

## RESTRUCTURING AND RESTABILIZING

### During Divorce and Separation

Your collaborative team members are experts in the protocols of collaborative process. They also understand the pain involved in separation and divorce. Ending a relationship is difficult, no matter how amicable the process. You will have many personal and financial decisions to make at a time when emotions are fragile. Even though the decision to separate or divorce may be a good decision in the long term, as you transition from “We” to “I” you will also grieve the loss of what you defined as family. It may be tempting to give into your emotions rather than keep a cool head and collaborate with the person you feel is the cause of your grief. The more you know about what you are experiencing emotionally, the more equipped you will be to make difficult decisions you need to make during the collaborative process.

Divorce is often viewed as simply two individuals ending their relationship through legal means. However, it doesn't take long to realize there is more to divorce than ending a relationship. Divorces often reflect a long-term process consisting of different phases. Bohannon <sup>(1)</sup> found that in most divorces, participants experience multiple overlapping stations of divorce:

- The **emotional divorce** involves the disappearance of love, trust and attraction and usually starts with one spouse
- The **legal divorce** is the formal dissolution of the marriage
- During the **economic divorce**, involves assets, liabilities, and economic impact
- The **co-parental divorce** includes shifting from parenting together in one home to parenting between homes, when children are involved.
- Partners then go through a **community divorce**, wherein relationships with others (relatives, friends, etc.) change;
- Finally, couples go through a **psychic divorce**, where they separate from each other emotionally and redefine the self as a single person, “I” instead of “We”.

## 5 STAGES OF GRIEF (2)

Divorce and separation can be difficult even under the most amicable of circumstances. The family suffers loss – the loss of “family” as once known – possibly the loss of two incomes – possibly the loss of the family home – the loss of extended family members and possibly family friends (for those who have taken sides) – the loss created by shared parenting. Be aware, as families move through the stations of divorce these losses may cause grief. Here is an example of what you and your children may experience during the divorce and separation process:

- **Shock and Denial:** “This isn’t really happening” “No, this can’t be.” In this stage you may have difficulty accepting the reality of the situation. You may be tempted to lie about the situation and tell yourself that this is just temporary and everything will be back to normal soon. This approach is often used to cushion the impact of the source of grief.
- **Anger:** “Why me?” “How dare this happen to me.” “I wouldn’t be thinking divorce if it wasn’t for her or him.” You may feel generalized rage at the world for allowing something like this to happen. You may feel isolated and furious that this is happening to you. You may think it’s unfair and feel betrayed. Outbursts of anger in unrelated situations may occur. It’s easy to target your spouse.
- **Bargaining:** “If I do this I can make it better. “I can fix things.” You may feel guilt and feel it is some else’s responsibility to fix the problem. You may attempt to strike bargains with your spouse. You may try counseling, dress differently, attempt things to improve the relationship.
- **Depression/Sadness:** “My heart is broken.” “I guess I’m just stuck here forever because I can’t do anything about this.” At this stage you may be absorbed in the intense pain you feel from having your world come apart; you can be overwhelmed with feelings of helplessness and sadness.
- **Acceptance:** “I don’t like it, but I can live with this.” “This happened, but I have great memories.” “It’s sad but I have learned from this.” Eventually you feel a sense of relief and realize a whole new world may be opening up for you.

Unfortunately, the stages of grief can’t be used as a checklist. You may experience some stages of grief several times or move up and down the stages as you are continually reminded of your loss. For instance: (1) moving through each station of divorce; (2) talking things over with your family as you restructure and restabilize two homes; (3) reviewing photo albums; (4) planning holiday or birthday celebrations for your children; (5) or attending collaborative meetings that don’t reach resolution the way you may have expected.

Your collaborative team understands the discomfort caused by each station of divorce or stage of grief and will be supportive of your efforts to make good decisions that will help your family restructure and restabilize during the divorce and separation process. Despite how you may now feel, you will eventually move through these stages, and your collaborative team will help you in that process.

(1) Bohannon, P. (1970). *Divorce and after: An analysis of the emotional and social problems of divorce*. Garden City, NY: Anchor.

(2) Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. New York: Macmillan.