

# MODULE ONE - RECOVERY

## STAGE – RE-BUILDING ONE

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### **DENIAL This Could Never Happen to Me!**

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In ending a relationship and exploring rebuilding their lives people are drawn from all backgrounds, some are male some female, some are older some are younger and some wealthy and I mention this because often people think that only those who are losers cannot maintain a relationship. Some people are ready for this first step whilst others are still shocked by what has happened and cannot think beyond the day before them. Many people in my groups told me how they were waiting for their ex-partner to wake up, knock on the door and tell them that it had all been a nasty dream.

It is natural for you to feel confused and disorientated with even the simplest issue taking on untold demands and you are feeling so unlike the person you used to be. Many people tell me during this stage that

'I feel dumfounded. I honestly thought this would never happen to me.'

In this initial stage you may be punishing yourself with statements like

'If only I had listened more; if only I hadn't been so angry' if only...if only and the list goes on.

Through this relationship you have learned a great deal about life and about yourself and such insights are a tangible part of who you are now and your awareness. Better to say 'I did the best I could with what I

knew and what I had to work with' and such a statement you are starting to be who you really are.

For example it is common in my work to see how for many people they have not freed themselves from their early life experiences with adults and the long term influence so they do not have identities of their own and in ending a relationship they are rebelling against such experiences and in doing so beginning to embrace their own identity and reality of how their world can be.

Often we have an idealised image of what a relationship provides and for many it can be that it was to overcome loneliness; to escape an unhappy parental home; because we were expected to enter a relationship given the belief that single people are failures or out of the need to parent or be parented by another, and the old standby because 'we fell in love'.

I talk of love later in another section of our virtual online sessions but I just want to point out that there are many levels of love and not all are mature enough to provide a sound basis for a long term relationship. Quite frequently we have an idealized image of the other person and so we fell in love with an image rather than the person. As the initial excitement passes we are disillusioned because that person is not living up the image we have projected on to them. Perhaps 'falling in love' is an attempt to fill some emptiness rather than creating a sound basis on which to build a long term relationship. For many people they trying to become a whole person and find happiness based on the false belief of how 'two people are becoming one'.

When you are ready to face living alone and have found happiness as a single person, then you are ready to face life together with another person.

Take a look at your former relationship

- Where you and your partner friends?
- Did you confide in each other?
- What interests did you share? Hobbies? Attitudes towards life? Politics? Religious or spiritual belief? Views about children and parenting?
- Were your goals - for yourself, each other, the relationship and where they similar/compatible?
- Did you agree on ways of solving problems between you (and here I mean not necessarily the solutions but the methods)?
- When you were angry with each other, did you deal with it directly, or hide it, or simply try to hurt each other like immature frightened children?
- Did you share friendships?
- Did you go out together socially? Where you also engaged socially when your partner didn't have to be present or did you assume that you had to go out together, as a couple, or not at all?
- Did you share responsibilities such as earning money and looking after the home together in a mutually agreed upon way?
- Did you make major decisions jointly?
- Did you allow each other time alone?
- Did you trust each other?
- Was the relationship important enough for each of you to make some personal sacrifices for it when necessary?

It is difficult to recognise shortcomings in the relationship and it is even more difficult and painful now to see that you were part of the problem given for many it is so easy to blame their partner or society, or.... but accepting such elements at this stage is the positive side to moving through the first rebuilding phase called denial.

At this initial stage you need to work on improving your self concept and as you come closer to standing alone and realising how, for a whole host of reasons, the very real fact that your relationship has come to an end and you feel very real pain.

Relationship separation and as in the death of a partner are probably the two most painful experiences you will feel in your life. We need to use our pain, to flow with the pain rather than deny it and to use it as motivation to grow and make fundamental changes rather than stop this experience which will result in our having wounds that may never heal. Some use the pain as an excuse to remain bitter, angry, unhappy where others use the pain to grow and expand at so many levels at this point in their life. Which do you choose?

At this stage the goal is to learn to be happy as a single person before you look to becoming coupled again.

**CHECKLIST** which we shall be working with in our discussion sessions.

1. I am able to accept that my relationship is ending or had ended.
2. I am comfortable telling my friends and family that my relationship is ending or had ended.
3. I have begun to understand some of the reasons why my relationship did not work out, and this has helped me to overcome my feelings of denial.
4. I believe that even though relationship ending process is painful it can be a positive and creative experience for my future life.
5. I am ready to invest emotionally in my own personal growth in order to become the person I would like to be.
6. I want to learn to become happy as a single person before committing myself to another future relationship.
7. I will continue to invest in my own personal growth even if my former partner and I plan to get back together with each other.

## STAGE – RE-BUILDING TWO

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### **LONELINESS to ALONENESS**

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It is natural to feel extreme loneliness when a relationship ends. Healing can and will come from such pain if you listen and allow this all important natural process to unfold so you can grow through loneliness to the stage of aloneness where you are comfortable being by yourself.

Loneliness is a disease that grows slowly and undetected.

Its symptoms are terrifying.

Loneliness is a dark, unseeing well that covers you with sadness, and a desperate race to conquer the complete spiritual and emotional emptiness...

