

GET OVER IT

Everyone except the very young or very dull has felt the pain of breaking up with someone they love at some point in their lives. Grief, whether it is at the end of a relationship because they slammed the door on their way out of a relationship or were accidentally squished by a bus on the way to the post office has exactly the same effect of the psyche of those left behind. We all go through stages of denial, anger, negotiation, depression and acceptance.

Not everyone goes through these stages at the same rate (it's estimated that it can take someone half the length of a serious relationship to get over it so if you were married for fifteen years the emotional effects are likely to live on for another seven or eight years, and seriously impact on your next relationship(s).

Sometimes you can experience two or three stages at once; sometimes you barely experience a stage at all. If a new trauma comes along to awaken old wounds you can go back to an earlier point on your emotional journey. You can get stuck at one of the stages (and if that's happened for any length of time then it's time to call in the professionals to help you gain some perspective, seriously - pick up the phone and dial for a counselor).

STAGE OF GRIEF

TYPICAL BEHAVIOR

A. DENIAL

THE IT'S NOT HAPPENING STAGE.

If you are going through a split this can be denial that your partner wants to leave you or a belief that they will change their mind, as they can't really mean it. Ok so they called you every name under the sun on their way out of the door but after all they loved you for all that time, they must still love you really, no really, deep down they do even if they don't realize it.

B. ANGER OR WHY ME!!!!!! STAGE

You are angry at the world, angry at the situation even if you were the one to walk away, angry on behalf of the others who were hurt by your or your partner's actions.

C. NEGOTIATION

CAN I PLEA BARGAIN MY WAY OUT OF THIS?

If I'm a nicer, more desirable, funnier person will s/he recognize that and come back? Can I possibly hang on to the dregs of this relationship; surely I can salvage something here? (Well that's your dignity straight out of the window then).

D. DEPRESSION

IT'S REAL AND I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.

The reality hits home and so does the misery. This is when the depression can strike, when alcohol and other dependent behaviours can take hold, and Prozac seems like a lifesaver. At this point there is nothing left to lose.

E. ACCEPTANCE

ITS OVER – NOW WHO AM I

And has anyone seen where I last left my life?

So what has this to do with a second wife? Well it's not good news. Men and Women do not work their way through these stages at the same rate but even if you were the one to call time on the relationship you will still go through all of these (and you may have a huge dollop of guilt to deal with as well).

Your new partner may not have dealt with all his issues before embarking on a new relationship. Chances are a woman will be just starting to get her head around the grief of a split when her former partner has gone through all the stages and launched on his next relationship. If you are the woman next in line when your partner's former wife is working her way through one of those stages then all that ugly raw emotion is going to be turned directly on you.

Of course if you were involved in breaking up the relationship then it's no big surprise if his former partner holds a grudge in your direction. If you were even partially responsible for wrecking her family fairytale she's going to blame you and if someone did the same to you I bet you'd be just as mad. Even if you had nothing to do with it, even if you came along years later, or she was the one to end the marriage then guess what - it will make no difference. If she is not emotionally separated from her former partner and that grief is still raw then you are going to have a very rough ride ahead.

STAGE OF GRIEF

THE SECOND WIFE'S BURDEN

A. DENIAL

If she is facing up to the reality of a split then his Ex Wife/Partner can refuse to deal with the implications of the new situation. As the Ex sees it there's another rooster in the hen house, a new significant other in her partner's life (note 'partner'- not 'former partner' as she hasn't drawn that boundary in her head yet. As far as she's concerned she's his first wife, possibly she is also the mother of his children and you are the interloper here.

As a second wife you may want to satisfy your curiosity about this other woman, at the very least you will want to talk to her about the care of the children. Guess what she doesn't want to know you, if she can pretend you don't exist then that's fine by her, at worst she'll hope you'll be just a passing fancy and in the end he'll see that she was the one true love of his life. Even if she doesn't actually want to be with the reality of him she will still cling to the dream of the relationship and you are getting in the way. You are a threat to her status as the wife, to her status as the mother, both within the immediate and extended family (she doesn't see it as two separate families yet). She'll reach for the extended family on both sides to shore up her position - expect lots of family get-togethers at which you won't be invited but your new partner and their children will be the star attraction.

