Experiencing Grief and Depression After Divorce

by BRENDA VANTA

Divorce and Depression

Depression during and after a divorce is not uncommon. Going through divorce is a painful experience during which most people feel great loss -- you are not only losing a partner, but also the dreams, goals and commitments you shared together. You may also be losing support (i.e. financial, social or emotional). You are entering into a new territory, and many people feel uncertain about the future, and even their identity as a single person.

Grief After Divorce

It is normal to feel various emotions and experience grief over a divorce. Grief usually comes in stages, which change as your mind tries to make sense of the loss, and are part of the healing process. At the beginning you may be in denial, and experience numbness or shock, particularly if you did not initiate the split and/or it came as a surprise to you. The next step is bargaining, when you question what you could have done to prevent the divorce. Next is depression. At this point you are fully aware of the extent of loss and experience symptoms of depression like trouble sleeping, change in appetite, extreme fatigue, and feelings of guilt, loneliness, isolation, emptiness and anxiousness. The next stage is anger, followed by acceptance, when you fully admit and accept the end of your relationship and start looking forward to the new chapter of your life.

As mentioned above, feeling depressed is a normal part of the grief process and you may not need any treatment for this. You just need to allow yourself to experience and accept these feelings, and things will improve in time. On the other hand, clinical depression sparked by a divorce requires treatment from a doctor and therapist. If your depression symptoms – feeling hopeless or empty, losing of interest in things you used to enjoy, having trouble sleeping and eating – last for weeks at a time and interfere significantly with your day to day life, see a doctor. Depression can go on for years, and can lead to suicide, so it’s important to seek professional help.

Saying Goodbye

Psychologists recommend an easy, yet effective technique to let go of negative emotions, while focusing on your new life in a positive way. Firstly, write a goodbye letter. You will have to sit down and write a detailed goodbye to everyone and everything linked with your marriage. You will say goodbye to your old self in the role of spouse, as well as to your ex partner and his or her family and friends.You may want to think about your house, joint bank account, arguments you had, your thoughts on everlasting marriage and happiness -- the entire relationship. Try to objectively review this chapter of your life and accept that it is over.

The second letter is a hello letter, and will help you to start your new life. Write about things you are looking forward to experiencing, things you are glad that you no longer have to deal with, your goals and aspirations, and the steps you need to take to find the best (and happiest) version of yourself. Include as much detail as you want and visualize yourself becoming that happy person.

Try to view your divorce not as an end, but as a new, exciting beginning.