I am experiencing this disease, and wish I could find a cure -  
But even a ray of sunlight is a blessed thing.

For loneliness demands; it takes everything from you and in return gives you nothing but solitude; as if you were the only person in an unmerciful world.

Elaine

Working with people and listening to those going through this process as I have done in my career I saw various kinds of loneliness. There are the people who have withdrawn into their cave and just peer out sullenly, looking very sad and dejected. Then there are those who insist on being with someone else, so they always are holding hands or following somebody around. Then there are the busy people where they are always doing this and that so they never have to face their loneliness.

Loneliness is pain but in such pain we are being shown something that we have to learn. Loneliness can be like a vacuum where the person deals with this by sucking everyone around them in to fill their void.

It is not just for people at a time when they have ended a relationship because for many it began in childhood and may be a stumbling block for years to come in their life.

The loneliness that comes when a relationship ends is often more intense than any emotion we have felt before. We have no one with whom we share meals, our bed, and those special moments and now when they are gone we know nothing but silence. There is a strange emptiness and we can find no one in the whole world to share our life and living it with. When friends try to reach out they seem distant, even when we most need them to be close and real. Within us we hear 'Withdraw, withdraw, and you won't be hurt again!' and whilst this brings safe seclusion we at the same time crave emotional warmth.

Whilst many people were lonely in the relationship they tell me how they find themselves relieved to end the relationship that encouraged loneliness. At this stage the rebuilding elements in this module have a three stage pattern to them. For loneliness the first stage is withdrawal. Some hide in empty homes and brood so that no one will suspect their fear. Some may play the 'poor little me' game, hoping that someone will come along and feel sorry. Here the driving force is to keep others from seeing how much we hurt, while at the same time letting the former partner know what 'they' have done to us.

Withdrawal during this period may be appropriate because - let's face it - we are not very good company. The need for emotional warmth is

insatiable. The need often stifles friends by engulfing them and so denies them the space to be themselves, to be friends.

Seeking ways to escape this loneliness causes many people to enter a second stage of becoming busyholics, with an activity for each night of the week and two activities for each night of the weekend. They work long hours at their jobs and find other excuses so they don't have to go back to their empty lonely home. Interestingly enough it is also possible to find many workaholics who are still in a relationship - perhaps to keep them from coming home to a lonely relationship.

Here we are running from ourselves as though a ghost of loneliness hides inside. We never take time to stop and look at what we are doing or where we are going because, yes you guessed it, you are too busy running or going around in circles instead of moving on to the next stage.

This busy loneliness varies in length and intensity from person to person but eventually most people realise it must end and they slow down into the aloneness stage. Someone once called this aloneness stage the 'all-oneness' stage because you have reached a point where you are now comfortable by yourself. You have achieved this by accepting that loneliness is a natural part of being human. It also has healing qualities allowing introspection, reflection, growth and connection with part of inner self which may have lay hidden until this point in our life leading for a sense of fullness and strength.



**CHECKLIST** The following checklist is useful for us to work on in our next session or sessions. If you can answer yes to most of the items in this list you have developed a healthy aloneness. If areas need work then we will focus on these in our work together.

1. I am taking time for myself rather than keeping too busy.
2. I am not working such long hours and I have no time for myself.
3. I am not hiding from loneliness by being with people I don't enjoy being with.
4. I have begun to fill up my time with activities important to me.
- 5 I have stopped hiding and withdrawing into my home.
6. I have stopped trying to find another relationship just to avoid being lonely
7. I am content doing things by myself.
8. I have stopped running from loneliness.
9. I am not letting the feelings of loneliness control my behaviour.
10. I am comfortable being alone and have aloneness time.

## STAGE – RE-BUILDING THREE

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### **GUILT versus REJECTION**

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Here is the scoreboard:

**Dumpers** end the relationship –

**Dumpees** have it ended for them.

Naturally the adjustment process differs since dumpers feel more guilt and dumpees feel more rejection.

Dumpers start their adjustment process while still in the relationship but dumpees start adjusting later after the ending of the relationship.

For the '**mutuals**' (those who jointly decide to end the relationship) the adjustment process is somewhat easier.

At this point let me explain that I am going to present four key concepts that are very closely intertwined but also I should point out that it may get confusing at times. We are going to be viewing the two main people in the end of a relationship drama as the dumper or the dumpee and we will be exploring the nature of two very strong feelings which accompany the trauma of relationship endings - **GUILT** and **REJECTION**.

There are different groups of people at this stage in the recovery process.

(1) Those who walk around in shock, lying on the ground trying to get their emotional wind back

(2) or those walking around looking guilty and trying not to look at those on the ground.

(3) Then there are the others who are walking around holding hands with their former partner..

People in the first category (1) On the ground is the dumpee who was walking the pathway of life when their partner announced they were leaving them and the relationship. OK sometimes the dumpee had some warning and sometimes none at all but either way they have a great deal of difficulty accepting the ending of the relationship.

People in the second category (2) Now those looking guilty and often acting very guilty are the dumpers. They had been thinking about leaving the relationship for some time and were always busy trying to get their courage up to do so but they knew it would hurt their partner. So naturally they avoid looking at the dumpees lying on the ground because that makes them feel more guilty. Often they have moved on further along the process than the dumpee and don't have the same intensity of feelings.

