

Elizabeth Cohen:

Welcome to the divorce doctor podcast. I'm Dr. Elizabeth Cohen, the divorce doctor. I'm dedicated to breaking the stigma of divorce through my work. Divorce can be so isolating. Your friends and family might not understand what you're going through, but you're not alone. And divorce is not a failure on this podcast. I speak to real people. Who've gone through divorce and thrive through it. I talk about the struggles and the successes we explore with my guests, how the pain of divorce brought them realizations about themselves and their situations they wouldn't have had without this experience. I can't tell you how many clients have shared with me that being reminded they're not alone, allow them to get up in the morning and keep on keeping on. I hope listening to these people's stories will help you feel less alone with my 15 years of experience, as a clinical psychologist, working with people going through divorce. I know the ins and outs of divorce and love talking about all of it. I'm thrilled. You are here and are ready to get the support you so deeply deserve. So let's dive in.

Today's episode of the Divorce Doctor podcast is brought to you by my online program. Afterglow: The Light at the Other Side of Divorce. Afterglow is the first course of its kind that provides a healing program to thrive, not just survive, after your divorce. It's based on research. It has therapeutic tools and is led by me, a clinical psychologist. The online program is available at [drelizabethcohen.com](http://drelizabethcohen.com). And recently released on [drelizabethcohen.com](http://drelizabethcohen.com), a new master class called How Not to Screw Up Your Kids During Divorce: Three Secrets from a Psychologist. Check out that free masterclass and find that information on our sponsor: Afterglow: The Light at the Other Side of Divorce at my website, [drelizabethcohen.com](http://drelizabethcohen.com).

Today, my guest is Jeff McMahon. He believes the future of health is not belonging to a gym or following some new and crazy diet every month, but more following the principle of living life in the majority. This refreshing approach of getting people results without being miserable and sacrificing a lot has made him a sought after consultant and mentor for top online entrepreneurs, thought leaders and influencers. I'm so glad to have you, and I'm so grateful that you're willing to share your story and your experience of divorce with everyone today.

Jeff McMahon:

Well, I'm very happy to be here and excited for the conversation we're about to have.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah, me too. Great. So, Jeff, I always start the podcast asking people the same one question, which is what one word would you use to describe your divorce.

Jeff McMahon:

Hmm. If I didn't do it or we didn't do, however you wanna approach it, would have been a bad environment for the kids, that it was violent. It was just a lot of yelling, a lot of anger, a lot of frustration, and the kids could see it too. And so the only thing I could see to do, cause I'm the one that initiated it, was to start counseling and then go into divorce after that. So it would be the word I would say.

Elizabeth Cohen:

I love that word because it's also, it really, you know, a big part of my work is flipping the stigma of divorce on its head that it's somehow a failure. And your word is such a, a great example of actually what was more healing for my family was the divorce.

Jeff McMahon:

Correct

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. And that was brave of you to initiate that yeah.

Jeff McMahon:

Was risky, but you know, I, wasn't a calculated risk then you really think it all the way through, but at the moment, you know, just fighting for like 18 months straight and like, I want to do counseling and I did, and just didn't get better. Like, you know, things like that that are just, yeah.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. It was needed. So let me ask you this. I usually like to explain to people listening that, you know, divorce doesn't happen overnight. Right? A lot of times we have this kind of prolonged or protracted experience of you're mentioning counseling or from the first time you think about separation. So I'm curious for you, Jeff, like how much time was there and what was the experience like from when you first thought about the possibility to actually divorcing?

Jeff McMahon:

I thought about the possibility a year into our marriage. We ended up going to marriage counseling. We fought a lot. We rushed our wedding after being engaged because she had cervical cancer and didn't have medical insurance. So I was like, Oh, well, let's, you know, we're going to get married anyway, let's get married. Now that way you can be on my insurance and we can get you your procedure to help out. And she was all fine with that. So no worries. But we didn't have that engagement period of planning a wedding and seeing what each other are really like, and like going through the ups and downs that a lot of relationships would have before tying the knots. Yeah.

