

The Five Stages of Grief

Grieving a break-up

1. **Denial** – The person left behind is unable to admit that the relationship is really over. They may continue to call the former partner even though that person wants to be left alone.
2. **Anger** – The partner left behind may feel angry for the pain the leaving partner causes them.
3. **Bargaining** – After the anger stage, the one left behind may plead with their former partner by promising that whatever caused the breakup will never happen again. Example: “I can change. Please give me a chance.”
4. **Depression** – Next the person might feel discouraged that his or her bargaining plea did not convince the former partner to stay. This may send the person into depression causing disruption to life functions such as sleeping, eating and even daily bowel movements.
5. **Acceptance** – Moving on from the situation and the person is the last stage. The partner left behind accepts that the relationship is over and begins to move forward with his or her life. She or He may not be completely over the situation but is weary of going back and forth, so much so that they can accept the separation as reality.

Children grieving in divorce

1. **Denial** – Children feel the need to believe that their parents will get back together, or they will change their mind about the divorce. Example: “Mom or Dad will change their mind.”
2. **Anger** – Children feel the need to blame someone for their sadness and loss. Example: “I hate Mom for leaving us.”
3. **Bargaining** - In this stage, children feel as if they have some say in the situation if they bring a bargain to the table. This helps them keep focused on the positive that the situation might change, and less focused on the negative, the sadness they’ll experience after the divorce. Example: “If I do all of my chores maybe Mom won’t leave Dad.”
4. **Depression** - This involves the child experiencing sadness when they know there is nothing else to be done, and they realize they cannot stop the divorce. The parents need to let the child experience this process of grieving because if they do not, it will only show their inability to cope with the situation. Example: “I’m sorry that I cannot fix this situation for you.”
5. **Acceptance** – This does not necessarily mean that the child will be completely happy again. The acceptance is just moving past the depression and starting to accept the divorce. The sooner the parents start to move on from the situation, the sooner the children can begin to accept the reality of it.