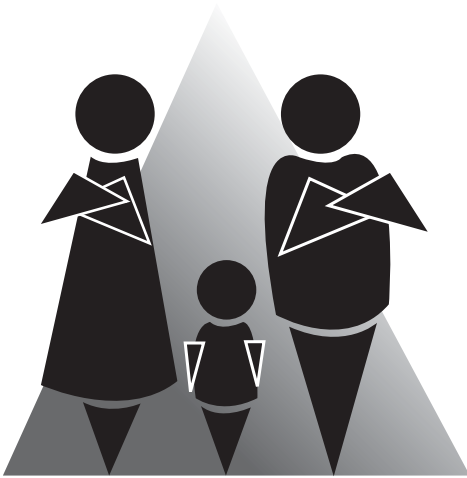


**EXTENSION PROGRAMS**

Agriculture and Forestry  
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 4-H Youth Development  
 Natural Resources



Are Your Children in the  
**MIDDLE**  
 of Your Conflict or Divorce?

**Loss of a Relationship**

**W**hen a marriage or a long-term relationship ends, many different feelings surface. While each person is unique, many people say they go through four stages.

1. Realizing that the relationship might end. "I knew our marriage was in trouble, but I still wanted to work it out."
2. Recognizing that the relationship has to end. "Our problems weren't going away."
3. Mourning the end of the relationship. "I felt relieved but sad. I missed the way things used to be. It was hard to give up the idea of being with my husband forever."
4. Adjusting to single life. "I've made new friends and found ways to improve my life. I'm comfortable with myself now. I'm happy."

Common experiences after divorce include learning to trust again, laying aside the anger, handling the lack of money and carrying responsibilities alone.

In addition to emotional reactions to change, watch for physical reactions such as not being able to sleep, headaches, changes in eating habits or fatigue.

**Stages of Mourning**

At the end of an important relationship, you will experience mourning. Most people go through the following mourning stages, but not in the same way or in the same order. Which of these experiences seem familiar to you? How do your feelings differ? Are you taking time to sort out your feelings and to talk with friends, relatives or a counselor?

**Shock and Disorganization**

Some people are so stunned by the change in the relationship they may feel immobilized or dazed.

"I didn't know what to do about the situation."

"I wasn't sure how to act. My daily life was turned upside down. The kids, the house, the car, grocery shopping, laundry, all the decisions were mine. I was always late for work and ordering pizza for dinner. I was in a daze."

**Denial**

Some people may deny their loss by avoiding change.

"I would spend time thinking, what if Joanne came back? Maybe it could work this time. I held onto that hope instead of making changes. I avoided looking for a new job or making decisions about the settlement. I couldn't even sleep alone in our bed."

Other people blame themselves.

"I thought we had a good marriage. We had difficult times, but isn't that part of marriage?"

"If only I had worked harder at the relationship, maybe we still would be together."

Others may jump into a whole new life to postpone their mourning.

"I started dating right away. It felt good to be needed and part of a couple again. But it didn't last. I was still too angry and resentful of Tom."

**Anger**

Some people feel the temptations to make the other person feel as bad as they do or to seek some form of retribution.

"My partner took advantage of me. My partner should pay for what has happened."

"Then I got angry. How could she leave me with the children and go off to some new life? I was angry because she seemed to be moving on, and I had all the responsibility. At first, I kept it inside. But I just





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## Loss of a Relationship

felt more depressed. Then I decided that I wasn't going to let her ruin my life. I started making changes. Now I'm much happier."

If anger is not expressed, it can become destructive. It may lead to depression, ulcers, high blood pressure or other problems. But, expressed in healthy ways, it can prompt us to make positive changes.

Be careful not to take your anger out on your children. They need to feel close to you and their other parent. They shouldn't be forced to choose between the two of you.

### Loneliness

Making the transition from being part of a couple or team to being alone can leave some people feeling lonely.

"I can't make it alone."

"Because my husband doesn't love me anymore, I feel worthless."

"After things calmed down, I was managing better, but I still felt lonely. There was no adult around to talk about the changes or to help me make decisions."

### Guilt/Shame

Divorce or the dissolution of a relationship makes some people feel they failed at that relationship. They suffer from guilt in not being successful at maintaining that partnership.

"I felt like people looked at me differently after we split up. I was embarrassed to say I was divorced. I felt like a failure."

"I deserve to be punished for the things I have done."

"My partner will fall apart without me. I'm selfish for leaving."

### Evaluation of the Relationship

It is important as part of the divorce process to develop an understanding about why the relationship didn't work. This is essential to avoid carrying the same issues into the next relationship.

Signs that mourning is over:

"I started thinking more clearly about what went wrong. I realized we wanted different things."

"It feels good to have made a decision. Divorce or separation was inevitable."

"Things have finally started to fall into place and make sense."