People in the third category (3) Finally, the ones holding hands are the **MUTUALS** having jointly decided to end the relationship. However in my imaginary picture do you notice how few of them there are! OK I hear your question 'why are they ending a relationship if they are such good friends?' And the answer is that because they are such good friends they think of each other and don't wish to be unhappy together in the relationship they have and they want the relationship to end to the benefit of both of them.

To summarise what we are going to be discussing and exploring in this session:

Dumpers are the partners who leave the relationship, and they often feel considerable guilt; dumpees are the partners who want to hang on to the relationship, and they often experience feelings of rejection. Of course it is not really as simple as that but later we will explore in more detail and at this stage I am giving you a map of what we are going to explore.

Nearly everyone has been a dumpee in some relationship and we all know how no one enjoys rejection. I have found that I become very introspective, continually examining myself to find what fault within me causes people to reject me and such self-examination helps me to see myself more clearly and perhaps, as a result, I will change the way I relate to people. So in one sense feeling rejected is helpful. Everyone brings much of their past into a relationship, a past which often determines the course of events in a relationship. Because the relationship has ended it does not mean that I am inadequate or inferior or that there is something wrong with me. Feeling good about yourself is a difficult goal to meet and so don't feel discouraged if it takes quite a period of time to admit that the responsibility is mutual and not yours or your partners alone.

You are a worthwhile person capable of loving and being loved and you have something special to offer and that is your own unique individual self.

Now let us look at guilt. If you feel no guilt you are being harmful to yourself and others because a sense of guilt is helpful in making decisions about the way one chooses to live. Unfortunately, many people experience so much guilt that they become inhibited and

controlled and so the happy balance is just enough guilt to maintain a sense of direction without restricting future options.

The dumper feels powerful feelings of guilt in hurting someone they love or used to love and so the best solution is to listen to your head rather than your heart given that the end of the relationship is, in reality, positive because the relationship developed into being destructive for both people. Instead of sitting around feeling guilty those involved need to be able to say 'this is probably the best decision for both of us.'

One way to resolve guilt is to punish yourself to relieve the guilt. If you see yourself as trying to punish yourself by setting yourself up to experience pain in relationships, maybe you should look at the feelings of guilt from your past which may be motivating your behaviour.

Guilt is usually a result of not living up to some standard of behaviour. If the standard is one you have freely chosen for yourself, and is it a possible one, it is probably healthy to feel some guilt about falling short. But if the standard is someone else's, or societies and not one you have adopted for your own then your guilt feelings are not productive. So time to give yourself a break as it is tough enough to live up to your own standards and you can't please everyone.

'But,' you tell me, 'staying in loving relationships is one of my standards. I feel guilty because I didn't make the relationship work, so I failed to meet one of my own standards.' I realise and understand the feeling. What I hope for you is that you can come to accept your own humanness. Nobody is perfect so maybe you should take a look at that guilt and consider a more useful response to the situation. Try this one for size: 'My partner and I aren't able to make our relationship meet our needs and provide us happiness. It appears that, somehow or another,

we didn't learn enough about interacting with another person in a committed loving relationship.'

One person in one of my seminar's responded at this point to what I said and shared how they remembered whilst at school taking a test that they hadn't fully prepared for. They did badly on the test at the time but didn't fail the whole course. As an adult we can feel guilty because a relationship didn't work. Maybe we can learn from the experience so we can do better next time. We may even help our ex-partner to learn something positive about themselves for the future.

I want at this stage to compare appropriate guilt to the large reservoir of guilt that seems to be free floating within our feelings and personalities. Appropriate guilt is when we do something wrong or do something to hurt somebody, and we feel badly about it. When a relationship ends, it is very appropriate for us to feel bad about hurting somebody or for that matter hurting ourselves. So here appropriate guilt is a process we move through.

However, many of us have long standing guilt, usually from childhood, and there is a large reservoir of guilty feelings waiting to be released. Some event will come along and tap into this reservoir of guilt. Then we will suddenly feel so guilty that we feel anxious, afraid and fearful. The guilt grows to become overwhelming because it does not appear attached to or related to anything around us. It just feels huge in both our mind and our heart. If we have this sort of free floating guilt within us we may need help in counselling to cut down and remove the guilt so we can get it under control or make sure that we do not project such feelings again in our future life.

Acceptance is an important aspect of dealing with rejection and guilt. In my seminars over the years the emotional atmosphere is that of accepting one's own feelings and a feeling of emotional support and so being with people going through similar processes makes us feel accepted. So if you can find warm, supportive, accepting friends you will be able to heal feelings of rejection.

Rejection and guilt are also closely tied to feelings of self-worth and self-love which we will be discussing and exploring later in our work together. Our aim is to improve your feelings of self-worth and self-love so in the future you will be less devastated by rejection.

At this stage you may not know if you are a dumper or a dumpee . First of all it may be a concept that you might not have thought about it. Second, the roles may switch back and forth. Well, language is a clue to whether you are a dumper or dumpee for when I am talking to a seminar group I can frequently identify someone as a dumper or dumpee just by the questions she or he asks.

