

Step 4 The Grieving Process



The following are the different stages in the grieving process, whether it is a death or divorce.

- Shock
- Numbness
- Disbelief/Denial
- Tearfulness
- Guilt
- Anger
- Giving in and giving up
- Fear
- Reliving memories
- Seeing your partner through rose-tinted spectacles
- Loneliness

These stages are in no special order. At any one time you can jump from tearful to lonely.

In some ways a divorce/separation can be much worse than losing someone through a death. I know that sounds ridiculous, but if you really think about it a dead person is no longer around; they are not **with** someone else; they have not dumped you for another person; they have not had enough of living with you; they are **DEAD**.

When someone you love dies, you can take flowers to a graveside and spend time there thinking and talking to your loved one. If someone you love dies after a long illness, then somewhere in your mind you are somewhat prepared for the

death. You will go through the grieving process, but without the added dimension of feeling betrayed, abandoned with the knowledge that the person you love is living with someone else or prefers to be alone rather than with you.

On the other hand, when your lover walks out you will probably see them from time to time enjoying themselves with a new partner. You will see them picking up the children of the partnership (if there are children). You will have a constant reminder minute by minute that they are spending their precious time without you.

If someone you love dies suddenly (accident, heart attack, etc.) then you will not be prepared and will need time to come to terms with the death and you will be on the path of the grieving process.

The grieving process is a necessary time for you to come to terms with the loss of a loved one. It usually takes about two years of 'normal' grieving. You will experience the 'annual events,' such as, birthdays, anniversaries. For example, you will think this time last year you were going through the illness with your loved one; then the anniversary of the death and funeral. When you have experienced these significant days the mind begins to accept and prepare to 'move on.'

The first three stages of the grieving process I have identified are easily explained. Guilt, however, might need some clarification.

Guilt

When someone walks out on you the danger is to blame yourself entirely. This is not usually accurate. Remember, it takes two to quarrel and two to decide to part. It is, however, a natural response to someone you love not wanting you any-

more. You feel responsible for some (or all) of the breakup of your relationship.

You relive circumstances and situations that led to the split-up. You imagine handling these times differently and wonder if you had handled them in another way perhaps you wouldn't have come to the decision to break-up?

Your mind goes around in a whirl of self-hatred. Guilt can lead to depression and/or anxiety, as you mentally relive your life with your partner.

At this time, try to be realistic. Focus. See the past in a clear way. Check your thoughts and drag yourself from feelings of guilt back into reality. Even if you had an affair and this led to the eventual breakup, it is unlikely that another person would have attracted you sufficiently if things had been 100% fine at home.

Anger

You are angry that your partner has walked out. You may be left to manage the children and household affairs.

- Why should you be put in this position?
- What have you done to deserve this?

If you are a woman and your partner has moved on to someone else, you will feel angry that whilst he has been loving someone you have been slogging away, washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning and seeing to the needs of the children.

If you are a man reading this, then you will feel aggrieved that all the help and support you gave your partner has been thrown back in your face. You might be angry that you have

been left alone and unloved having to start afresh with the rental or purchase of a new home, household appliances, furniture, etc.

In this instance, anger can be a positive emotion. It can spur you on to a more appropriate and powerful place in your mind. It can motivate you to putting the past behind you and starting your life afresh. You can think, 'I'll show you that I don't need you,' and, 'You just watch this space.' In my experience, anger expressed at this time dissipates rather quickly and once more you are plunged to the depths of despair. However the anger will return and it will feel like a huge fire inside you. This fire must burn out before you can truly break free from resentment.

You might want revenge. I have heard many revengeful stories. Some are quite elaborate and inspired.

Example:

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

One lady, after being, unceremoniously, dumped by a partner, proceeded to order a truckload of manure from a Garden Centre to be delivered at his new home with his new partner. Not content with this action, she drove to his house and parked the car in a spot that allowed her full vision of the scenario about to unfold. Soon, the lorry drove up and began unloading its contents all over the perfectly manicured lawn at the front of the house. Her ex-partner's new woman rushed out of the house to remonstrate with the truck driver only to be confronted with the recently abandoned woman driving by making rude signs!