"At last I can admit my anger. I have finally outgrown the need to get even."

"The divorce opens up all sorts of possibilities."

"After awhile, I realized I wasn't so resentful anymore. Instead of complaining about my ex-partner, I would think of ways to solve problems. I got used to being single, not so embarrassed. I began to meet new people and do more things that I enjoy. I stopped thinking of all men as awful. Now I know that our breakup was for the best. It doesn't mean I can't have a future with someone else."

There are many people who enter relationships with unrealistic expectations. These expectations can sabotage a relationship because they can be sources of anger and disappointment. Letting go of unrealistic expectations is one way to build success in future relationships.

Here are some examples of unrealistic expectations:

- ▶ Life will be happy and free of pain and disappointment.
- ▶ I'll always be able to control the way things go if I am very alert and work hard.
- ▶ My happiness (or pain) is the center of the universe.
- ▶ I will catch up one day.
- ▶ Others can read my mind and will do what I want them to do.

Which statements represent your views? Can you work toward creating a more positive view?

### What Areas Are a Challenge for You?

Change is a difficult process. In what areas will you need input and support from the people you care about?

Look at the following list. Check the areas that will be the greatest challenge for you.

- Change in physical environment: where you live, where your child will go to school
- Legal issues: insurance, child custody
- Financial: property, budget
- Relationships with extended family
- Relationships with friends
- Need to create new social activities
- Change of personal identity: self-image must shift from being a couple, "we," to a single "me"
- Getting through grief or depression
- Check two or three items you will try, to help yourself through the mourning process:
- Accept yourself and give yourself time to mourn.
- Know that wishful thinking will not turn back the clock.
- Recognize that grief and sorrow are normal; don't try to deny your feelings.



# Are Your Children in the MIDDLE of your Conflict or Divorce?

## Loss of a Relationship

- Express your feelings. Talk to friends, family members, religious leaders and/or counselors.
- Use techniques to reduce stress such as exercising, eating nutritious food, involving yourself in hobbies, sports or volunteer work.
- Examine the relationship with your ex-spouse in a realistic and constructive way.
- Accept support and help from others. Ask other single parents what has worked for them.
- Seek professional help when you need it.
- Don't expect too much of yourself or your children during stressful times, such as holidays, birthdays or anniversaries. Create new routines and special celebrations.

### Here Are Some Things You Can Do Today:

- ▶ Don't make other changes in your life right now. Divorce takes time and energy.
- ▶ Come to terms with what happened with the relationship so you can let go of it.
- ▶ Let go of the emotional attachment you have for the other parent, whether that means feelings of love or anger and resentment. Lingered attachments hinder new relationships.
- ▶ Acknowledge that your former commitments to the other person are over. Your most important commitment is your responsibility to parallel parent your children.
- ▶ Tell your children you love them.
- ▶ Find things that calm you. Take a bath, go for a walk, cook a special meal.
- ▶ Write down realistic and attainable goals. Decide on a goal to start working toward.
- ▶ Find small successes in every day.
- ▶ Focus on your children's well-being.
- ▶ Educate yourself.
- ▶ Share your interests with your children.
- ▶ Work at strengthening the ties you have with family and friends and creating new friendships.

- ▶ Give yourself time to build a new social network, a year or so. Focus on these friendships and relationships with family and current friends rather than on a new romantic relationship.
- ▶ Take time to appreciate what you haven't lost. "I am thankful for my daughter."

### Basic principles in every relationship loss:

- ▶ All breakups are different, but all have elements in common.
- ▶ Each of you has the right to pursue happiness, no matter what others may say.
- ▶ Some individuals should not have married or formed a relationship at all, some should not have married each other and some should not have married or entered a relationship when they did. When you realize this for yourself and accept it, you can move on with your life.
- ▶ Only you and your spouse or significant other know the whole story; others' judgments are invalid because they don't know the whole story.
- ▶ You don't need permission to get a divorce or to get out of your own relationship.

If you are interested in more information on this and other related topics, please call your local LSU AgCenter parish office. Below is the list of topics in the "Are Your Children in the Middle of Your Conflict or Divorce?" series.

A Child's View of Divorce  
The Business of Co-parenting  
Coping with Stress and Change  
Costs of Raising Children  
Custody Issues Today  
Dating Issues  
Disciplining Children  
Friendship and Support  
Help! I Feel Overwhelmed  
Loss of a Relationship  
Managing Income and Expenses  
Not Enough Hours in the Day  
Separating Your Finances  
Sharing Parenting  
Talking with Your Children  
Talking with Your Children About Money  
Talking with Your Children -- Communicating Within Your Family: Active Listening  
Visitation Do's and Don'ts

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## Loss of a Relationship

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**Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service**, Jack Bagent, Vice Chancellor and Director

Pub. 2799 - J

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.