Elizabeth Cohen:

And you also had cancer. I mean that, you know, having a life stressor brings people together. And I, I, in my experience in my practice sometimes covers up some things. So I wonder if that happens,

Jeff McMahon:

Covered up some things. And I wanted to, you know, love this person, want to make sure that she was okay and, you know, in a real relationship, I would always, probably have gone a lot slower than, you know, being engaged and married three months, two months after that. So, you know, hindsight is 20/20 kind of thing, but looking at it now, the first year was rough. We had a lot of ups and downs and so a lot of trust issues. And I was going from being very single to then being, you know, now married and like that transition of like, no, it's Christmas. I want to spend time with my brother, not realizing that she wanted to be home and just have, you know, um, first Christmas together, alone. And like a lot of things we should have figured out. And we had a lot of fighting. Did counseling get better for a few years? And then later on with her new profession, there was hiding text messages. There was always second guess what I'm doing and not trusting me. And then our trust kind of faded into our then intimacy chatter to fade. And then it turned into just glorified roommates versus actual love to be around each other. And, you know, then the kids would start butting heads with us and it just was like, okay, something needs to change because this isn't going well for anybody. So,

Elizabeth Cohen:

And I appreciate your honesty about the trajectory of it. You know, that looking back, as you said high, in hindsight, you can think, Oh, you know, there wasn't this trust. There was a lack of intimacy. The kids were being affected. Right? Like you see, you see it now, but my guess is when you were in it, it just felt like you had to figure out how to make it work. Right.

Jeff McMahon:

Right. I didn't get married to get divorced. And so, you know, I love her, they know she's the prettiest girl in the room and I loved everything. She had two kids that I married into. So I just used step kids. And even after the divorce, I'm still very active in their lives every week. I'm with them all the time. I'm their guy that teach them how to drive, how to ride a bike, like their biological dad's out of the picture. So I'm it, which I love. And so, yeah, they were always a big part of it. And I want to make sure they have a normal childhood as much as possible and wish they didn't go down this road. But yeah.

Elizabeth Cohen:

And so you initiate the divorce.

Jeff McMahon:

I initiated, after one time we were coming home from a wine tasting in the afternoon and for the entire 30 minute ride heard how bad of a husband I was and father, and, you know, I do is, you know, never there. And I worked too much and all this kind of stuff. And I'm like, I just can't do this anymore.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. And isn't it interesting. Right? Cause that was probably a conversation you had many times, but for whatever reason that day, it was enough.

Jeff McMahon:

All I said was what you want to do for anniversary, which is four days before my birthday. And it was like the beginning of October when I asked us, like, I don't have a schedule like you, I can't work for myself and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And like went down this whole thing. And I'm like, all I want to do is when we date together. But if we can't even do that without fighting, then what are we really doing?

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. And so it must have been painful. I imagine the kids, there was some impact with the kids. You've mentioned that before. Can you share a little bit about that?

Jeff McMahon:

Yes. Um, initially, you know, she told the kids one-on-one on her own and they seemed fine. They didn't want to see mom and dad fight all the time anymore. So they were okay. Uh, we separated beginning of December, got officially divorced in April of 2019. And then my, at the time, 11 year old told my ex that he was having suicidal thoughts and you know, wanting to hang himself in a shower. And a lot of it came partially from social media, partially from the separation of us. And he felt alone again, his biological dad had already left them five years ago. Now his other dad is maybe leaving again the uncertainty, what is this? And we got him help right away with a virtual therapist. That was very suicidal forte, specialty, whatever word was absolutely great lifesaver. She is doing much better with kids. You don't want to just, Oh, he just saying that like take it very seriously. So it was a cry for help. It wasn't an intentional thing, but he knows he was heard. We loosely talk about it once a year just to make sure how are things going? Do you need to talk to Dr. Mitchell again, anything happening? Let us know.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. It's such a great sign. Also, Jeff, that he was able to come to you. I mean, we talk about that as a clinical psychologist that, you know, we're going to have these thoughts, these experiences, you know, these people in our family might struggle with these intense feelings. And the most important thing is that they feel like they can come to us. And so the fact that he could come to you and that you both responded in such a beautiful way is really a gift to him. I wonder. Was it hard to navigate that tricky situation with him during your separation?

