

# Coping with Grief

## Part II: Loss Through Divorce

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In Part 1 we discussed loss through death. This issue focuses on coping with grief as a result of separation or divorce.

Individuals facing marital separation and eventual divorce undergo similar stages described in Part 1. However, the emotional experience may differ in terms of frequency and intensity. The spouse who has lost her loved one is more likely to undergo the stages of the grief process in the order mentioned in Part 1; whereas the divorced person could experience the stages singly or together at any phase of the divorce process. Feelings could range from failure, rejection, defeat, resentment, guilt and frustration to emotions of relief and even euphoria.

In order to cope better, the person undergoing divorce should have a clear understanding of the emotions she is likely to experience.

The divorcee experiences:

- Emotional pain which is often accompanied by humiliation. A sense of low esteem is likely to set in.
- Difficulty adjusting to the status from a married person to that of a separated/divorced individual.
- Uncertainty and guilt. She feels responsible for depriving the children of their other parent.
- Being targets of their children's anger. Grief is more likely to be shared with the children of the widowed than for the divorced. The children may resent her for depriving them of their other parent. She is likely to have difficulty explaining to the children the reasons for the break-up.
- Loneliness. This is more acute for the divorcee, especially when she is among married friends. People are more sympathetic towards the widows than the divorcees. Divorcees are also seen as easy meat.
- Anger. This is more intense for the divorcee. In bereavement they are less deeply felt and soon muted.
- Painful memories. The widows can draw strength from memories of a relationship that was strong and firm. The divorcee is plagued with painful and bitter memories. For the widowed, the spouse is a memory often cherished. As for the divorcee, the other parent continues to have visitation and other rights and the struggle for custody continues.
- Tragedy accompanied by a sense of failure/bad judgement. For the widow, the death is a tragedy per se.
- Financial deprivation (in most cases). Support payment from former spouse is not always forthcoming. The widowed is more likely to receive gratuity, insurance and other social security.

- Relief. She is now free to lead her own life and start afresh.

The above factors show that generally, the widowed receive more public sympathy and support than the divorced. It goes without saying that coping is more difficult for the divorced/separated than for the widowed largely because of the social stigma attached to a divorcee.

**The following are the ways a divorcee could consider in her attempt to cope with the grief process.**

1. Seek out the best person with whom to discuss your problem. Talk it out with someone you can trust. In many cases of dilemma, you may need the expert help – your lawyer, your pastor, the school teacher or principal, your doctor. Professional help may be necessary if the emotions get out of control
2. Get to the root of your apprehension and anxiety. Understand what is causing it.
3. Practice positivity. IN your hands is the control of your emotional life. You may have heard o this saying:  
“Two men looked out from the prison bars. One saw mud and the other saw stars.”  
Replace “I can’t” with “ I will”.  
Take time off to “stand and stare” and to appreciate the beauty and goodness of life.
4. Be prepared. Expect to be miserable. Keep in mind that there will be a grieving period you will go through and that it will pass.
5. Write down all the things that hurt as well as the things that you are blessed with.
6. Concentrate on simple joys. Life does not read like a Hollywood script.
7. Change your behaviour. Stop listening to mushy sentimental songs if it depresses you. Remind yourself that things could have been worse. If it doesn’t work, play the love songs, exhaust your sadness until boredom sets in.
8. Discover your inner strength. Examine your personal worth, stop comparing. Develop your capabilities. Start believing in yourself. You will be amazed to learn that you do have hidden talents which never surfaced until now.
9. Seek spiritual comfort.
10. Lead an active life. Inactivity lets you dwell too much on the tragedy.

Exclusive May-Aug 1992

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