

Separation and Divorce

If you are going through a separation or divorce, you face many life changes. You may have to move, look for a new job, or find a new school for your children. In some cases, you may have less money, lose other relationships, and have new household duties that you may never have had to do until now. For almost everyone, this is a hard and stressful time.

Most people going through a divorce also have strong feelings – both good and bad. These can include: denial, anger, depression, bargaining, acceptance, and hope. These are called the stages of loss, and are similar to what people experience after any major loss or transition. Let's look at them more closely.

The Stages of Loss

Denial is kind of like being in a state of shock. When we first have a bad experience, we might be in denial. In this state, we pretend that the painful situation did not happen.

When we can no longer deny the truth, we then begin to feel **anger**. We may even blame or hurt others without meaning to do it.

We may also try to **bargain** – taking steps to avoid or put off the loss. When we feel let down, **depression** may follow.

Acceptance is when we admit the truth, let go of the past and move on.

Finally, we reach a stage of **hope**. We start to look forward to what the present and future holds for us.

You may experience these feelings and more. They do not have to follow one another, and they can come in any order. Not everyone goes through these stages in the same way. You and your ex-partner may also be in different stages at different times.

To deal with the ups and downs of divorce, talk to people you trust. They can help you with your feelings and remind you of your strengths. These people may be family members, friends, or a counselor.

Practical Concerns

To deal with the practical side of divorce, you might want to use a mediator. This is someone who does not take sides and can work out the legal and financial issues in a fair way. This can reduce both the financial and emotional costs of divorce. You can get the names of divorce mediators from family court or a social service agency.

Tips for Dealing with Physical Symptoms

It is also common to have physical symptoms. You may not be able to sleep or eat well. Or, you may oversleep or overeat. You may get headaches, feel tired, or have body aches. It may be hard to focus or remember things. You may be moody and easily brought to anger or tears.

Take care of your body and mind. Get regular exercise and eat a healthy diet. Relax or meditate to reduce stress. If you have children, do fun activities with them. Lower your expectations of what you "should do" or "have to do". Give equal time to what is fun and helpful for you and your family as well as to your day to day responsibilities.

Who to Contact for More Support

If you are having a hard time coping, call your doctor or nurse practitioner. You may want to call the Psychiatry Department at your local Kaiser Permanente Medical Center to set up some time to talk to a therapist. Local church groups, a YMCA or YWCA program, or an employee assistance program (EAP) can help you get support after separation and divorce.



Additional resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.