Jeff McMahon:

Yes. Just because at the time, like she didn't want me at the house to like come visit. Like I didn't come and get the kids and leave, but she didn't want me there. And like he needed to be there and I'm like, I'm not trying to invade. I, you know, coli, we call him Coley D his name's Cole Coley. He needs us like, you know, and so it was a little tricky because she had a lot of resentment from me for starting the divorce and like this kind of stuff. So it wasn't

Elizabeth Cohen:

Right. But you actually, but think about it, Jeff, you showed up fully for him. Right. I mean,

Jeff McMahon:

Thousand percent and I would die tomorrow for them. And you know, they're my, step-kids not my biological kids. They both know that I would give my life up tomorrow if they needed it. So that's where I guess, you know, a lot of stepdads when they are divorced and they just leave the whole thing. I'm, can't do that and never would. So in my mind, they're me.

Elizabeth Cohen:

I think it's really important for people to understand this and hear this my situation too. My children are raised by their stepdad and he's their dad. And people often ask him or say to me, Oh, he didn't have any of his own kids. And he'll say I do. They're our kids. Right? I mean, and so I really want people to know, you know, in popular culture, set parenting gets such a bad rep. Every Disney movie that's like evil stepmother, evil stepfather, but the truth is those relationships can be incredibly beautiful and special. And I talk in my program about the more love, the better, and so not to be threatened by a step parent coming in and really seeing it as an opportunity for more love. And you're such a beautiful example of that, Jeff.

Jeff McMahon:

Well, thank you. Yeah, no, I definitely couldn't agree more. The more, more the merrier for that, as long as long as the kids want that too, you know, like my ex is dated and they don't like who she's dating and stuff like that. So obviously it has to be both ways, but yeah, the more the merrier, for sure. Yeah.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. So tell me, Jeff, what kind of, you mentioned, you know, couples counseling, but what kind of individual's psychological healing did you pursue? And did you have, when you were going through a, well,

Jeff McMahon:

I made the mistake of saying, Hey, obviously we're fighting a lot. I'm going to go see a therapist, but in my mind I was hoping she would come with me. She was like, Oh, okay. That's great. And in my mind, okay, now she thinks it's only my fault that all this binding happens. So, so I did go to counseling and we did for the most part, talk about my ex. And then when I got done with a session, she'd be like, Oh, what happened? And I'll be like, Oh, we were talking about this. She's like, Oh, are you going to do is talk about me. And I'm like, kind of, it's the definition of what I'm doing.

Elizabeth Cohen:

It's what I'm going through right now.

Jeff McMahon:

Now I'm not going to be in a bashing session. I'm like, okay. And then the one thing that triggered for me specifically was when the therapist was like, you know, on a random Tuesday in November at 11 o'clock at night, where you be okay sending by herself, she's like, you know, divorce is a lot like a funeral. People come with food for about a week or two and your festivals will be there. And then after two weeks you'll be gone. They won't think about you. And then are you going to be okay at that moment? And I was like, I think I will be. And that's when I was like, you know, I can't do this anymore. And I'll try to find a place to go. I want you in the kids, you know, it was very amicable throughout our whole divorce, even everyone's like, wow, you guys had the easiest divorce ever. There was no fighting over things. There was no, you know, I walked away from everything to start over, which I was fine with because in my mind I still want the kids to have the house where their friends come to and they have a normal childhood. I still want them to have everything that they wouldn't normally have if we were still together.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Mm. Well, you made it sound like you made it very amicable and easy, and it sounds like at that moment with the therapist, the focus shifted off of your ex and onto you and would you be okay? And so did you then start kind of focusing on, okay, what do I need, what do I want, like trying to understand you rather than just the relationship.

