Working With Clients in The Five Phases of Divorce Grief

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- Author of Unhitched: The Essential Divorce Guide for Women
- Leader of three weekly in person Divorce Support Groups for Women for past 16 years.
- Unhitched featured on CBS Morning Show with Gayle King and in Time Magazine

Kubler-Ross' Stages of Grief

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Sadness
5. Acceptance



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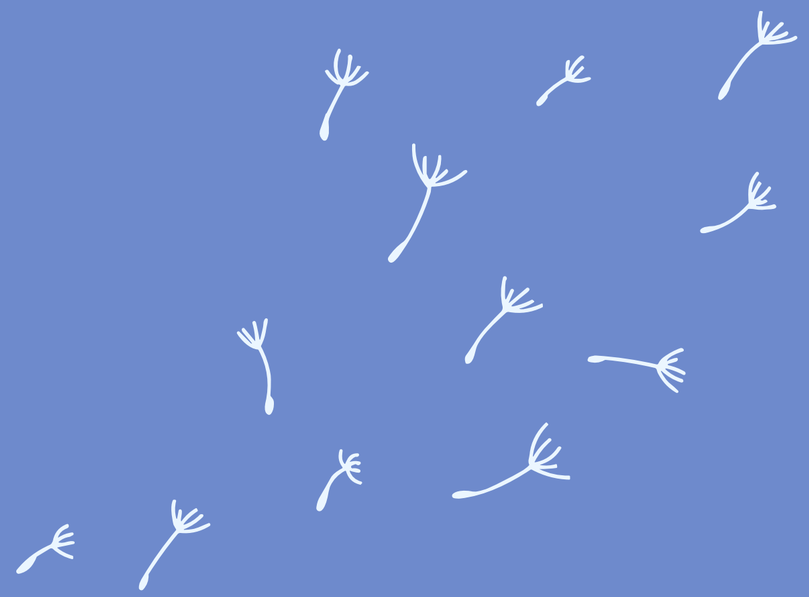
#1 Heartbreak

- Feelings: Anger, sadness, doubt, regret
- For the one who did not initiate: “rug has been pulled out”, “bomb went off in living room”, betrayal
- For the one who initiated, little heartbreaks over time lead to heartbreaking decision to leave, feelings of guilt, shame
- May be traumatic, or not
- Physical symptoms: change in appetite, sleep, central nervous system
- Cognitive skills temporarily impaired

Professionals’ role: Normalize experience, provide empathy, promote self-care and affect regulation, slow down. Emphasize team approach. Use plain language.

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#2 Rollercoaster



- Longest stage
- Feelings: sad, angry, fearful, frustrated, worried, regretful, hurt, rejected, ashamed, confused, relieved
- Exacerbated by the legal process
- Mixed feelings common; expected and unexpected emotions

Professionals' role: Refer to individual therapy and/or support group, normalize ups and downs, provide realistic optimism and clear map. Use plain language. Return communication promptly.

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#3 Mending

- Feelings become less intense, less frequent
- More focus on self and self care, less focus on ex and legal process
- More reflection, insight
- Client can take more responsibility
- Attention to changing relationships and new boundaries



Professionals' role: Finalize current issues and look to future.

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#4 Letting Go



- Move out of uncertainty
- Greater acceptance and peace
- Forging new identity
- New boundaries
- Forgiveness of self and perhaps others

Professionals' role: Validate letting go phase. Help client to let go (feelings and identities, victim stance). Awareness of your own difficulty letting go and its impact.

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#5 Moving On

- New normal
- New identity
- New romantic relationship or not
- Stronger, more empowered



Professionals' role: Help client prepare for future that includes meaning, purpose and joy. Financial planning, pre-nups.

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3 Common Divorce Professional Pitfalls

- Veering out of your lane
- Lack of awareness of the five phases of divorce grief
- Letting countertransference (your emotional reactions to a client stemming from your past experiences) get in the way



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