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Mourning Your Relationship

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Even if you rationally realize that breaking up was the best decision, you are still likely to experience a period of mourning, where you will live through the loss of your marriage/cohabitation. To help you become used to your new life more comfortably, you should prepare yourself for some of the emotional hardships most people experience after a separation.

Separation, after marriage or cohabitation, is inevitably seen as a personal failure. And in some ways, it can be compared to the loss of a loved one: the “we” and the sense of family that has been built, has died and now there is only you to carry on. The “what ifs” may haunt you for some time and force you to question if you could have done more or worked harder. Please bear in mind that it takes two to dance and saving your marriage/cohabitation can never be the effort of just one person.

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What Emotions to Expect?

Even when the decision for a separation has reached upon mutual agreement, it is inevitable that there would be suffering and hurt involved. The time, love and effort you have put into your relationship seem to have been in vain and this is always painful to deal with, even if it is just a subjective viewpoint, and not actually the case. On top of that, there can be children to deal with, significant life changes, financial challenges, and so on. Life as you know it ceases to exist and it is only natural that this would bring on some amount of emotional suffering. If

you are prepared and know about it, it would likely be much easier to accept that period for what it is, and let it pass gradually.

What to Expect in Terms of Personal Grief

Researcher and psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross has described five stages of grief in terminally ill patients. The dynamic first described by her, has been used to explain grief and mourning, concerning the passing of a loved one. Since we experience similar emotions at the end of a strong and important relationship, the theory applies in this case as well. The five stages you may expect to go through, have been described below.

Stages of Grief

Denial

At first, your mind won't even tolerate the thought, because it's so painful. You might forget you heard the word divorce, "This isn't happening, we can still work it out", "We've been married for years, we won't waste it all away", "We will fight it and we will prevail together", are examples of the thoughts you may be having during this stage of the process. You hold on to that last thread of hope and can't possibly believe that you are actually getting a divorce.

Anger

You're angry and you want to hurt your spouse/cohabitee the same way you've been hurt. You want to destroy him/her and everything that gets in the way. Your anger might blind you and get you to do and say things you honestly don't mean. It is in this stage that usually a separation gets ugly and it may stay that way for months or even years. Some direct that anger towards themselves and may engage in self-harming behaviours.

Bargaining

During this stage, either one of the partners may start negotiating terms for getting back together, in their disbelief that they might actually separate. Phrases such as "I will never do it again", "It will be different", "You can't do this", may become part of the conversation.

Depression

Bargaining and pleading did not work, which has led you to feel broken-hearted and discouraged. You may feel the urge to cry - for your marriage, your life, your kids, your dreams, and might exhibit other symptoms of depression. The future you've envisioned for your life no longer exists. You might feel like a failure, a loser, and facing family and friends can be very painful. You might want to erase every memory of your former partner, or find yourself on the other end of the spectrum and hold on tight to even the most insignificant memories.

Acceptance

Once all the sadness and desperation have settled, the time comes to adjust to a new life of being single again. It will take some time to create a new identity – being single after a long-

term relationship (with or without children). Regardless of whether you find someone new, you will discover it's possible to live without your ex and will feel content with that fact.

Progression of the Stages

Kübler-Ross doesn't believe that the stages are mandatorily sequential, there can be break-troughs and setbacks, going back and forth until some level of acceptance is achieved. However, not every person necessarily goes through all the stages, and sometimes even acceptance is never reached. If the latter happens, we would then be talking about pathological grief.

How Long Does Grief Last?

It is commonly accepted that this process can take up to anywhere from a few months, to a few years, until acceptance is achieved. Of course, it all depends on one's level of resilience, the severity of the divorce, whether or not the ex-partner facilitates the process, if there's still conflict between the two, how children are adjusting to the separation, etc.

Separation and Guilt

Divorce is a complex process to face and go through. Even if you're the one who decided to end the relationship, you may still experience this as a personal loss. And if you're the one that initiated the separation process, aside from going through the five stages of grief, you may experience guilt for ending your marriage/cohabitation. A bit further on, we will also focus on the feeling of guilt, after a separation.

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