Jeff McMahon:

Yes. And the biggest thing, the two biggest things I realized from the divorce, which is why it was needed was a, I wasn't myself in the divorce. So like in dating her, I was so used to being a people pleaser that I would be like, yeah, I love country music. I don't really like country music or, you know, I love Grey's anatomy. I hate Grey's anatomy. So like, she's like, Oh, I thought I was marrying this one guy. And then finding out you're not really that guy. So who am I really married to caused a lot of issues. And then, so I knew from the divorce, like, I'm just going to be me. If someone likes me great. If they don't, I'm fine with that. I'll find someone else that does like me like that. Yeah.

Elizabeth Cohen:

To start looking into and trying to understand like why you were a people pleaser and where that came from. And it was that part of the work too, that you did with a therapist

Jeff McMahon:

That deep into it. I know why I'm a people Pleaser is because having strict parents and like, I had to have straight A's in school routes. I couldn't even play sports or have friends. Like I had to like go to church every Sunday and like all this kind of stuff. So I knew the upbringing caused a lot of it just so I could feel normal. But in the same token, people pleasing kind of helps my job because I do a lot of fitness training and virtual trainer people all over the world. So the happier I make my customers, the more they want to stay with me. Yes.

Elizabeth Cohen:

I think that's really one of the issues about people pleasing, right. Is that there's two sides to every coin, like in, in a lot of professions, it's real asset problem is in a relationship when you start losing yourself because of people pleasing, you know, in, in work, there's the boundaries. So you're not going to give over yourself, but in a relationship, you know, I love that example. Like, yeah. I like country music. Like, no, I don't. So did you have the experience that a lot of my clients have where after you get divorced, you look around your house and you're like, what do I actually like, like, what do I actually want to do? What do I want to be listening to? Did you have that experience?

Jeff McMahon:

I did because I got to like my hobby to de-stress and like free my mind is to like play video games with my friends on X-Box. Like I got to do that more. I was still go see the kids about twice to three times a week. And so I still had a nice balance between both my friends and my kids. I did find myself at least the first year of divorce, like taking more trips to like escape a little bit. Like, I'll go to Colorado. I went down to Texas. I have virtual clients all over the world. So I would go visit them to like escape and feel free. But then after the first year, I was like, I feel guilty making these trips. I only want to do these trips if I go with my kids and COVID happens by doing that thing. But now that it's back on, like, we're doing our first trip in two weeks to Texas and I want to do another one this summer. Like, I don't want to go on trips without them. Cause I don't need to escape. I need to embrace more. So that was a big revelation.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Beautiful. Wow. That's a really lovely, um, is that the second thing you said you learned when you learned about the people pleasing was the other, that you were more of an avoider rather than an embracer. Yes.

Jeff McMahon:

Yeah. Yeah. That was the big part. So left-leaning, you know, I'm still learning. I mean, first by year and then second year into divorce is still a learning process, you know, then dating since and had some ups and downs, like ready to commit to a new person, not ready to commit, you know, that kind of thing. And trying to navigate that realm of things is new road and path. I'm not used to. So trying to figure that out is what this year looks like, but in the same token, also trying to get rid of COVID and see what normal.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. Are you noticing or are you keeping your eye out when you're dating? I talked to clients about this now for things that you used to do, you know, behaviors that you did in your previous relationship.

Jeff McMahon:

Yes. One of the things, actually, we just had a we'll call it a discussion was like in the past I would bottle it up like, or not tell like in my marriage, I tried to run a 5k race business, and the first race we lost \$3,000, the next race, we lost five grand, the next race, you lost five grand. And I was like, so I didn't tell her that we were building up 16 grand a debt. And then she found out like, where this all come from. And then like in this relationship, we had some issues with my girlfriend's ex husband and then this other thing popped up and something popped up and I never like told her that it bothered me. So she thought everything was fine then was like, Oh wait, no, it's not fine. And she's like, well, where'd this all come from? And I'm like, I guess that's a pattern of me hiding things that I need to do better on. I need to let people know if I'm not happy to tell them not happy versus, you know. Yeah.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Right. Well, it's another, it's a, that's another side of the people pleasing. Right. Because it's like, if I'm, if something's going badly, I don't want to tell you so you don't get upset and I don't get upset. Right. There's like this lack of tolerance of discomfort. And so it's an ongoing, it sounds like it's an ongoing practice that you're willing to. And I really appreciate your talking about that. What part of the divorce could you not have seen coming, but changed you for the best?

