

Stages of Grief in a Divorce

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Divorce is a heartbreaking and life-altering occurrence. The confusing tangle of painful emotions and anxiety from new uncertainties about the future are similar to what happens after the death of a loved one. We are forced to fumble through processing our grief from the divorce, and ultimately to resign ourselves to the reality that life will change. ***It can be helpful during his difficult time, to know what to expect as you begin to go through the natural progression of the stages of grief during the divorce process.***

Recognizing the Stages of Grief

Just as people progress through the normal stages of grief following the death of someone close to us, or upon discovery of a devastating illness in a loved one, there is little we can do to avoid going through the natural grieving process in divorce as well. Being able to recognize the five natural stages of grief, as explained below, can at least allow you to make your way through the steps of grieving with a greater awareness of what is happening to you emotionally during this time.

And, perhaps an increased awareness of the normal steps of grieving can even afford you a stronger sense of personal control over the challenging phases of transition through grief, from the denial phase to the brighter final stage of grief—acceptance. ***It can be reassuring to know from the beginning of the grieving process during divorce, that beyond that final stage you can expect to discover a new sense of opportunity and of looking forward to a new future beyond divorce.***

Grief Stage 1 — Denial

This is the phase of the divorce during which a person is in disbelief that this can really be

happening. A wife can't believe her husband could do what he's doing to hurt her. Or, a husband can't accept that things have come to this. The situation seems surreal. Feelings are very intense during this time. This instinctive denial is a resourceful human survival trait that protects us from bearing the full impact of loss all at once and becoming overwhelmed by it. ***Through the denial phase, we are able to more gradually come to digest and accept the new reality without absorbing the blow. As the sense of denial dissipates, we can begin to see the situation as it really is.***

Grief Stage 2 — Anger

Anger is the stage of grief in which emotions are running very high. ***The denial has past, and in the anger stage, the full force of pain from facing the reality of the situation becomes most intense.*** The ex-spouse is normally the central focus of our anger, but anyone near us may become the recipient of our angry expressions during this phase of grief from divorce. Friends or family members who are trying to be supportive and helpful can sometimes find themselves the recipients of anger from a husband or wife during this highly frustrating period of needing to vent feelings, often in response to hurtful actions by his/her spouse.

Grief Stage 3 — Bargaining

After the anger stage has been worked through, we are likely to next move into a bargaining phase. In this stage, we may try to figure out what we can do to make things return to they were prior to the start of the divorce process. ***We may offer to change our behavior,*** or to do specific things that we think have caused the marriage to deteriorate. ***One spouse might plead with the other to try working together to save the relationship.*** Or, we may make deals with a higher power in attempt to obtain a merciful outcome.

Bargaining is an attempt to return to the past, restore previously more secure conditions, and have another chance to achieve what we imagine ***could*** have been. ***It can be too agonizing to look back, scrutinize ourselves, and leave behind all of our mistakes and fault in the marriage.*** We can get caught up for a period of time in blaming specific past instances or certain habits of ours as the cause(s) of the loss of the marriage and family life we had.

Grief Stage 4 — Depression

After it becomes apparent that bargaining is not going to divert the divorce process, we find ourselves focusing on the unfortunate ***realities or the present, the fact of living with the loss of the marriage and family life we no longer have.*** We may sink into a phase of despairing, feeling as if we cannot be happy again and that our opportunities are all past. Life can seem very empty.

Loneliness can set in, after our frustrating futile attempts to bargain our way out of the situation are finally let go. We now can find ourselves giving in to the sadness of facing the future alone. In this stage, we may feel as if the world has become very cold and meaningless. It can be a struggle to maintain a positive attitude with such a large number of major changes having so recently occurred.

Grief Stage 5 — Acceptance

At this point, we are starting to come to grips with the facts of the divorce. The feelings of depression have begun to wane. We are resigned to what has happened, and are starting to feel less distressed. We may even be starting to notice that we've been starting to develop a new life for ourselves. And, we may feel a **stronger sense of confidence in our potential to be content living alone**. And, hints of the positive and intriguing possibilities ahead of us start to capture our attention. Near the end of the acceptance stage, we find ourselves beginning to actually **look forward to a promising new future**.

Beyond the Grieving Process

Processing the unique events and unfamiliar feelings that naturally emerge and then pass, throughout the divorce period, then reflecting on all that has occurred, **we develop deeper understanding of ourselves. And, we are in a better position to make an informed analysis of the marriage and how the relationship came to end in divorce**. This phase of reflection is the necessary transition from the grieving process, to embarking on an emotionally-ready move into the future, and a happier, more peaceful state of mind beyond the grieving process.

Getting beyond the grieving process may not happen at the same time for you and your ex. **It often happens that spouses are moving through the grieving stages at different rates**. Your ex may seem to have moved on very quickly, and it may seem that he/she is emotionless and has gotten completely over the ending of the marriage while you're still in the denial or depression phase, still shocked at the situation and acutely suffering from the loss.

The difference in grief stages between spouses as the divorce process goes on may happen when one person started going through the grieving process much **earlier than the other, and has gotten much farther through the steps of grieving the loss than the other**. One spouse may have come to realize that the marriage was in trouble and may have sensed for some time that it was moving toward an end. She or he may have been trying to figure out how to save the relationship for some time, perhaps well in advance of the other spouse coming to see that a problem exists.

It has been suggested by some in the field of grief counseling that, for each year of the length of the relationship, it can take several months to recover from the break-up of a marriage. The average recovery from divorce is around a year and a half. But, **there is not a specific timeframe** we can expect it to take to get through the grieving process and fully move on from the loss.

The best approach is to accept that you are going through **a natural process, and allow yourself to heal in your own time**. After all, as with anything else in life, your individual divorce circumstances and reaction to them will be unique. You may breeze through some of the steps, then linger through others longer. The fact is that we owe it to ourselves to feel each stage and fully work through it, however long it takes.

Looking Forward to a Joyful New Future

Some people can move beyond the grieving process after a loss comparatively soon, while others can find themselves still suffering years later. It is important, as you recognize that you are in the state of denial, or anger, or perhaps have begun with the bargaining stage, that ***once you get past a period of depression and come to a state of acceptance, there is a whole life to enjoy beyond divorce***. Though it is certainly a time of great sorrow during a divorce, it is essential to keep your perspective, being confident in your nature, recognizing that you can and will get through this difficult and painful time, and will find a happy future for yourself and your family beyond the divorce.

Divorce Attorneys at Wall & Wall Attorneys at Law, Salt Lake City, UT

At Wall & Wall Attorneys at Law, We are a family-owned law firm in Salt Lake City, providing our clients with the help they need to ensure that their rights are fully protected in the divorce process. And, we understand what people go through during the divorce process, and we want to help each client feel comfortable discussing their situation. ***We are divorce lawyers who listen carefully to our clients to understand their situations, and we treat each person's case with respect.*** After we help you examine all of your options, we will personally stand with you in court to successfully resolve your divorce case in the Utah family court system with a judgment in your best interests.

For More Information on Divorce Issues

For a ***complimentary consultation*** to assess your case and find out your legal rights in your divorce, **contact Wall & Wall Attorneys at Law, P.C.** today. Our law firm has been helping our neighbors in Salt Lake City, Utah and throughout our region through the legal process of divorce for over 40 years. Give us a call at **801-758-8204**.