

The Slippery Slope

Grief is hard... Grief is lonely... Grief is painful...

When a person grieves a loss there are basic stages one goes through. These are all painful but they are all necessary. We call them **The Slippery Slope**, the grief cycle of divorce.



As the diagram shows above, the 1st step in the grief cycle is **Denial**. Denial can come in many different forms. For some it comes with the shock of the first news that your marriage is over. For some it has happened months or even years earlier when they have accepted the fact that the marriage was in trouble and emotionally started pulling away. When an individual first recognizes the frailty of their marriage is a crucial piece to how they are coping. This is called the Active or Passive Agent. We will look deeper into that later.

The 2nd step is **Anger**. This is when the reality starts to settle in. This anger stage will pop up its ugly head many times throughout the grief cycle. It is a natural response when you lose something you counted on, something you trusted. The anger can be expressed in many different forms, some healthy, some not so healthy. It is important to understand that anger is ok, when expressed properly. It is very normal and is an important part of our grieving process. As time progresses, it can get rather intense as things tend to stir out of control and there is little anyone can do to stop it or control the emotions. We will spend a lot more time looking deeper into this thing called anger later.

As you bounce around the anger stage, the next step is **Bargaining**. This is when you start to feel desperate and make promises, pleas and find all attempts to fix the problems. This also looks and feels very different whether you are the active or passive agent. If the separation/divorce has come as a total surprise, you are at a point of panic trying to do all you can to put the pieces back together again. If you

are the one seeking the divorce, you probably went through this stage without even knowing it. Either way, it can be a very desperate stage.

Now is a great time to talk about the biggest misconception about **The Slippery Slope**. It can sometimes seem like it is an organized process, taking one step at a time until you calmly reach acceptance. This is so not the case! Thus the reason why it is called the **Slippery "Slope"**. While you are going through the grief cycle you will find your self moving forward then all of a sudden you will find yourself slipping backwards. This is very normal and you need to allow yourself some grace as you continue to move through your grief process. At times it may feel like the 2-step, two steps forward and one step back or vice versa. The important thing is that over time you find yourself inching forward little by little and you will soon find that you will be spending longer periods of time between your step backs. And soon one day you will find yourself one stable footing once again as you reach the top of acceptance. But until then, give yourself a break and ride the cycle.

The 4th stage is **Depression** and it is often called "The Pit". This is when you feel and process the many losses that you are experiencing. There are a lot of adjustments and changes taking place. Change can be very hard, especially if you don't want it. This is a time you feel the pain, deal with the changes that are taking place, and put into perspective what has happened and what you need to do to move forward. If you haven't already sought help, now may be the perfect time to find a trusted counselor or a Divorce Recovery support group to attend. I highly recommend DivorceCare. Please go to www.divorcecare.org, put in your zip code and find a group nearest you. It is important to find seek out people to talk to at this time so you don't end up stuck in the pit too long. Lean on others to help you through this step. This is where I want to walk alongside you as well. Reach out in the Discussion Forums, read the articles, dig in. It is vital you find others who understand and walk this journey with you.

The 5th and final step is **Acceptance**. The interesting thing about this step is that many times the Active Agent, the one pursuing the divorce, can already be at this step at the time when they separate or acknowledge the problems. That means one person is at one end of the slope while the other is at the other end from the very beginning. This is a big reason why there is so much conflict during the separation process. It is the cause for many hurt feelings, misunderstandings and misconceptions of how each one process and deals with the issues that a separation/divorce brings to the surface. Neither is wrong, they are just very, very different and they get expressed in very different ways. One may think their spouse is being cold and indifferent, when in actuality they have already gone through all the stages without you even knowing it. It is also very important for the person to try being extra sensitive to the one just entering the stages of grief. It will be a very difficult process for them and the more understanding you can be while they process the better things may go.

Remember, the **Slippery Slope** is just that...a slippery slope. Please be aware of the stages you are in and the ones coming up. Don't expect to move through them in an orderly way. Be kind to yourself. Don't focus on how fast you can get through them, instead focus on continuing to put one foot in front of the other and make progress along the way. And....

Hang on for the ride....