She may try to prevent your interacting with the children at all. She will probably insist on maintaining a relationship with your partner in which you are actively excluded.

She may even try to act as if she and he are still in a relationship, many second wives are incensed by inappropriate behavior from the ex wife ranging from the unforgivable enticing him into bed after he dropped off the children, to a knowing kiss on the cheek or a hand placed intimately on his arm when she's stood next to you both, to emotionally intimate phone conversations and emails. This is her way of saying quite clearly he's still my partner and I'll be as intimate as I want because I'm in control here.

B. ANGER

It's your entire fault. No really, everything is your fault. Even if she walked out on her husband they were getting along just fine until you came along. Now he's standing up to her, refusing to mow her lawn on request or be an emotional crutch for her when her new partner isn't available. It's your fault. Their kids now have to adjust and that's your fault too that they are hurting.

Suddenly he has other financial responsibilities which are going to detract from his ability to support her children, worse still you may have children of your own and what if you and he have children together, your child and hers would be related. She never thought she'd be in this situation, she didn't choose you as a relation, she had no say in it at all, and how dare you impose yourself on her like this!

It's at this point that a former partner uses Parental Alienation most destructively. Sanity has nothing to do with it, she's angry, she's lashing out, she is going to use the best weapon she has and you are both going to pay –suddenly the children hear that it's your fault that she can't afford to send them to private school or ballet classes, you are taking their father away from them and their father is letting it happen.

Soon he won't care about them at all he'll only care about you and your children, they might as well have nothing to do with either of you because you can't possibly love those children at all, why should you they will never be yours.

C. NEGOTIATION

She's realized that she's losing all those extra benefits a relationship brings – companionship, emotional and financial support, and it's amazing just how many women think they can hang onto those while losing a husband. She is losing influence with her former husband and the more aggressive she is in trying to keep you at arm's length the quicker he moves away from her to be with you.

She may try to be nice because she wants something – to find a way to be in control of the situation - and you'll know it, as every move she makes feels so insincere she gives Cassius a run for his money as she smiles and plots murder while she smiles. She'll try to stay as involved as she possibly can in every element of what happens in your home. Prepare yourself ladies. You can't possibly be expected to know how to care for her children so she'll send them over with a daily supply of freshly laundered clothes. Their friendships, school life, home life in both homes will all be subject to her control- after all they are her children and she has every right to judge if you are taking care of them in your home (and taking good care of her partner too – yes she still may not accept you and he are a couple, and that she and he are not).

Either she'll try to keep you as the second wife out of it completely or else get ready for the food parcels, instruction notes and stream of complaints that you didn't send little child to school in a warm coat. You will be slapped down for stepping into her territory at every turn and her territory may not stop at the children. It will probably include the school, the extended family on all sides, her children's friends, family friends, even her favorite brand of perfume or designer. Do not get caught wearing the same coat as

her from her favorite high street store even if you have had it for ten years and so do 50,000 other women.

Don't be at all surprised if she comes into your home uninvited and acts as if she has the right to do that even if it's somewhere she never lived. In her head where the children go she goes. She is their mother and there are no possible boundaries to that.

You probably can't be expected to get your new partner a birthday present so she'll do that for you, and phone him at work when she knows you can't possibly intervene to remind him to collect the children at a certain time, and while she's on the line could she ask his advice as to how to fix her computer (so the kids can use it for school). She may ask you for a call to say you've got home safely with the children, andit won't stop she'll have communication diarrhea. The phone will not stop (though she still won't talk to you directly); emails will not cease, and expect your partner to be subjected to a litany every time he arrives on her doorstep.

