

The Grief Process of Divorce

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Divorce is an ending of the way “it was” and with all endings there is a grief and loss process that everyone in the family will go through. In my practice, I work with children, teens, adults, and families to assist them as they move through four stages in the grief and loss process. These stages are accepting the divorce/loss, processing the emotions, creating new relationships, and reinvesting in life. Looking at divorce through a grief and loss perspective can give you and your family a way to process the intensity of divorce. It can offer some structure in a very chaotic time and it can “normalize” the intense feelings, behaviors, and reactions to divorce that everyone in the family is experiencing.

Below you will find some more in-depth information regarding the four stages and how these may manifest for individuals and families.

Accepting the divorce:

- Accepting the loss of what was and can no longer be.
- Acceptance takes time for everyone in the family – you will be accepting this in different ways and in different time frames.
- Although there are many similarities in grief and loss work it is ultimately a “unique” experience.
- Acceptance is a process and it isn't linear – it may change day to day, moment to moment.
- The “firsts” are often the most difficult i.e. the first time you do something by yourself or spend the holiday without your children.

Processing the emotions:

- Allowing all of the emotions to come out – anger, sadness, hurt, etc.
- Creating safe space for everyone in the family to talk about how they are feeling about the divorce and the impact it has had on each individual as well as the family as a whole.
- Asking for help and support when you need it.
- This stage will take longer and be more painful than you expected.
- The more you can express your emotions, the more you will be able to move through the grief and loss process.
- Other people in your life will probably not understand the intensity and duration of the emotions, seek out those people who can support you and your family in this process.

Creating new relationships:

- Everyone in the family will be adjusting to new relationships – be as gentle on yourselves as possible.
- Taking some time to get to know yourself again – finding the things that you enjoy, the things that support your growth.
- New rules and guidelines will be forming within your family – accept that mistakes will be made it will take some time to find what works in the “new” family structure.

- New parenting relationships will need to be formed if you have children and share custody. This too will take time and there will be mistakes made along the way – be willing to seek out support and guidance to help with this process.

Reinvesting in life:

- Over time you and your family will begin to adjust to this “new” way of being.
- Your energy will no longer be focused on the past but on what happens now and in the future.
- You and your family may know more about yourselves and each other by going through such a difficult time.