How, well dumper vocabulary goes like this: 'I need some time and space to get my head straight. I need to be out of this relationship in order to get that time and space. I care for you, but don't love you enough to live with you.. I feel bad about hurting you, but there is nothing I can do about that because staying with you would also hurt you. Can we be friends?'

Dumpee vocabulary goes like this: 'Please don't leave me! Why don't you love me? Tell me what is wrong with me and I will change. There must be something wrong with me, and I don't know what it is. Please tell me what I did wrong. I thought we had a good relationship and I don't see why you want to leave. Please give me some more time before

you leave. I know you want to be friends but I love you. Please don't leave me.'

The dumper may reply: 'I have been trying for a long time to tell you that I was unhappy in the relationship and that we needed to change. You just wouldn't listen. I have tried everything. I don't have any more time. You keep hanging onto me and I just want to be friends.'

Dumpees at this point are likely to be hurt and to cry. They become introspective and try to understand what went wrong: 'Why am I unlovable?' and 'Why did our relationship have to end?' Often there is denial of feelings while the dumpee gains time to recover from the shock. The emotional pain is great for the dumpee at this point.

The vocabulary seems universal; almost all dumpers and dumpees use the same words. The problem of timing is evident. The dumper claims to have been trying for 'months and years' to do something about the problem and during much of that time was thinking about leaving. The dumpee has not heard this dissatisfaction, perhaps because he or she had started using denial long before the dumper actually left. But when the dumper makes the announcement, the dumpee really starts denying and refusing to believe there is anything wrong, 'We had such a good relationship!'

Notice the difference in priorities. The dumper wants to work on personal growth and the dumpee want to work on the relationship. The dumpee is angry but the dumpee does not express these angry emotions because the relationship ending is still in the early stages.

During this period the dumper is feeling much guilt, acting super nice, and wants to give the dumpee anything. The dumpee is feeling rejected,



willing to give the dumper anything. The dumpee is feeling rejected, anxious for the dumper to come back, and afraid to express anger for fear it will drive the dumper even further away.

Eventually anger replaces the feeling of guilt in the dumper and the feelings of rejection in the dumpee and at this stage the relationship ending honeymoon period is over. This phase often begins around three months after separation, but the timing may vary. 'Good court settlements' are often negotiated because dumpers feel so guilty they will give up everything, while dumpees will settle for anything in the hope of getting the dumper back.

Within this basic structure there are two other elements to consider.

The good dumper is a person who has tried to work on the relationship in order to make it last. A good dumper was willing to make changes, invest emotionally in trying to change, and enter relationship counselling but has finally realised that the relationship was destructive to both people, and that it is better to end an unhealthy relationship than to continue to destroy each other. This person has the courage and strength to end the relationship, and it often takes a great deal of courage and strength to do so.

Then there are Bad Dumpers who are similar to run away children. They believe the grass is greener on the other side and all that is needed for happiness is to get out of the relationship. There is often another relationship waiting in the wings. The bad dumper avoids dealing with feelings and avoids looking inside at attitudes that might need to be changed. Bad dumpers often leave quickly without even a goodbye conversation or explanation of their intent to end the partnership.

Good dumpees are open, honest, willing to work on the relationship and willing to go for counselling. They seldom have had an affair, and have likely worked on communicating. However, there are no innocent victims in the sense that they too have done things to hurt the relationship. They are basically at the wrong time and place when the internal explosion and the need to be out of the relationship takes place in the dumper.

Bad dumpees are people who want out of the relationship but do not have the courage and strength to be the dumper. They make it miserable for the other person who is then forced into being the dumper.

There are few of us who fit perfectly into these four categories. Most people are a combination of both good and bad dumpers or dumpees.

Another important series of elements in the dumper / dumpee relationship is the pain cycle. The dumper is not hurting as much when the relationship ends, but the dumpee's pain is great and motivates rapid growth and adjustment. When the dumpee is reaching a good emotional adjustment, the dumper frequently comes back and begins talking about reconciliation. This really blows the dumpee away.

Gordon exclaimed, 'I devoted all of my emotional energy to learning to accept the ending of the relationship and I'd given up completely the hope that John would come back. And then he called me!'

There are many different ways to interpret this phenomenon: Perhaps the dumper, in contrast to the sense of euphoria when they first left, has found it so scary out there in the single world and that the security of the old relationship now looks good.

Another interpretation is illustrated by dumpee anger, 'He made me the dumpee. Now he wants to make me the dumper, to share the guilt!' Perhaps the best explanation comes from observing that the dumper comes back around the time the dumpee is 'making it' successfully in terms of rebuilding their future life. So maybe when John no longer felt the quilt and responsibility of having Gordon cling with dependency to him he felt free to come back into the more equal relationship.

The typical dumpee reaction is not to take the dumper back. Dumpees find that they can make it on their own, that being single has advantages, and that it feels good to experience the personal growth that has been unfolding during this period of separation for them. If you get a dumpee to talk long enough, you will learn what was wrong with the relationship. It is only during the first period of denial that the dumpee maintains there was nothing wrong with the relationship. 'Now I can see what was happening all of those years! Besides, I don't see that much change and personal growth in John, so why should I want him and the old relationship back?' At this point the dumper usually gets dumped!