I am not suggesting that this behavior is right or a good thing to do. It is not a good idea to react in this way.

Giving in and giving up

When you are living through this difficult period in your life, you believe that the easiest option is to 'give in and give up.' You can't be bothered with anyone or anything. You stay wrapped up in a cocoon of your own making believing that it's safe to huddle there. Thinking through and dwelling on your past has exhausted you and robbed you of the vital energy you need to live. Life can become a drudgery and you question the validity of your existence.

Example:

Ann was going through a separation or divorce. She awoke very early in the morning made herself a cup of coffee and smoked cigarettes endlessly until it was time to wake the children and get them ready for school. After the children were dressed, breakfasted, and taken to school she would crawl back to her empty bed and hide there until it was time to pick the children up from school later that day. Ann relied totally on her mother to clean the house, purchase and supply food, and amuse the children. She relinquished her duties in the sincere belief that she was a useless person.

Ann was, in normal circumstances, a very positive and happy person until her relationship broke down but soon after her husband walked out she was reduced to a physical and emotional wreck.

This period of 'giving in and giving up' continued until Ann's mother was rushed into hospital suffering from severe burns from an accident. Ann was forced to engage in life again and reestablish herself in the household. Even when this happened, it still took a neighbor and friend of her mother's to point out—none too tactfully—that Ann's home was dirty and untidy

and this included Ann's personal cleanliness. It was the short, sharp shock Ann needed to pull herself together.

Frequently, it's even worse for a man, who may well lack housekeeping skills altogether. He may be unable to cook, know what to buy, how to mend clothes, etc.

Fear

Fear is a barrier that you have to surge through in order to achieve self-esteem. There are a number of fears:

- Fear of responsibility
- Fear of accountability
- Fear of success

Fear of Responsibility

Responsibility is being able to take control of your life. It means that you are:

- Whatever you think
- Whatever you feel
- Whatever you do

You are responsible for your children. You are responsible for what happens to you in your life. You are in control.

Fear manifests itself when you dwell on the bad things that have happened in your life. You must remember that whatever you have done in the past, you did with the knowledge and information you had at that time. **Don't waste time thinking of the past, you are not going in that direction.** Focus on the here and now, your future is ahead of you and can be anything you want it to be so decide now to embrace the future with hope and determination. Don't sabotage yourself by being self-critical and

judgmental. Know that if you decide on a course of action there will be an outcome. Understand that you will make mistakes. If you don't make mistakes you will never learn anything. The majority of learning comes from mistakes and the ability to move on and tackle the same action in a different way.

Fear of Accountability

The dictionary definition of accountable is, 'to be answerable to someone or something.'

In the first instance we are answerable to ourselves. Being answerable to yourself is achieved by living to a set of rules and regulations that you feel comfortable with.

The rules and regulations are made up of your beliefs behavior and responses to everyday living. You cannot hide from being accountable; it will catch up with you at a later time.

Fear of accountability lies in the uncertainty that you can live up to the self-imposed rules and regulations you have chosen to adopt. Accountability puts pressure on you to live by a certain standard and if you drop those standards you become disappointed in yourself. Your rules and regulations are not necessarily the same rules and regulations that other people live by and it is this that separates you from everyone else. The frightening aspect of accountability is that you may not comply with your peers. We all want to get on with each other and have an easy life and it is your own accountability that can distinguish and separate you from the crowd.

Your rules and regulations may be very different from those rules and regulations that you were raised by. As an adult you decide how to lead your life and the pattern of the past need not

prevent you from acquiring a more suitable and appropriate code for living.

Fear of Success

Often you are afraid to try just in case you might actually succeed. You may always have believed that you cannot succeed; that a good life cannot be yours that there are winners and losers and you are the latter. Then the prospect of succeeding is scary and you may feel you are unworthy of achieving success.

Success is possible for all of us. In order to succeed, we have to leave old fears and thought patterns behind and accept that we all play on a level field and opportunities are there waiting for us. You deserve success as much as anyone else and it is there waiting for you. Don't let your old belief system prevent you from claiming the success that can be yours.