Jeff McMahon:

I did not see my, my older son and I were really butting heads when I was at the house. Like I would say, plug your phone in, in your room. Don't have your charters laying all over the kitchen and living room and stuff. So what do you do? Leave just charters in the kitchen living. So we'd always be butting heads on little things that didn't need to be like that. And so, but after the divorce, when he saw me a little bit less, but still saw me, we had a much better relationship. I would get random text messages. Like I just want to know how much I love you, dad. And, you know, thanks for coming up this weekend. And I can't wait to see you again. And I like would have never gotten those before and now it was a thing that, you know, and they're teenagers and I get, and my oldest is almost 17, my younger one's 13. So there that boy maturing age range, but just for him to do that was a big surprise and a lot more opening up that he never did would be before and stuff. And like, I, he slowly stopped going to mom for everything would start coming to me for some things. And like, you know, this year is this first sexually active year. So he came to me like, dad, guess what? And I'm like, don't tell me that Had sex, but then you use a condom. I'm like, Jesus,

Elizabeth Cohen:

Again, at least he told you just like the suicide. Right. It's attempt. It's like, it's so good to sell it.

Jeff McMahon:

And did, and we talked about protection and the whole nine yards and that stuff. And I pray to God, he's still doing that. Yeah. So it's definitely, that was one thing I did not expect was to have a better relationship than not.



Elizabeth Cohen:

I'm really glad that you're bringing this up, Jeff, because this is something I talk a lot to, uh, women who are worried about what the relationship is going to be like with the father. And if you're a heterosexual or whatever parent, you know, isn't the primary, primary caretaker. And I always point exactly this out, which is there is the possibility of more closeness and more connection in a way that you couldn't have had in the house. And it sounds like that's what you've gotten from your

Jeff McMahon:

Yeah, no, my ex and I are very, very cordial after about six months of not being cordial. First six months was don't come in the house, don't be blah, blah, blah. Only see the kids when I say you can't because I legally don't have rights to them. So it is a juggle of making sure she's happy enough to let me come up and visit the kiddos. Right. And so that is a little legal struggle, but you're lucky that that makes you quite powerless.

Elizabeth Cohen:

I mean, you're lucky that it was that hard to go through that piece as far as not being like the having legal rights.

Jeff McMahon:

Yeah. There's been some times when I thought that I was, that she was going to take the kids away and I wouldn't see him again. And that would devastate me beyond belief. So being able to be cordial with her and having a good friendship now versus a relationship, but a good friendship now has really been good for the kids to see that we can laugh. And it's not the end of the world. We can, you know, her and I collaborate on Christmas gifts. We collaborate on birthday gifts. I don't pay child support because she gets that from her first husband. But I help out with every sporting thing. They need any kid's thing, any medical bill, her a nice split, 50 50 on that part so that she does know that she's not in it alone and it's for the kids. So, you know, I want to be there. So they know that it's from me too. And not just so, you know, I'm the fun dad, but I don't do anything else. I get to drive a car like by, on their computers, like, you know, all that stuff, her and I do, but I do the financial part to help out and make sure that the kids can still, you know, him driving now helps my ex everyone in the practice and pick them up from school and you know, that kind of thing. So it's been a blessing for everybody.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. And I really, again, I just want to reiterate that piece of the closeness and the connection that probably wouldn't have happened if you had stayed in the house because of the fighting with you and your ex and also just what it was like between your older son. So I think that's such an important thing for people listening to understand that there's a possibility for even more connection.

Jeff McMahon:

That was a very big surprise.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah, I know. And it's, I love when I hear it. So thanks for sharing that. Absolutely. So, one thing I love to ask people too, is if you could go back, I guess, to 2018, was that in September, 2018, when that, or you were driving October when you were driving from the wine tasting?

Jeff McMahon:

October of 2018. Okay.

Elizabeth Cohen:

So let's say you could go back to that, you know, just peek in to that car and give yourself a little, like tap on the shoulder and send yourself a message now from where you're at from yourself now, what would you tell that guy back then?