I hope that this discussion of dumpers and dumpees will enable you to see that feelings of guilt and rejection are part of the process. Intellectual understanding is often the first step of awareness that leads to emotional understanding. Feelings of guilt and rejection are normal and typical during the ending of a relationship - in fact you may have been experiencing these feelings before. But the ending of a relationship tends to magnify and emphasize feelings so you can be more aware of them and thereby learn to deal with the more effectively.

Take some time now to consider the different perspectives partners get of what happened during the ending of the relationship.

**CHECKLIST** Take a look at the checklist so we can prepare for our discussion.

1. I am no longer overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and/or rejection.
2. I can accept that I was either a dumper or a dumpee or that we made a mutual decision to end the relationship.
3. I can now accept that being a dumper may not necessarily mean I should now remain feeling guilty.
4. I can now accept that being a dumpee may not necessarily mean I should feel rejected and unlovable.
5. I am aware of the difference in feelings and behaviour between dumpers and dumpees.
6. I realise that both dumpers and dumpees feel emotional pain even though it may differ in both timing and intensity.
7. I understand that in some areas I was a dumper and in other areas I was a dumpee, since this is typical of most relationships.
8. I understand the concept of dumper/dumpee is most meaningful at the point of separation and as I grow and move forwards it becomes less and less important to me in life.
9. I have looked at my life patterns to see if rejection or guilt feelings have controlled much of my behaviour in the past.
10. I am working to overcome the influence of rejection and guilt in my life.



## STAGE RE-BUILDING FOUR

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### GRIEF BOYS and GIRLS DO CRY

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Grief is a very important part of the process when a relationship has ended and so you need to work through these emotions in order to move on fully to the next stage. Here, initially, we will intellectually explore the stages of grief so that you become emotionally aware of grief process and thereby to enable you to do the grieving that you have been afraid to embrace and experience. We will then work through this challenging process in our one to one sessions.

“Weekends are... all the lonely hours poured into remembering.  
All the lonely thoughts poured into trying to forget.  
The harder I try to forget, the easier it is to remember.  
The past can't die and the future can't live.....But the present exists.  
If silence is deafening, then what is quiet?  
Quiet is weekends and weekends are hell.  
Wake up and face the reality – why should I?  
Weekends enforce reality, weekdays subdue it.  
Saturday - it's a world of two plus two, where one has no meaning and no value.  
Sunday the body rests, but where is the 'off' button for the mind.”

This is going to be quite a long section and so I have put in some all-important breaks for you to take time out from reading and create time for reflection. It will be good to have your journal to hand and open in case you wish to write a few notes or draw a few line images.

We are now working with one of the most difficult and emotionally draining aspects of rebuilding. Whenever there is loss of something important in our lives we suffer grief. For death there is a set ritual with funeral, coffin and the acceptance that grieving is important. In ending a relationship there are no prescribed rituals other than a court hearing, the packing up of a home and informing friends and family and so grief is often not acknowledged or accepted and the death of a relationship is cause for us to grieve.

Many forms of loss happen when a relationship ends which many people grieve over. There is the loss of a future; the sharing of a future as a couple, of love, of partner and lover and the social status of being a couple and then there is the loss of role both personally and within society and the status as a couple and all that that communicates both to us and those around us. So for many people the loss of the relationship is as important as the loss of the partner.

Then there is the loss of the future and plans, goals, careers and home together. It is very common when we end a relationship to look at past pain. I have found that many people have not grieved a loss in the past, such as the death of a loved one connecting with another loss now in our life often powerfully connects with re-experiencing past pain which intensifies the current grieving process. Essentially for those who carried such unresolved loss from the past their current grief is especially painful and difficult.

But it is not just about past loss. If we have a history of unfulfilled emotional needs such as one man who began working the seminar on unhappiness he experienced during his lonely childhood then here is the chance to break free. Many people are forced to move away from the

house they lived together with their partner in and single parents have to grief the loss of children when they are with the other parent. Naturally the children must also grieve the loss of a house, parent and family.

### **Essentially for most people grief has a push-pull effect.**

When you are hurt you have a massive empty feeling and you expect friends to help you fill it. You talk to friends and get close to them and yet you still have this empty feeling like a big wound and therefore you feel so vulnerable to being hurt again. As a result when people get too close you tend to push them away in order to prevent further emotional pain. Naturally this creates quite a mixed message for your friends.

With grief we feel emotionally drained and sleep problems are often common. Either falling asleep at night if we don't use drugs or alcohol or waking up early in the morning and though tired unable to go back to sleep. This is a major concern at a time when we need to have rest both mentally as well as physically. Also the content of our dreams or the fact that on waking we return to the reality of loss makes grief hard work. It is quite normal if challenging to feel continuously tired until we have finished our process of grieving.

Eating is a problem during grief. It is common to feel a tightness in the throat and find swallowing difficult. Sometimes the mouth feels dry and you may not have much of an appetite resulting in forcing yourself to eat.