Ask yourself:

- Are you happy with you?
- Do you want to change your past pattern and adopt new rules and regulations that are more apt?
- Are your old patterns holding you back?
- Are you ready for the change?
- Do you know what new rules and regulations you want to adopt?
- What purpose will your new rules and regulations fill?
- Finally, are you satisfied that you have looked at the options and decided on a new set of rules that best gives you the structure you need to live by?

Remember that any change of patterns has an effect on those around you. You will have to allow sufficient time for those people close to you to adapt to your new outlook and new way of life.

Reliving Memories:

Unfortunately it's par for the course to relive the memories of your life with your partner. This is a particularly difficult time. These are some typical examples only of the memories you will be reliving:

- Memories of when you first met
- Your first kiss
- Birthdays
- Christmases spent together
- The first time you made love
- Meeting parents
- Integrating with families
- Getting engaged
- Getting married
- Honeymoon
- Your early life together
- Buying/renting a home
- Furnishing and decorating the home
- Shopping together
- Planning a family
- Pregnancy
- Birth of your first child
- The joy of parenthood
- Anniversaries

Once again, the list is endless! You will trawl through these memories and they will break your heart. It is necessary, however, to go through your memory box. It may be more comfortable to do this with a trained Counselor who can guide you and provide a structure to this process.

Seeing someone through rose-tinted glasses

Why is it that try as hard as you can you cannot remember the bad times in your relationship? All the bad situations you have had with your partner seem to have evaporated into thin air. This is most annoying to experience. Of course you had bad times (probably more bad than good if you were to be honest) so where are they?

During this phase you can rely on family and good friends to remind you of instances that now elude you. Good friends are very good at remembering the bad times and will at the drop of a hat recall them in detail. Momentarily this will make you feel good, but not for long. Try as you might to stop loving your partner you are unable to accept it right now. You are so sorry that this has happened—you didn't really think it would happen. You continue to believe that you still love him/her; that there is still a chance for you both. You give serious thought to whether you should both have stayed together for the sake of the children? The answer to this I believe is NO. Children pick up tension and anxieties. Instinctively they know if things are not right. Being honest with your children is in most cases the best option.

If you are a woman reading this, the next time you see your partner (when he picks up the children), or out in a 'pub' you may feel a surge of anger and want to confront him with stuff you want to 'get off your chest.' There may be a scene and one of you will storm off (or be asked to leave the establishment) or

you may burst into tears and want to persuade him/her to return. Whatever happens, you will end up in tears.

If you are a man reading this, you will be more likely to react to the same set of circumstances with either rage or spiral down into a depressive state.

You miss the silliest things about your partner the small stuff a person does that the other finds endearing. You never said anything about it at the time—you didn't think you needed to. On reflection, you think that perhaps you should have? Life is so unfair.

Loneliness

The loneliness you feel after a separation is overpowering.

The definition of this word from Webster's dictionary is, "cut off from others, sad from being alone, a feeling of desolation."

"Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty," is a well known saying by Mother Teresa.

Judy Garland said, "If I'm such a legend, then why am I so lonely? Let me tell you, legends are all very well if you've got somebody around who loves you."

What are the feelings we may get when we are **not** in a relationship?

- Feeling Rejected
- Feeling Unloved
- Feeling Unwanted
- Feeling Ugly
- Feeling Bored
- Feeling Unworthy

- Low Self-Esteem
- No Confidence

Why is it that if you are **not** in a relationship you feel a failure? Why do you need someone else to validate you? When we **are** in a relationship, many of us let our friends go by the way-side and become exclusive to that one special person. We all want to be wanted and loved. It is human nature from the very beginning ‘Adam and Eve.’

Remember that people who are in relationships can feel just as lonely as everyone else. Loneliness is the emotion you feel when you are emotionally cut off from those closest to you. It is a powerful emotion. The saying “no man is an island” suggests that you should maintain family relationships friends and personal relationships for the sake of your mental health. If all these relationships are maintained and you still feel lonely then you can safely say that your emotional needs are not being met. Research shows that any person, even an extreme introvert, needs identification with at least three social groupings. Loneliness can cause depression/suicide.