Jeff McMahon:

I'd probably tell that guy to convince her to do therapy with you. So I could have maybe fought a little bit more as opposed to just rushing for the divorce. See, I'm not saying I regret it. I'm not saying it wasn't needed. I'm just saying if I was to go back to maybe tell that guy that, you know, let's see if you can get her to go to therapy with you. That would be the advice I would've given him. Yeah.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Yeah. It's interesting. Right. To think about knowing what you know now, what you would have liked, which is just to have known that you tried that. And do you think that there's anything you've learned about yourself that he didn't know back then?

Jeff McMahon:

Yeah. I definitely know how to be happy and I definitely know what makes me and what, what I want to be around for what excites me. Why do I work harder in business to provide more for the kids and like that kind of stuff. So like, I know my drive and that scenario, but I don't know. Overall, I would just mostly say that it's like, I don't know, divorce size. I mean, almost senior kid commit suicide, scared the hell out of me that I never ever wish upon anybody. So that's why I'm like, if I was to go back, I'd say, let's see how we can not have to go through that because it's not easy for my 11 year old at the time is now 13. And like, it still haunts me like every may. I'm like, okay, is this going to happen again in this road? Like, is he thinking about it? I don't know. And so that's why the whole hesitation of should I convinced her to do therapy with me back then? What would it have changed? Might not have might've just been me.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Well, that's, that's the important thing to remember, right? That, especially with suicide and emotional struggles, we don't know it's a one-to-one correlation. Right. We don't know. Maybe he would have had that experience even if you had stayed together.

Jeff McMahon:

Yeah, no, I know. And everything happens for a reason. That's why I don't regret it. I think that the separation was awesome and I still get to see the kids

Elizabeth Cohen:

You're still involved. It sounds like you're so involved. It's really great. And so is there any message that you would want to share? Anything else about your experience that you want to share with the audience before we finish up

Jeff McMahon:

For post divorce or people that are considering an in divorce?

Elizabeth Cohen:

Either? Any advice you you have is wonderful.

Jeff McMahon:

Um, post divorce. The best thing I would do is take time for yourself. Don't try to rush into another relationship. Don't try to like add, to try to escape or anything like that. Be present, um, take the time to like I'm a personal trainer. So I work out, but I even worked out more to focus on myself, which helped with a lot of stress. So like take care of yourself. So if you now have a little bit more free time to do so, just emotionally and confidence wise, I was a big boost for me. And then pre divorce definitely talked to a counselor before doing and make sure that is like, when I had that aha moment of this is like a funeral or people aren't going to be around. Are you going to be okay? That was a big point for me. So like go through that with someone to make, to see know you're making the right decision. That's all I, whether you do or don't, that's up to you. But that, that was definitely a big thing that I would tell other people.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Great. And so what you're saying is both self care and to get care from other people right

Jeff McMahon:

We forget ourselves and our relationship, we focused on the kids too much focus on jobs. And I mean, we always put ourselves on the back burner. That's one thing when you have more free time, you're like, okay, what can I do? That journaling was a big thing for me. I still journal every day. Um, just to get thoughts out, to be positive, to be grateful and things like that. And so that helped me. Maybe it'll help you too.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Great, Jeff, thank you so much for coming and sharing your story and being so honest and open. And these kids are incredibly lucky to have you as a parent. Can you let people know how they can find out more information about some of your work if they need to want to reach out or not?

Jeff McMahon:

I mean, the biggest thing I do is help people after divorce feel better and start to learn their health and take care of themselves. So they can go to [Jeffdmcmahon.com](http://Jeffdmcmahon.com) and we have a community there and a membership. And you can be part of the health journey if that's for you. Or if you want to just email me [jeff@totalbodyconstruction.com](mailto:jeff@totalbodyconstruction.com), which I'm sure it'll be in the show notes, just, you know, ask me any questions as well. We're here to help.

Elizabeth Cohen:

Thank you so much. Thanks for being here today, sharing your story and just being an overall wonderful person. I was honored to be here and I really enjoyed the conversation. Thank you.