Rapid mood changes are typical during grief given that in one moment you feel forgetful or distracted and then suddenly emotions rise only to



find that almost a second later the pain is once again with you. The whole sudden mood swing may have been triggered by a conversation from a friend showing an act of kindness and also your friends can feel confused and sad not knowing what they have done to upset you.

There may period when you sense a loss of reality, of being in a daze, in an unreal world. You observe the world as though watching a film, remote and detached from the events happening around you. You may also experience a period of lack of contact in regard to your emotions and this is based on the fact that you are afraid to trust your feelings because of your inability to control them. The emotional pain is so great; you have to protect yourself from feeling too much by effectively creating times of deadening your emotions. At these times it is common to have a sense of emotional 'numbness'.

Many people report to me how they experience a lot of fantasizing during grief. Fantasizing about seeing your former partner, or that you hear their voice. That part of your body is missing, as though your heart were removed, which symbolizes the loss of the other person. For many this part of the process may be frightening if you do not recognise that it is a natural and normal part of the grieving process.

Loneliness, lack of concentration, weakness and a feeling of helplessness, depression or as I prefer to term it given grief is a normal healthy reaction 'intense sadness'; guilt, lack of sexual interest and perhaps the feeling of impotence or frigidity may accompany the grieving process. Self-criticism in the sense of a need to continually question your mistakes and how you relieve the past unfold on a daily basis during this part of the journey.

Anger is a part of grief resulting from powerful feelings in regard to the unfairness of both the recent loss as well as life in general. Anger directed towards your former partner may approach rage in its intensity but I will look in more detail about this part of the process in our next online session.

Suicidal feelings are common with approximately three fourths of people attending seminars reporting such thoughts and feelings. Research indicates a much higher than normal rate of suicidal thoughts and the associated feelings can appear overwhelming at such a time. Such apparently uncontrollable mood swings, loss of reality, fantasies, intense sadness, and suicidal feelings often lead us to question 'Am I going crazy?' and for many this is a difficult fear to discuss. As you can guess holding such a fear simply makes it even more isolated and challenging but rest assured that this is a natural normal feeling which everyone experiences rather than a permanent psychological diagnosis. You are experiencing normal grief reactions.

So these grief symptoms may be handled by acknowledging them, accepting that they indicate grief work to be done and allowing, with the right support, to feel the pain without the denial. Crying, shouting, and writhing are non-destructive actions to express your grief and so make a decision to manage the grief by deciding on an appropriate time and place to do grief work.

When you are working this is naturally not the time so you must contain and put the grief to one side which becomes easier once you have consciously set aside times to allow your grieving process to unfold. In doing so your emotions become easier to control at other times.

Elsewhere you can read about my work in PNI (psycho-neuroimmunology) and the common almost universal fact that if you do not travel through your grief work then your body may express the repressed feelings of grief in psychosomatic symptoms of illness. This may be simple ailments such as headaches, or you may develop ulcers, arthritis, and asthma as unresolved grief puts a great deal of stress upon all parts of your body.

Naturally we try to protect ourselves during this time and many people I work with say this part of the rebuilding process is the hardest as they don't want to experience the pain and crying of grief. Somewhere deep inside you will know when the grief work is complete and you have worked through the process of letting go it means that you cannot experience these feelings again.

### **TIME TO TAKE A BREAK**

Let me take you through the major stages involved in the grieving process or journey. I am greatly indebted to my friend and colleague, Dr Elizabeth Kubler-Ross for her fine work in helping clarify the stages of the grief process.

**Stage 1.** The first reaction is **DENIAL** 'This isn't happening to me. If I just wait a while, everything will be okay and we will be back together again.' This is often a state of emotional shock, numbness, and denial of feelings.

Naturally one may enter an almost robotic phase during this time, acting as though nothing is happening, repressing anger and a few other emotions as well and feeling down no matter people say or what happens around you. There is the hope that your partner will not leave

and you will wake up and all will have been a nasty dream. You don't want to talk to people be they friends of neighbours about the ending of the relationship indeed you don't really want to tell yourself as this would make it real.

**Stage 2.** Is the emergence of powerful feelings as one gradually begins to accept the end of the relationship and such powerful feelings of anger start to emerge and often at the most unexpected times. **ANGER** that is turned inwards can contribute to a form of reactive depression. As we work on this stage expressing the anger now feels easier but there is also concern that the partner will not return to the relationship at any cost because of such anger which can result in times of feeling both guilt and ambivalence. Now the frustrations in the relationship which built up over time may also surface in the form of intense feelings of anger. Friends will have told you how they wondered how you tolerated your former partner for so long. In turn it may be the case that you go to great lengths to convince others how terrible your former partner was which often results in the "Catch 22" situation where you lose both ways. If you talk about how good that person is, how do you stay angry? But if you say how terrible that person is, then the question becomes why did you choose such a terrible person to love in the first place! You have now started to work through the grief process when you admit and express such anger.

