

Why Divorce is so Traumatic

The fairy tales we grew up on end with the prince and his princess getting married and living happily ever after. That is the dream we all take into marriage. Nobody marries with the expectation of getting divorced. It can be devastating and life changing when it doesn't work.

While divorce becomes increasingly common as an option to a relationship that is not working, the experience of grief, sadness and disappointment stay the same.

Often even those who choose to end their marriage struggle enormously. Given the frequency of divorce, why does it still lead to such chaotic and overwhelming emotions?

The central element in divorce is **loss**.

1. The most obvious losses of divorce are the **material** losses. You may lose your house, your financial status may suffer and belongings have to be divided. There is always disruption.

2. Loss of **friendships**. This is often inevitable if they are unable to stay neutral despite your wish for it to be so. It may be that you want friends to support you and feel betrayed if they wish to keep the friendship with both of you. Alternatively, you may find that over time you relate less to the friends that belong to your "old" life. It is important not to isolate yourself.

3. Loss of **family**. Your in-law family may be unable to remain neutral if you have a difficult divorce. This may be difficult if you have children who want to keep a relationship with them that you are excluded from.

4. Loss of **children**. Usually only one parent has custody. You may not lose your children totally but you may only have limited time with them. If they are young, you may only have access or communication with them through an ex-spouse who may make it difficult. In extreme situations, you may lose contact or access to your children altogether. Your children should be allowed to love the person you are angry with.

5. Loss of a **sense of security**. This may lead to fear and anxiety.

6. Loss of **confidence**. You may feel worthless and unattractive. You will be asking yourself questions like "If I could not get this right, how can I trust myself to make decent decisions about my future?" "I am a useless mother/father. I have messed up my life and my children's life," This is not realistic and needs to be worked on.

7. The loss of a **dream**. When you commit to marriage, there is a sense of building something together that is safe and lasting that you are in together. It is the place where you can start to put your dreams into practice. You have to start to create new dreams for yourself over time.

8. Loss of **identity**. Being married and part of a couple can be an important part of your sense of self. You may feel that you don't fit in anywhere anymore. If you are struggling with overwhelming feelings of anger, depression and anxiety and not coping with life, you may feel that you don't know yourself and have lost your sense of who you were. You may be behaving in ways that are unfamiliar to you or even shameful to you. Accept that that it will be like this for a while but do not become destructive to yourself or other people.

9. Loss of **relationship**. The person who you once trusted to be there for you has betrayed you either by not loving you or by hurting you deeply in some way. Or you have hurt them. You may be engaged in difficult custody or settlement battles. You are not on the same side anymore and this is not easy. Loneliness can be a big factor. Find new interests and put effort into your existing friendships.

10. Loss of **status**. This may be real or perceived. In some cultures, divorce is more acceptable than

others. Your status as a single person will depend on how you and others feel about this. You should try not to buy into stereotypes about people who are divorced.

11. Loss of **trust**. Your divorce may leave you feeling that you do not trust people or relationships anymore. It is not safe to do so in the future in case you get hurt like this again. Be discerning, take your time but you have to also live again.

12. Loss of **hope**. If you are feeling really depressed and overwhelmed, you may see life as pointless and the future as hopeless. Go for help if you are unable to cope.

The greatest potential for growth is when we are forced out of our comfort zone. While you can't undo what has happened, there are things you can do to make your recovery more successful. Life crises fragment us and make us totally disorientated, but with healing you can create a new (and sometimes improved) sense of self.

Crises provide the opportunity to heal, set new goals and work towards your own personal transformation.

See the article on "Transformation after Divorce"