D. DEPRESSION

You have probably blown a fuse by now or else have left the relationship in search of a single man with no children. She'll be miserable, possibly clinically depressed, potentially using drugs or alcohol to ease her pain. If you are still around you will either be on medication yourself or will have insisted on boundaries being put in place and without doubt those are going to hurt her.

If she's given the opportunity she will ask your partner, and possibly even you, to be her emotional crutch. She won't give a thought to how you feel or all the pain you as a second wife have had to deal with so far but she will expect you to care about her emotional distress every second. She'll be clingy with the children and your partner and communication will go crazy. It's her bed and she'll lie in it- and won't you know just how truly miserable she is every second of the day. The children will turn up with a major guilt trip about enjoying themselves on every visit – if they haven't

refused to leave her side or washed their hands of their father and you by now so they don't have to deal with the distress of it all. (And yes that will still all be your or his fault)

E. ACCEPTANCE

This is where you stand a chance of finding a way through all the mess the adults have created together. Finally she will see that there is no way back and she has to forge a relationship for the future – Of course some women deal with this by concluding that the best way to get on with their lives is to wipe their previous relationship from existence. They remove themselves and their children from having anything to do with their former family, up sticks and make a fresh start somewhere else, leaving your devastated partner to get on with his new life with you minus his children.

Some women do come to their senses. They can see that you are not second cousin to the wicked witch of the west that you do care about their children that you are competent and capable, and will try to turn things around so at the end of the day it's the children who come out of this ok.

The trouble is by this point you are probably so traumatized by all the emotional trash she's shoveled in your direction that you don't trust her, you don't like her, you are allergic to her name, your partner doesn't want to have anything to do with his ex this side of the devil getting ice skating lessons, the solicitors are very wealthy and their children think you and he are public enemy no 1.

If you can get to this point quickly then you stand a chance of having less trauma to deal with, less harm to your relationship and to the children, and everything settling down so if your partner is rushing around to help his ex to move house, doing everything he can to play happy families with his former family out of guilt for the effect on the children, fear of losing contact or grief of his own, then he is doing himself and everyone else no favours and you

should consider the merits of asking him to decide which family he wants to be part of

- The one you and he will create with his children when they are with you

Or

- The one he had with his ex partner and their children.

Chances are his ex-wife will be a permanent pain for you until she's worked through her issues and come out of the grief tunnel. It's perfectly natural for her to feel like this but it isn't going to be pleasant. All you can do is hang on for the ride and remember the second wives mantra.

- These are his ex-partners problems,
- You can't control her behavior and make it better, You and your partner can only control your behavior.

AFTER 1 YEAR

Physically you may have spent the past 365 days fighting off every sniffle that circulated your workplace. The recently separated have poor immunity for up to a year post-split, especially if they dwelled on the relationship afterwards.

Make sure you sleep at least seven hours a night – studies show this will help you get healthier, slimmer and look fresher. Emotionally you're tougher than Mrs. Obama's biceps. "It's a cliché that time heals, but it will – if you let it,". "If you spent the whole year living in the past and lost in misery, you haven't done yourself any favours. By now you should find yourself thinking more about how exciting your future could be." Commemorate the 12-month goal post by buying a significant piece of Jewellery or by snogging a totally unsuitable, totally hot man. The good news you're now an improved version of you: more resilient and wiser. "A break-up can breed independence and a new attitude about what you don't want in future relationships,". All of which makes you a more attractive prospect to the next person who is lucky enough to snag you.

Musically you want a playlist that makes you feel like dancing, swishing your hair and rocking your tightest jeans: Kanye West, Outkast, Empire of the Sun and Guns N' Roses. After 6 months Physically You're in acceptance stage and no longer feel like you're missing a limb. But watch for ongoing exhaustion; sleep disruption and tearfulness – symptoms of depression. A study of married couples found that people who had divorced – who had not previously reported experiencing symptoms of depression – were four times as likely to experience a “depressive episode” than those who remained in a relationship. So, how do you tell when sadness has tipped into the big D? “That’s the million dollar question; diagnosis isn’t easy but, generally speaking, sadness feels temporary, as if – even if it takes another six months – you know you’ll get over it. “Depression feels never-ending. If you want to be able to eat and sleep, see your friends and do your job properly but you can’t, and your grief is overwhelming you, then it’s time to ask for help from your GP.”