**Stage 3.** You are beginning to face the fact that the relationship is ending, yet for a whole host of reasons both emotional and practical with reluctance, one may start **BARGAINING**: "I'll do anything. Just take me back!" This stage is dangerous for the ending process because many people do get back together, but for all the wrong reasons - to avoid loneliness and unhappiness in considering life without their

partner. They are not choosing to live successfully with their former partner but instead choosing the 'lesser of two evils'

**Stage 4.** Stage four of grief is **LETTING GO** of the relationship and is essentially the darkness before the dawn. Very intense sadness is typical of this stage but differs in expression from the earlier stage of intense sadness about the loss of the relationship and extends to your life in general in the sense of 'Is this all there is to life?' There is much internal dialogue about the meanings of life: 'Why am I here on earth? What is the purpose of my life?'

This is a stage of personal growth to build a stronger identity, to find a deeper purpose for living and to make life more meaningful.

A number of people are left feeling like they can't go on living during this stage with feelings such as 'I've tried so long and worked so hard, and here I am again down in the pits and I don't want to let go!' Because this stage sometimes comes so long after the actual separation, people are naturally surprised to feel so down and intensely sad again. It is discouraging to have worked so hard and feel so little progress. However I have found that once people are aware of this stage and that it is a stage then they progress through it more easily. They are essentially comforted to realise that this is a normal feeling and they are not getting anything wrong at all. Be encouraged to know that with the right support that this stage will not last for ever and that it is very different from the earlier stage of grief.

**Stage 5.** This is the stage of **ACCEPTANCE** of the loss of the relationship. You have begun to feel free from the emotional pain of grief and to no longer feel the need to invest emotionally in the past

relationship. Now one can begin to move along the journey with personal freedom and independence.

It is critically important to work through these five stages of grief before entering another relationship. We will discuss the reasons for this in our session.

Now you feel and understand the grieving process and have permission to grieve as a healthy mental activity you may feel freer to do some needed grieving which may even include some past loss besides that of the loss of the relationship in your life. People I work with often find writing a letter and certainly when my partner died this is something that I didn't just find helpful at the time but in the future for it was something that helped me when I entered another transitional phase in my life.

In addition to our working together I encourage you to use your close and insightful friends for support as you work through your grief and do not talk to people who have never grieved for they often have no understanding or respect for this powerful and all important process. This is something that we will focus on in our session so just make a mental note at this stage.

**CHECKLIST** So our checklist before our next session is:

1. I give myself permission to grieve if and when I need to.
2. I am not burying the grief and sadness anymore but I am trying to express it.
3. I now have physical and emotional energy from morning until night.
4. I have stopped feeling intense sadness most of the time.
5. I have no trouble concentrating.
6. I no longer feel like crying most of the time.
7. I have overcome the feeling that I am in a dazed state all of the time.
8. My emotions and moods are back in my control.
9. I have no trouble going to sleep and sleeping all night.
10. I notice that my body weight has stabilized.
11. My appetite is good.
12. I no longer feel mechanical in my day to day living habits.
13. I have outgrown the feeling that I am losing my mind.
14. I have stopped continually talking about my relationship and life crisis.
15. I have no thoughts of ending my life.
16. I no longer have a lump in my throat.

17. My stomach feels relaxed.
18. I am beginning to be emotionally close to people again.
19. I understand the grief process.
20. I have identified which of the five stages of grief that I am in.
21. I have identified what I need to grieve be this a person, relationship, a future.
22. I am comfortable talking about my feelings of grief with a close friend.
23. I have written a letter of good-bye to the loss I am experiencing now.



## STAGE RE-BUILDING FIVE

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### **ANGER How Could You Do This To ME?**

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You will feel powerful rage when your relationship ends. Feeling anger is a natural, healthy part of being human. However, anger is different from aggression which is a destructive form of expressing anger.

It is not healthy to keep your anger locked up inside and nor is it to express aggressively. You can learn to express both your anger over the ending of your relationship along with everyday anger constructively.

I don't know what came over me. I saw his car in the parking bay and I knew he had met this girlfriend and left in her car. I went over and let the air out of all four tyres. Then I went behind a building and waited until they returned so I could watch them find his car with the tyres flat.

I watched them trying to solve their problem and I felt so, so good. I've never done anything like that before in my life. Guess I didn't know how angry I could get.

Jean.

We are approaching a point where we can become consumed with anger and if we don't deal with it adequately, it can stop us in our tracks instead of us progressing through the rebuilding process.

Relationship anger is extreme rage, vindictiveness, and bitterness which at time seems overpowering. It is a special kind of anger that we usually have not experienced before and many of our friends who are still in relationships do not understand it either unless they have gone through the breakdown and end of a relationship.

You may try to keep this anger inside and not express it and this can result in reactive depression because one cause of such intense sadness is anger not being expressed. The dumper does not express it because he/she feels guilty and the dumpee fears the other person will not come back so both are 'nice' for a while, except that they feel a lot of intensely sad thoughts and feelings.

Anger is expressed in violent ways many times.. Many people, given the opportunity while they are angriest, will commit an act of violence. It is crucial at such times to be able to restrain ourselves and find more suitable methods of expressing these feelings of rage and vindictiveness. We can find more constructive uses of anger than destroying ourselves with depression and psychosomatic problems (headaches, body tension, ulcers, and the like.) Also, since the fires of anger can spread to other rebuilding stages, if we can work our way through this block, we will have much less trouble handling the other all important parts on our rebuilding journey.

