



## So...podcast – Episode 4 Eliza Tipping

*You're listening to So...podcast with John McKenna*

John: Greetings and welcome to another So...podcast. I am with today, Eliza Tipping. G'day, how are you going?

Eliza: I'm very good John, thank you. How are you?

John: I'm good. Is divorce a dirty word?

Eliza: Is divorce a dirty word..... to me it's not. To some cultures it is. The experience I've had going through divorce and having to share the news with my friends, family and colleagues has only been positive on the most part. I think whether or not it's dirty or not is an inevitable part of our society.

John: Now to those listeners, you're saying 'Why is John coming with that question'? Of course we're here today to talk about some research you're doing on a book around that big topic of divorce. We've got some themes we're going to cover. So let's get into it. What created the idea of you wanting to do this book?

Eliza: Well, as I mentioned, I went through divorce almost two and half or three years ago and I actually found it to be a positive, amicable experience and it was a mutual choice between my ex-partner and I to divorce. It's actually opened up my world and been an amazing growth period since making that decision and I've also learned a lot about how to go about relationship breakdown and separation effectively. I've made some mistakes along the way but I'm also really proud of my ex-partner and I for how we went about it. Also for our daughter as well because that's a really big factor when parents split of course and a lot of people are affected by it.

John: Could I suggest, you wouldn't often hear that word 'proud' when you're talking about a divorce and obviously you guys are proud of how it happened and you've got a child and you're conscious of their development going forward.

Eliza: Absolutely. Yeah, I get it, it's probably not a common feeling associated with divorce but we made a joint decision. It was not after trying to keep together and seeking help to stay together. It wasn't a decision made lightly but I'm actually really proud of how we went about it. We can thank the people around us, it wasn't just because of the two of





us. We had a lot of support from family and friends without judgement to get through that decision and change. But we've also always tried to remember what's best for our daughter. So I think that's also helped it be a... not a positive experience but the best it can be.

John: Eliza, can I pick up on the word 'judgement' because we talk about is divorce a dirty word? People are so quick to judge. You just see the people's face don't you? When you say 'I'm divorced'... 'Oh my God'.

Eliza: Absolutely.

John: Judgement, how do you manage judgement? It's a type of bias isn't it?

Eliza: Absolutely, and I think it's going to be different for everyone and I guess that's the point of judgement. People are bringing their own experience and attitudes to reaction about your own life. But I think, and it did trouble me leading up to the divorce, the responses I'd get from other people because it is a dirty word, especially if you've gone to the effort of a wedding and made all this hoo-ha about union. It's actually a really confronting thing to face when you make the decision and having to tell people.

I guess the question you asked though John was around how I've managed that judgement?

John: Yep, and I think we've touched on that with the book of course. Perhaps you ought to talk a bit more about how writing itself can be a type of therapy.

Eliza: Absolutely, and I think in a way, I've written that book as a way for me to make sense of what happened and reflect on it, what I can learn, but also to share it with others that sure, divorce can be a dirty word or something that's not a great life event, but there are very good reasons for it happening sometimes, and sometimes they're not the obvious reasons. In my case there wasn't abuse or betrayal, it was a decision we made that we felt was the best for everyone involved. So I think in a way the writing has been therapy for me but also a way to tell my story and experience and hopefully it gets out to the world and can help other people going through it to help guide them, learn from what I did wrong or right and make it an amicable experience. Something that you can tell your children about when they're adults and be proud of it, the way you went about it.

John: It is about learning I think. Divorce is a bit like a bereavement, even with a death. It's not 'get over'. It's 'go forward'. Could we talk a little bit about stats. I've given you warning that I was going to talk about stats but obviously we hear it's high but have you





checked ABS, which stands for Australian Bureau of Statistics recently to talk about what's happening in the divorce world, going up, down or sideways?

Eliza: The last time I checked the stats it was around 40% of marriages end in divorce in Australia. I've heard anecdotally that number's actually been going down and there can be different reasons for that. It might be less couples are choosing to enter marriage. I haven't looked at the results since same sex marriage has become legal. So that might create a surge. And I've heard stats recently that demonstrated that same sex couples have less divorce rates but that can't be that accurate right now if the option's only been available in Australia for a year or so. But it would be really interesting to see how those stats go in the future.

John: People are going to be listening to us – I hope they are – and have got a relationship going on which is ups and downs. We've all got ups and downs in relationships and some people want to do a couple of days away from each other, trial separations. Are we able to get your thoughts on that small journey during those tough times where you're pondering in your mind 'are we going to be divorced?' Or 'how do I feel after that little break we had from each other?' Or 'he or she is doing this again which really pisses me off.'

What goes through your mind with that dilemma? Can I call it a dilemma? I know there's different words for it. The thought process.

Eliza: I think that's a great question and another reason I wanted to write this book, and I've had a lot of conversations about it over the last couple of years and it strikes a chord with everyone I've spoken to about it. Because I think we all know intimate relationships are really challenging. They're the most rewarding probably, relationships that humans can have but they also require a lot of work. That's something I've talked a lot about with friends that are in relationships is that please never take them for granted. Put in the work, get help when you need it through Relationships Australia, marriage counselling. There's a lot of secular, non-secular options out there to support couples because ultimately I think it pays off. If you can work through the challenges in a relationship, within reason, I think ultimately it will pay off. But again it's a very case by case thing. You can't really put a blanket rule or judge anyone for the way they might go about these things.

But I think when people are having those dilemmas, I think it's really important to remember these are universal struggles often and that relationships do take work and anything worth doing usually requires some sweat, some effort, and to not take it for granted. I'm really passionate about that as well. And even embracing the conflict that happens. It doesn't have to be a dirty thing. It can be something that can help you work





through your differences or might be reminded to have more quality time together. In our busy lives that can be hard.