Emotionally if you're coping well, you'll be fitter emotionally and starting to see the old you back again. You'll go for days, maybe even weeks when you don't think about your ex. You've probably changed your hair. A hallmark of this stage is an attempt to demonstrate that you're better off without him, and you might have jumped back in the dating pool. Fill your bookshelf with self-help classics and turn up to that cooking class you always wanted to try. “There is a pivotal moment when, rather than fighting, you've accepted the big picture,”. “Then you know you're out of the woods.” Now is the time to think about what you've learnt and what you want to do differently. The good news There's no barometer for how long it should take to get over a break-up – it may take you three months or three years, but most of us overestimate how devastated we'll feel if our relationship were to end. Subjects who said they were very much in love and didn't anticipate or instigate the break-up made “especially inaccurate forecasts”.

AFTER 1 MONTH

Physically you're not matching his portion sizes anymore, but a study of about 14,000 men and women found people gained five per cent or more of their body weight if they experienced "vital exhaustion", a psychological state in which people feel tired, irritable and demoralized – pretty common feelings mid- or post-break-up. Go with the flow of how you really feel rather than always suppressing the pain. Let your anger or tears out to your best friend, mum or a punching bag. There are stages of grief necessary to go through before you feel acceptance and can move on. It's actually easier to feel and heal pain and disappointment now than trying to clear them out years later.

Emotionally if you're channeling Alanis, that's a good thing, people move on faster when they're angry at their exes. Exiling all reminders of the man from your life will help your healing interlude, so delete his texts, put his gifts and letters in a difficult-to-access cupboard, and block him from your Facebook for now. It's impossible to feel happy when his mugshot is still beaming from the photo on your bedside table. "People fare better psychologically if they can find lessons and positive meaning in the experience of the relationship break-up," The good news you're now your own hero. Even though you freak out the first time you have to deal with a huntsman or a flat car battery alone, doing something that scares the crap out of you is a recognized builder of confidence and self-esteem. People are more self-reliant than they think.

The good news there is beauty in heartbreak. Don't throw a shoe at us – it's what all the experts we spoke to said. Until your heart breaks a little, it will never grow bigger. It's a measure of the love you had in the relationship. Break-ups can have many positive psychological consequences.

Sometimes people don't realize how much stress being in a relationship that wasn't working was causing, or how much stress indecision was causing, until it all ends.

Break-ups can lead to tremendous personal growth.” You might not see it yet, but now you get carte blanche to shape your life exactly the way you want it.

Back in the saddle One day you will fancy someone again. You’ll even go on a date. And when you do, remember this advice “Think of some conversation starters before you meet up. Hopefully you won’t need them, but it helps to have a safety net. If you’re going for dinner, you could talk about the food you’re eating, or ask which three people they’d most like to cook for. Asking random questions like ‘What’s in the boot of your car?’ or ‘what’s the country you’d least like to visit?’ are always winners.”

But don’t try to be funny or quirky if you’re not feeling it – you’ll only come across as unhinged. If you’d like a second date, ask him if there’s anything on at the cinema he’d like to see. If he’s interested in seeing more than just *Star Trek*, he’ll ask you to join him for popcorn.

NUMBER OF WEEKS IT TAKES FOR SYMPTOMS OF
DEPRESSION TO BEGIN FADING FOR MOST WOMEN
POSTBREAK- UP.

60 Percentage of women who are still friends with the guy they split up with. online survey of more than 5,000 women, 25% Percentage of women who say their friends have influence over whether they’ll dump a man. Let him know and he’ll get in their good books.