

Coping with Sadness Following Your Divorce

Objective

To reduce your feelings of sadness and sense of loss after your divorce.

You Should Know

The loss associated with divorce can be hard to overcome and can contribute to ongoing feelings of sadness or even depression. Denial of the loss is not a helpful long-term strategy. Psychologists believe that unacknowledged loss can interfere with long-term happiness.

If you are in the process of divorce, or you have recently divorced, it can be helpful to reflect on what you have lost. Remember, it is completely normal for you to feel sad following your divorce. Be compassionate with yourself.

Check the losses that are most important to you:

- Dreams of growing old with your partner.
- Someone there with you to face illness, financial problems, or other stressful events.
- A companion to attend parties, weddings, and family celebrations.
- A handy person who knows how to unclog the sink.
- Creating memories and a family home.
- A sexual partner.
- Friendship with your partner.
- Consistent contact with your children (*if you share custody with your ex*).
- Rituals and holiday celebrations.
- Sharing inside jokes.
- Your ex's family and friends.
- Financial security.
- Friendships of people who related with you as a couple.
- Predictability and routine.
- Sense of personal competence.
- Faith you will love and be loved again.
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Coping with sadness and loss is a process and it will help if you reach out to friends, family members, a counselor, your religious community, or a support group. Write down the names of people who can help you after your divorce.

What to Do

1. **Reflection.** Take a moment to reflect on how your life has changed after your divorce.

2. **Write a “goodbye” letter.** In this exercise, sit down and write a goodbye letter to everything and everyone that has changed since your divorce. You might want to say goodbye to your role as spouse or traditions and rituals you shared as a family. Some of the people you might say goodbye to are your ex or your in-laws. Writing a goodbye letter takes courage because it requires you to face what you have lost with the end of your marriage. Writing this letter can give you clarity about your losses and can give you a better idea of what you can do to move on.

This is a sample goodbye letter:

Goodbye to everything I thought my life was and everything I thought my life would be. Goodbye to intimacy and emotional security. Goodbye to my home — the place where we raised our children. Goodbye to the belief that marriages can last forever. Goodbye to the belief that my spouse would never cheat on me. I thought you were someone you weren't — loyal, respectful, and in love with me. Goodbye to excusing your disrespectful and condescending behavior. My dreams have been shattered. Goodbye to our future together as I create something completely new for myself.

Write your letter below.

4. Pay attention to self-talk. Rather than make negative statements about yourself and the end of the marriage, you can make positive statements about your strengths and the things you have accomplished in your life. Write down some of these positive statements below.

Reflections on This Exercise

What else can you do to lessen your sadness following your divorce?

On a 1 to 10 scale, rate how successful you were in finding ways to cope with the sadness and loss associated with your divorce, where 1 = not at all successful, and 10 = completely successful: _____

After completing these exercises, are you feeling more hopeful about the future? Explain.

Do you feel differently about yourself or your life now that you have completed this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do to continue to live a happy and fulfilling life?