John: You talked about getting help and help comes in different colours. You could have professional counselling. You could have peer help from someone else who's gone through divorce. Then you've got good old family. You've got your family, you've got their family on the other side. How do you, in your own heart and soul, what's the good help? How do you try and find good help? Of course it's going to be meaningful, you feel it in your heart. But when you're shopping for.... can I be really crude... when you're shopping for help, what are you looking for?

Eliza: That's it. Good question. And I think again it's going to be a very individual thing depending on someone's beliefs. It also depends on your partner. Sometimes one person might want to undertake marriage counselling and get the professional help but the other party isn't willing to. So it's about finding something that's going to suit both parties. But also doing your own work.

John: What do you mean when you say that? Your own work?

Eliza: Well that idea of self-care. It might be ensuring you're looking after your own body and mind so you can think clearly, be a supportive partner, have compassion when you're having difference, carve out the time, do the self-reflection about how you might improve as a part in that relationship.

John: So instead of having that glass of wine, go and do something else that you really enjoy and make yourself happy.

Eliza: Well I think a glass of wine can be something we can really enjoy and can make us happy but not abusing that either. Because in Australian culture, that could be a really easy way to get help supposedly.

John: That's right, sure.

Eliza: To get pissed or whatever. I think there's a place for that sometimes but yeah, I think the self-care can be about exercise or getting your own professional help or spiritual guidance, because we all have those needs, in whatever form they come.

John: Another tough question, it's not so much a question, it's your thoughts on women are getting help easier or happy to find help more so than that stubborn guy? That's still a trend is it?





Eliza: I think so. I think there's a real shift happening but it's a very good point and since divorce, or going through divorce, I've tried to delve into that a bit deeper and I've read a book called Manhood by Steve Biddulph. It's a bit controversial but it was a great insight into the struggles that men have experienced in our society. Of course there's been suffering and struggles for women over the decades, but there was this theme around the absent father in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in western culture.

John: Wow, tell us more.

Eliza: It's really fascinating. He talked about the moments in history in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century we had two world wars. We had the Industrial Revolution. All three events took men to the war, frontline, or to the factories. So we have generations of absent fathers that often went around to guide and support children. That shapes their development and relationship with their father and their role as a man or their relationship with men, and I think the rates of divorce and the conflict that we often experience between gender can be traced back to that tension. I think women's rights have had a lot of attention, and rightfully so but I think men had their struggle as well, and neither social pressure really served either party or each other. I think we do confront that when there's conflict in relations and an inability for men or women to be able to get help and talk about feelings and their childhood or whatever it is that shapes their behaviours. It can be really hard for people but I like to think there's a shift.

John: That's good.

Eliza: I think it's getting easier for everyone I hope.

John: Other factors such as unconscious bias and also ugly things like money and finance, it's a real big elephant in the room that plays a big role during that journey of divorce because of the power imbalance, about one of the partners brings in the money and someone's got to feed the kids. So that's really a tough one isn't it?

Eliza: I agree, and I think that's an incredible burden to have, as is being home alone doing all the chores and housework, pick-ups and drop-offs, whatever it is. I think we're finding a better balance in those roles hopefully. But it can't be underestimated, those pressures and that's something that really got highlighted in our experience of marriage counselling. I remember the counsellor listed six different universal pressures that will contribute to a relationship breakdown.

John: Go for it. Do you know what they are? Can you tell us?





Eliza: I think I can remember. Money, finances like you mentioned. Chores, sex, the in-laws, bringing baby home. There was a sixth one added which was really interesting and that was around the digital pressures of life. That can actually be a really powerful negative influence on relationships and that's been talked about a lot more I think at the moment.

John: As in screen time?

Eliza: Yeah.

John: Yeah, social media and Facebook. It's a bit like parenting really isn't it? Parents up against Facebook and these other places.

So the book's not out at the moment?

Eliza: No, I'm still working away at it.

John: Watch this space.

Eliza: That's it.

John: At the end of divorce, it can be a happy experience.

Eliza: I absolutely agree. It can be. I probably wouldn't recommend it unless it's right for you but it can absolutely be turned into a really positive life moment where you can start over again. It's amazing the support you'll get from people as well. You'll get judgement but there's also a lot of support.

John: Any golden rules you want to share before we close?

Eliza: Golden rules? I think if you're going to make a decision to divorce or stay together, you want it to be something you can tell your children or people you respect, and hold your head high. So no matter what choices you make, be sure to go about it in a way that you can hold your head up high.

John: Guess what we forgot to talk about? Because we said it was really important. Your fantastic grandfather.

Eliza: Oh yes.





John: It's a podcast, we're still here. We can keep going. Don't go away folks. Let's hear about a guy by the name of .....

Eliza: Bill Tipping, known as EW Tipping I believe in his journalism role.

John: So go and Google that name if you're listening to us but anyway, he's been a bit of an inspiration for you?

Eliza: Yeah, I actually never met him but have grown up with a lot of talk and he's left quite a legacy in his work as a journalist and as a journalist obviously a very passionate writer. Very successful at it. He's a real inspiration and that's how we're connected which is great.

John: Because you are writer and you like writing. You found it's a bit of therapy for you, is that right?

Eliza: Absolutely, yep. Haven't been able to make a living out of it but that's okay.

John: Alright, so thanks for coming on to the So...podcast. I hope you've enjoyed the conversation.

Eliza: I really have, thank you so much John.

John: No worries at all.

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