Things to do

- Set yourself unachievable goals.
- Set yourself goals that inspire you.
- Instead of ‘slobbing out in front of a weepy film,’ invite friends around for a girly/manly (playing cards, watching football) night in.
- Be proactive and meet new friends.
- Resist from reaching into the cookie jar; eat healthily and look after yourself instead.
- Seek out the company of other people.
- Drink only moderately.

- Enjoy your new found freedom. Be excited with the possibility of meeting a new woman/man.

What are unachievable goals?

They are goals that are too ambitious and way out of your reach. When you decide on your long-term goal set yourself achievable targets along the way in order for you to be able to clearly identify your progress.

What are goals that lack inspiration?

If your goals lack **passion** you will find that aiming for them will sap your energy and strength. In order to find the energy you require to achieve your goals you have to be focused, determined, driven, inspired, and enthusiastic. If you are all of these things then you will have a better chance of reaching your desired outcome. You need these emotions in place in order to sustain your vision of where you want to be. If your goal is uninspired and you lack the necessary enthusiasm in order to reach it then you will give up and opt out.

Inspirational goals are those that identify your passions

There are steps you can take at this time.

When there is a separation between couples the days and times you feel the emptiness most is during evenings and weekends particularly Sunday. For most people, Sunday is a quiet day with nothing much going on which gives you plenty of time to dwell on your loneliness and missing your partner.

Decide to do something about it, here are some suggestions:

- Visit family
- Visit friends
- Go to cinema

- Take a walk
- Redecorate your home
- Involve your children in a game, project, or trips to the park
- Make this day the day when you do your household food shopping
- Find a hobby
- Join a Society/Group/Organization

I am sure you can add to this list...

Things not to do:

Don't do a Bridget Jones and slob out in front of a weepy film.

The Bridget Jones film highlighted what many of us do when we are **not** in a relationship. We put out negativity and get back negativity. Bridget Jones behaved like a victim and a 'poor me'. She felt sorry for herself. She wallowed in self-pity. She recognized some of the things she was doing wrong, e.g., over-eating over-drinking but did very little to redress the balance. She believed that she needed someone else in her life to provide her with love happiness and contentment.

Don't be a victim or a 'poor me'.

Who wants to be around a victim or a poor me? Think of the people you know (and we all know them) who are constantly moaning about their misfortunes. They personally are out of control and their lives are out of control. They perpetuate the poor me syndrome and expect nothing good to happen. They have not put into place structures or boundaries that would help them in their life. If you live in this haphazard state, you will have little self-respect or self-esteem. What you are actually say-

ing about yourself is that ‘you can treat me how you want to because I do not think I am worth more.’ Knowing your structures and boundaries will help you gain self-esteem. This is because these rules highlight both to yourself and to others the way you treat yourself and the expectations you have of how you want others to treat you. If none are in place, you are putting no value on who you are or what you want.

Don’t replace a relationship be eating lots of food (comfort eating).

Replacing love with food is a common occurrence. You dig deeper into the junk food and lavish a ridiculous amount of food on yourself. The non-verbal communication here once again is that you are unlovable and have given up.

- You eat because you feel in a low mood
- You eat because you are stressed
- You eat to aid relaxation
- You eat because you are bored with everything
- You eat because it gives you something to do

Eating for these reasons is habit forming and is another indicator of low self-esteem. This behavior forms a pattern and can lead to health problems. You eat because you are unhappy, not because you are hungry. You are substituting food for the love you have lost.

You should aim for some progress every day, however small. Take time out to notice and record your progress. Keep a journal. Reward yourself for the progress you have made and forgive yourself the mistakes you inevitably make. Progress should make you happy with yourself. If it is not making you happy then perhaps you should reevaluate your goals.

The Two Questions Everyone Should Be Asking:

- Are you making good progress toward your long-term goals?
- Are you enjoying the progress you are making?

As Robert F. Kennedy (1925-1968) once said: "Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly."