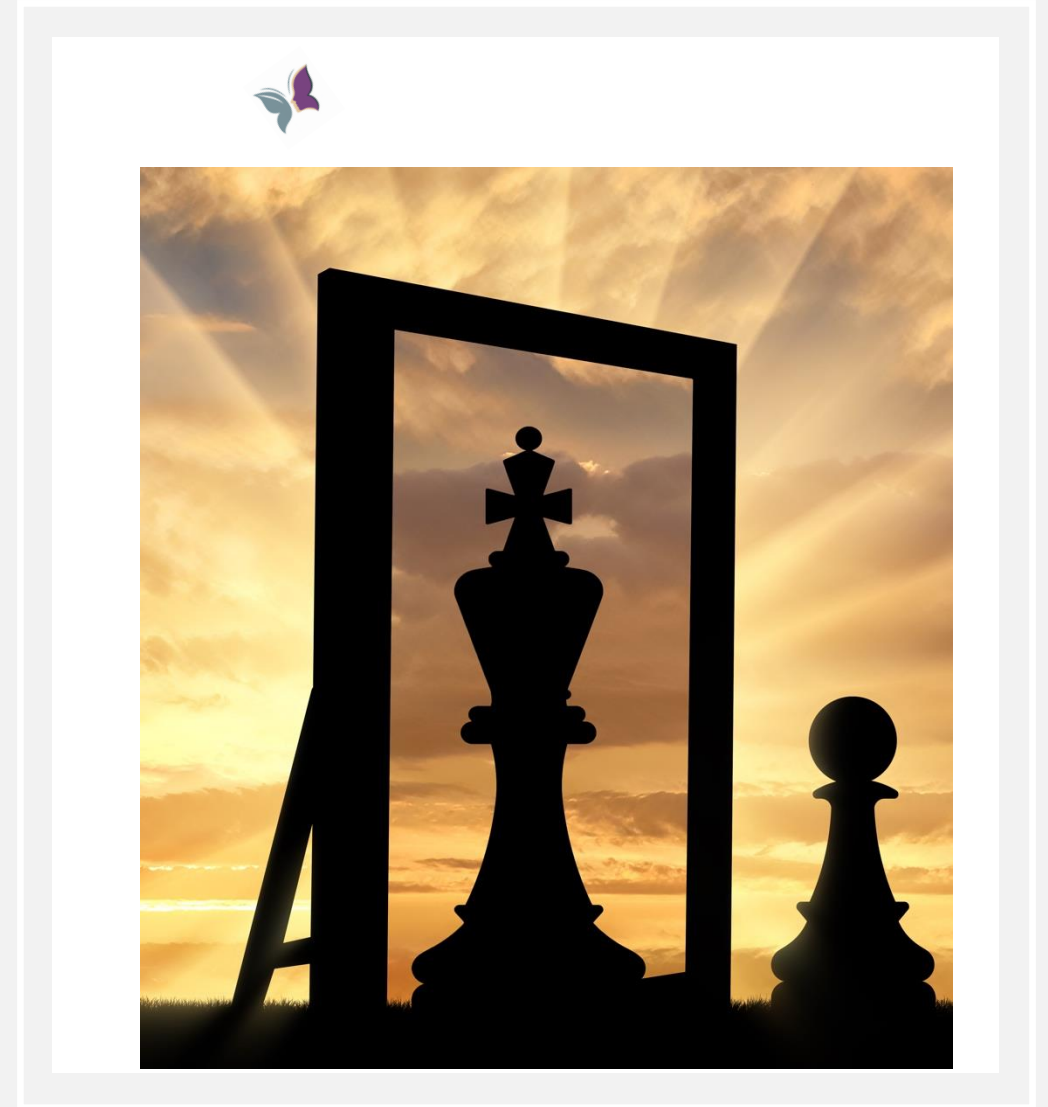


I = INTEGRITY
I. IS IT A
TACTIC OR DISHONESTY.

Withholding details from a partner about conversations with an attorney is not deceit, it's wisdom.

Buying gift cards to make sure your children have diapers, after the betrayer has wasted money on acting out behaviors, is not stealing, it's preparedness.

Not answering phone calls from an angry partner is not dismissiveness, it's self preservation.



G.R.I.T.

I = INTEGRITY
2. COMMUNICATE WITH INTEGRITY:
BIFF, JADE.



