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## **The 5 stages of grief when you're going through a divorce or separation**

Breaking up is often referred to as the 2nd most traumatic life event after the death of a loved one. In 1969, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross came up with The Loss Cycle, which identifies the stages of grief experienced when going through a separation.

Understanding where you are in the loss cycle can help you gain clarity about what you're going through and what you might experience in the future. Having this knowledge will give you a deeper understanding of your own emotions and why you're experiencing them.


The stages are not always linear and it's common for people to remain stuck in one phase, experience an overlap or skip stages altogether but whatever your experience is, remember that it's perfectly normal and justified.

## **Stage 1. Denial**

Grieving the end of a relationship can often bring on a powerful and overwhelming set of emotions. A natural reaction is to deny what's happening because it gives you more time to process the loss. You might convince yourself that your partner is suffering from stress and will come around or that you can change and be who they want you to be. This coping mechanism helps to dial down the intensity of the situation but as you move into the next phase of the cycle, these emotions can rise to bring on feelings of sadness

## **Stage 2. Anger**

Whereas denial is a defence mechanism, anger is a way of hiding your true emotions and the pain you're experiencing. You may feel anger or hate towards your ex, anger at the destruction the separation has caused or even anger about the loss of future plans.



Anger is a natural and often easier negative emotion for the brain to process and is therefore easier to cope with. This anger may be directed at your ex-partner, those close to you or even objects nearby. Whilst not everyone experiences this phase, some people may become stuck here, but once the anger subsides you'll be able to think more rationally again.

### **Stage 3. Bargaining**

Vulnerability and helplessness are very strong emotions experienced when you break up with a partner. To overcome these intense feelings you may find that you try to change the course of your relationship by making deals with yourself, god or another higher entity because it's difficult to accept that there's nothing you can do to change the situation.


You may also find yourself asking lots of 'what if' or 'if only' questions. Bargaining is another way of putting off feelings of pain and sorrow.

## **Stage 4. Depression**

While the earlier stages of grief are centred on postponing or masking pain and sadness, the depression phase is where you more readily embrace those emotions. However, depression is not clear-cut and can often be messy and incredibly hard. You may want to isolate yourself or struggle to move past this phase and if negative thoughts and feelings continue, seek help from your GP or a therapist.

## **Stage 5. Acceptance**

Whilst this may look like the ultimate relief after the rollercoaster of emotions you've experienced since your break up, acceptance doesn't generally mean a euphoric epiphany. It doesn't necessarily mean you've moved past your breakup, instead, acceptance means you've gained a new understanding of what life now looks like for you.



You will still have days where you feel sad, angry, scared or frustrated but these are normal responses that will lose their intensity in time.

When you're stuck in a state of negative emotion, try the following techniques to help

- Shift your focus. Do something that makes YOU happy, rearrange your furniture, go for a walk, bake, sing, treat yourself or meet a friend for a drink.

- Create a 'break-up bucket list' and plan what you want to do on your terms. As hard as separation is, in time you'll start to see a future that felt uncertain, become one that feels exciting, and having a plan will help you achieve this.

Don't forget, you can always get in touch for tailored and personal support at any time you need help.

*Natalie Coole*