



Single Parenting: Loss of a Relationship

When Ron and I split up, I didn't know how long it would take to feel like myself again. It was rough during those months when we were arguing. I knew our relationship was in trouble. But I think the hardest part was the day we finally decided that separating was the only way. He packed his things and left.



When a marriage or a longterm relationship ends, many different feelings surface. While each person is unique, many people say they go through many stages.

- Realizing the relationship might end. *I knew our marriage was in trouble, but I still wanted to work it out.*
- Recognizing that the relationship has to end. *Our problems weren't going away. Mourning the end of the relationship. I felt relieved but sad. I missed the way things used to be. It was hard to give up the idea of being with my husband forever.*
- Adjusting to single life. *I've made new friends and found ways to improve my life. I'm comfortable with myself now. I'm happy.*

Common experiences after divorce include learning to trust again, laying aside the anger, handling the lack of money and carrying responsibilities alone.

In addition to your emotional reactions to change, watch for physical reactions such as not being able to sleep, headaches, changes in eating habits, or fatigue.

It used to be us, now it's just me: stages of mourning

At the end of an important relationship, you will experience mourning. Most people go through the following mourning stages, but not in the same way or in the same order. Which of these experiences seem familiar to you? How do your feelings differ? Are you taking time to sort out your feelings and to talk with friends, relatives, or a counselor?

Shock and Disorganization

I didn't know what to do about the situation. I wasn't sure how to act. My daily life was turned upside down. The kids, the house, my job, the car, grocery shopping, laundry, all the decisions were mine. I was always late for work and ordering pizza for dinner. I was in a daze.

Denial

Some people may deny their loss by avoiding change. *I would spend time thinking, what if Joanne came back? Maybe it could work this time. I held onto that hope instead of making changes. I avoided looking for a new place to live or making decisions about the settlement. I couldn't even sleep alone in our bed.*

Other people blame themselves. *I thought we had a good marriage. We had difficult times, but isn't that part of marriage? If only I had worked harder at the relationship, maybe we still would be together.*

Others may jump into a whole new life to postpone their mourning. *I started dating right away. It felt good to be needed and part of a couple again. But it didn't last. I was still too angry and resentful of Tom.*

Anger

My partner took advantage of me. My partner should pay for what has happened.

Then I got angry. How could she leave me with the children and go off to some new life. I was angry because she seemed to be moving on, and I had all the responsibility. At first, I kept it inside. But I just felt more depressed. Then I decided that I wasn't going to let her ruin my life. I started making changes - now I'm much happier.

If anger is not expressed it can become destructive. It may lead to depression, high blood pressure or other problems. But, expressed in healthy ways, anger can prompt us to make positive changes.

Be careful not to take your anger out on your children. They need to feel close to you and their other parent. They shouldn't be forced to choose between the two of you.

Loneliness

I can't make it alone.

Because my husband doesn't love me anymore, I feel worthless.

After things calmed down, I was managing better, but I still felt lonely. There was no adult around to talk about the changes, or to help me make decisions.

Guilt/Shame

I felt like people looked at me differently after we split up. I was embarrassed to say I was divorced. I felt like a failure.

I deserve to be punished for the things I have done.

My partner will fall apart without me. I'm selfish for leaving.

Evaluation of the Relationship

I started thinking more clearly about what went wrong. I realized we wanted different things.

It feels good to have made a decision. Divorce or separation was inevitable.

Things have finally started to fall into place and make sense.

At last I can admit my anger. I have finally outgrown the need to get even.

The divorce opens up all sorts of possibilities.

Signs that mourning is over:

After awhile, I realized I wasn't so resentful anymore. Instead of complaining about my ex-partner, I would think of ways to solve problems. I got used to being single, not so embarrassed. I began to meet new people and do more things that I enjoy. I stopped thinking of all men as awful. Now I know that our break up was for the best. It doesn't mean I can't have a future with someone else.

Which statements represent your views? Can you work toward creating a more positive view?

What areas are a challenge for you?

Change is a difficult process. In what areas will you need input and support from the people you care about? Look at the following list. Check the areas that will be the greatest challenge for you.

- Change in physical environment: where you live, where your child will go to school
- Legal issues: insurance, child custody
- Financial: property, budget
- Relationships with extended family
- Relationships with friends
- Need to create new social activities
- Change of personal identity: self image must shift from being a couple—*we*—to a single —*me*
- Getting through grief or depression

Now pick two or three items you will work on to help yourself through the mourning process:

- Accept yourself and give yourself time to mourn.
- Know that wishful thinking will not turn back the clock.
- Recognize that grief and sorrow are normal; don't try to deny your feelings.
- Express your feelings. Talk to friends, family members, religious leaders, and/or counselors.
- Use techniques to reduce stress such as exercising, eating nutritious food, involving yourself in hobbies, sports or volunteer work.
- Examine the relationship with your ex-partner or spouse in a realistic and constructive way.
- Accept support and help from others. Ask other single parents what has worked for them.
- Seek professional help when you need it.
- Don't expect too much of yourself or your children during stressful times, such as holidays, birthdays, or anniversaries. Create new routines, rituals, and special celebrations.

Positive steps to help cope with loneliness

- Build a network of friends and make time to be with them.
- When you're feeling cheerful, start a list of things you'd like to do, books you'd like to read, or projects you'd like to begin.
- Get involved with people – even if you don't feel like it. There are many organizations and groups in your community that need volunteers.
- Take time to nurture yourself.
- Learn to be yourself, by yourself. All of us must find our own peace and contentment within ourselves.

- Ask for help if you need it. If you find feelings of loneliness and depression are too strong to handle alone- talk to a therapist.

Some things you can do to feel better today

- Don't make other changes in your life right now. Divorce takes time and energy.
- Tell your children you love them.
- Plan activities that calm you. Soak in the tub, go for a run, cook a special meal.
- Write down realistic and attainable goals. Decide on a goal to start working toward it.
- Celebrate small successes every day.
- Focus on your children's wellbeing.
- Begin learning something new.
- Share your interests with your children.
- Take time to appreciate what you haven't lost. *Say, I am thankful for my daughter.*

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