BE BIFF:

- ✓ Brief
- ✓ Informative
- ✓ Friendly
- ✓ Firm

DON'T JADE:

- x Justify
- x Argue
- x Defend
- x Explain



I = INTEGRITY

3. DEVELOP SELF-CONFIDENCE



G.R.I.T.

Believe, “I understand my partner better than anyone else.” and learn how to explain this to other professionals (attorneys, coaches, mediators, etc)

Why this is hard:

Gaslighting- my definition: altering her reality to be what he wants her reality to be.

Lack of self esteem

Questioning intuition

G.R.I.T.



G = GEAR
R = RUCKUS
I = INTEGRITY
T = TRUTHS

Truths

1. Legal Time
2. Infidelity Divorce Syndrome
3. Injustice





T = TRUTHS
**I. TIME IN THE LEGAL WORLD IS DIFFERENT
THAN NORMAL TIME.**



We prepare in advance. They wait for the day before.



We think 30 days means, 30 days. They know it means we ask for a continuation.



We worry about the tears we can't stop today. They know they will stop, at some point.

G.R.I.T.

T = TRUTHS
2. INFIDELITY
DIVORCE SYNDROME



What is It?

- **Infidelity Divorce Syndrome** describes a pattern of emotional and psychological responses often observed in individuals who discover a partner's infidelity and proceed through divorce.

Key Features

- **Emotional Shock & Trauma:** Sudden feelings of betrayal, disbelief, and deep hurt.
- **Obsession with Details:** Persistent, intrusive thoughts about the affair and partner's actions.
- **Loss of Self-Esteem:** Questioning self-worth and experiencing guilt or shame.
- **Rage & Anger:** Intense, at times irrational, anger toward the unfaithful partner.
- **Trust Issues:** Difficulty trusting future partners or forming new relationships.

Impact

- Can prolong legal battles, hinder co-parenting, and adversely affect personal healing.
- May trigger depression, anxiety, or symptoms similar to PTSD without targeted support.

T = TRUTHS

3. INJUSTICE IS REAL

1. Acknowledgment

- Recognizing trauma and validating the victim's experiences.
- Public acknowledgment as a critical step toward justice.

2. Restitution

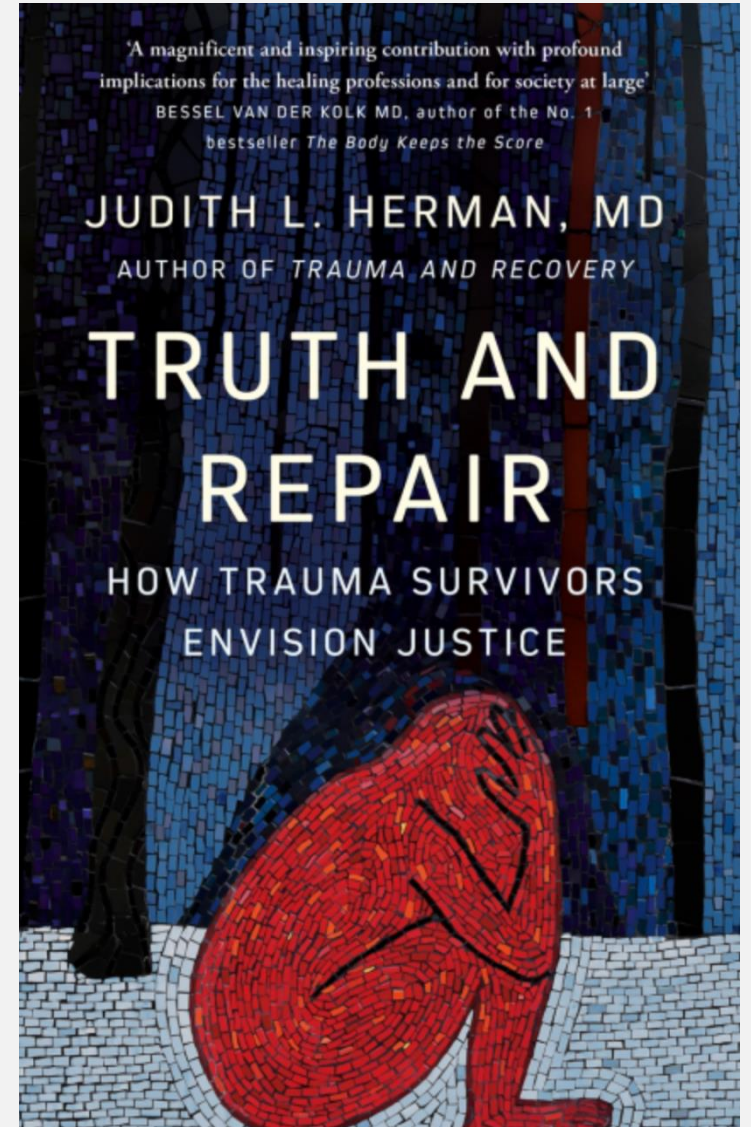
- Making amends for harm done, whenever possible.
- Includes both material (compensation) and symbolic (apologies) restoration.

3. Reintegration

- Supporting survivors in reclaiming power and community connections.
- Emphasizes meaningful participation and voice in society.

4. Prevention

- Addressing systemic causes of injustice.
- Implementing policies and practices to prevent future harm.



G.R.I.T.

WHAT INJUSTICE LOOKS LIKE AS AN EMOTION





G.R.I.T.

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WHAT IS ON THE OTHER SIDE?





RECOGNIZE REINFORCEMENT

- Not a Casserole Widow® Network (of course!)
- Life Saving Divorce, Gretchen Baskerville
- Leslie Vernick
- Divorce Groups
- 2nd Saturdays
- APSATS



RECOGNIZE RESERVATIONS

YOUR CAREER



The top fears I've seen:

- Loss of money
- Loss of future stability
- Permanently damaging children
- Career- what do they do next?
- Shattered dream.





RECOGNIZE
(AND CELEBRATE)
REBIRTH



WHO ARE “NOT CASSEROLE WIDOWS”?



Survey: 40% of my group responded

- 75% of the group have been married over 20 years
- 50% are divorcing due to continued emotional abuse and too much betrayal to heal from
- 50% found their best source of emotional support from a betrayal trauma group
- 30% found support from friends
- 16% found support from a coach

SUMMARY OF TODAY:



What constitutes a divorcing betrayed partner and what do casseroles have to do with anything?

- Casseroles represent unconditional support and soul nourishment during the mental mayhem.

What does it take to navigate divorce due to intimate betrayal?

- Grit: Gear, Ruckus, Integrity, Truths

What is on the other side?

- Recognize: Reinforcement, Reservations, Rebirth



SPARKLES OF FREEDOM

BY KIM HANSEN PETRONI



Free me.

Free me from the horror.

Freedom.

Is freedom possible?

Blackness determines your future,

Twisting through your heart, lungs, and mind.

Overwhelming daily thoughts,

Daily walks,

Daily talks,

Until you are paralyzed.



Seeking,

Endless seeking to stop the pain.

Maybe this book,
Maybe this podcast,
Maybe this blog...

And yet, the pain festers,
unceasing.



A spark of hope
Flashes for a moment.

It disappears.

And then, another spark.

It disappears.

Now two sparks,
They disappear.

Now one spark.
It disappears.

Now, 3 sparks STAY
and establish an ember in your
soul.



Creating hope.
Small, delicate, fragile hope.
Survival begins to feel plausible.

Blackness still rests in your soul
But it is haunted by that ember.
As you breathe gently, the ember
becomes stronger.

Surprisingly, the blackness becomes grey.
It is a heavy grey- like clouds predicting a
storm.
Still threatening your ember.





Breathe the breath of hope on the
ember.

Tenderly encourage oxygen to
strengthen it.

Suddenly you see it-

A flame.

Flickering, casting light through the gray.

No longer a sputtering spark,

Or an unpredictable ember,

But a flame.

Strengthening.

Seeking fortitude provided by fuel.





The darkness ceases.
You will always remember it.
It has changed you.

But this new flame,
This is your new you;
Trampling through the darkness.

Emboldened by knowledge,
Encouraged by faith,
Enriched by a supportive tribe.

Trust the strength of your flame,
And seek other flames.
Enjoy the bonfire you can create.

Thank you for being here!

Download Today's Slides & Resources
coachinghope4u.com/litpath2026



You're not meant to hold it alone.

Review this session for LitPath HERE:



WHEW!