

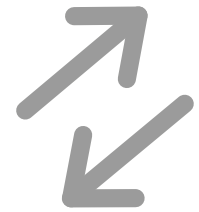


Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Managing Change and Grief

It can be challenging to start over after a divorce or separation.
Below are some strategies you can use to move forward with your new life.



Social Connections

Starting over often means creating a new social life and adjusting to new dynamics in old relationships. Establishing strong social connections with other adults is important for your emotional well-being but can feel very difficult during times of transition. Give yourself permission to get involved (or stay involved) with social activities, hobbies, and friendships with other adults. As one member of a couple, you were part of a circle of friends. In order to meet new friends you may need to develop new interests or try doing the things you enjoy with new people. Social connection can decrease grief, isolation, and feelings of hopelessness.

Honor Your Grief

The end of a romantic relationship can feel like you are grieving the death of a loved one. Psychiatrist Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross identified five components of grief that many people experience during loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These feelings may come and go, may be experienced simultaneously, and can be experienced in any order.

As you and your children manage the changes in your lives, identify which stages you might be going through today.

DENIAL:

Denying that the divorce/separation is happening provides temporary relief from a painful reality.

ANGER:

Realizing that your expectations have not been met in the relationship may make you angry. Anger may be directed at yourself or others.

BARGAINING:

Thoughts may surface about how the relationship might be saved. Change is hard but you can move forward.

DEPRESSION:

Admitting that the relationship is over brings sadness. You may feel insignificant and unimportant and may cry easily. If these feelings don't pass in time, it's important to seek help.

ACCEPTANCE:

Over time, adjustment to your new way of life will lead you to feel better. Life is more stable and hope emerges.

Supporting Your Children

You and your co-parent are doing your best to make decisions in your child's best interest, but you might not always agree about what or how to do that. Try not to let feelings of anger or hurt get in the way of making decisions for your children as you create a healthy living environment for them.

When you disagree with your co-parent, focus your attention on solving the problem in an emotionally neutral way, like the way you might do with a bank teller or plumber. Outline the needs of your child and review what you have done together as parents in the past and what you will each do in the future. The best way to manage the change you are going through is to find new, healthy patterns and keep the emphasis on your child's needs. Working together models important behaviors for your child. When parents work together, children feel more loved and secure.

UW–Madison Division of Extension offers co-parenting courses and support for families in caring for each other in ways that promote growth and understanding. For more information about these courses, contact your county Extension educator or visit <https://extension.wisc.edu/family/>.