### **This rebuilding block has three phases:**

**One** - learning to accept that it is okay and part of being human to feel angry. There are many myths in our society that say that to be angry is to be weak, childish or destructive. In essence we are told that it is not permissible to be angry. Now we have to relearn that it is natural and

whilst this might be easy to do intellectually it is much more difficult to embrace emotionally. Remember there is a difference between that feeling of anger and the way we act to express it.

**Two** - after we embrace that we are human and naturally feel anger we now need to see positive ways of expression which are not destructive to ourselves or those around us. We can do it with humour and physical exercise.

One of the most destructive ways is where people use children as a vehicle for expressing anger at their former partner. Some make children into spies when they return from visits. Some people restrict their former partner access.

**Three** - is the stage of forgiveness and this is not just about forgiving the other person but also learning to forgive yourself for we are also angry with ourselves. You are responsible for this anger because it is your feeling not someone else's and whilst projecting blame for anger on to someone else may be a part of the process - the part that allows us to get out the anger that has been causing our depression - when you get further along the journey you must learn to take responsibility for that anger yourself.

Essentially it is so much easier to blame someone else but this stage of forgiveness is actually learning to forgive ourselves for the choices we have made or the actions we have taken and letting go of our anger.

At this point I would like to discuss positive ways to express anger; ways that will not be harmful to you or to others.

Let me emphasize that important difference between the special relationship ending anger you may feel and your anger in connection to other life situations. First I will present some ways to express your anger whenever it occurs in your relationships. Relationship ending anger needs to be vented and released in a non-destructive way. Anger in future relationships - friends, family, partners, and children - needs to be expressed directly, firmly, honestly but in a constructive way to encourage communication and a deeper relationship.

Let's us focus for a short while on our temptation and desire to take our anger out on the former spouses directly. We want to call them up and hurt them, get back at them, be vindictive, and express our anger directly to them. I do not believe that this is helpful in most cases. When you throw a few logs on the relationship ending - anger fire, your ex may throw a few logs back in retaliation. Pretty soon the fire is consuming both of you. I suggest that you express your anger in other ways, such as those suggested here, rather than taking it out on your former partner.

Humour is a very effective way of getting rid of anger. Harriet was the comedian of one seminar group. She would come to the group and say, 'I don't know what to tell people when they ask me where my former partner is. I don't want to tell them that he's off with another woman. So I finally decided that next time a person asks me, I'll tell them that he croaked!' she laughs and the whole class laughs and everyone has vented angry feelings through laughter.

One of the most effective ways of expressing anger is to call a friend and say, 'I need to talk about this anger that I am feeling. I know I may not make sense sometimes, I know that I may become very emotional.

and I know that some of the things that I say may not be what I'm really feeling all of the time. But right now I'm feeling really angry, and I need you to listen to me talk about my anger.'

Many people are able to use fantasies to help get rid of it. Sandy was an expert on this. She would fantasize the following incident: 'I would go to the garden store and buy a sack of hot lawn fertilizer. Then in the middle of the night I would go over to my ex's house and write obscene four letter words with the fertilizer in front of his house. Then he would read them every time he had to mow his front lawn all summer long!'

We have to remember that these are fantasies and that we should not act them out.

Physical exercise of any sort is usually helpful. Physical games, jogging, house cleaning, beating a rug, or anything like that is especially useful. Anger is a source of energy and the energy has to be used up. Physical activity is a good way of using up that energy.

Tears are another good way for some people to express anger as crying is a positive, honest expression of feelings. Another effective way of getting rid of anger is to write a letter saying all of the things that you would like to say to that former partner. Write it in really big letters; maybe use a piece of crayon and write it with lots of anger. But after you have written the letter, do not post it. Instead, take the letter to the fireplace and burn it up. You have both expressed and symbolically burned up your anger.

You can use the 'empty chair', an effective gestalt therapy technique, which I use often with people I work with as well as with myself. Imagine the person sitting in an 'empty' chair is your former partner, and say everything that you would like to say to that person. If you are

good enough at imaging, you can even switch chairs and say the things that person would say back to you. Then go back to your chair and say the things that you would like to say again.

Another simple and effective way of getting anger out is to take an old garden hose and cut to a three foot length. Simply use it to beat on something that will not be damaged.

Incidentally, some people will not will not be able to express their anger because of a need to keep such anger close to them like a companion. If they let go of that anger, they will not have it as a toll for punishing the other person. So they have some sort of payoff or reward for keeping the anger.

Anger is one of the most important rebuilding blocks for if the fires are burning out of control in you then you will have trouble working up along the process of recovery. A great sense of relief will result from working through your anger until there is nothing but ashes left. It will free you to have energy for other areas in your life. You can forgive yourself and the other person. You have stopped blaming yourself, you have stopped feeling like a failure; you have found the internal peace that comes from letting go of everything that was painful. You find that you can talk to the former partner in a calm and rational manner without becoming emotionally upset. Now you can deal with friends- either your partner's or yours - without becoming irritated.

## **TIME TO TAKE A BREAK**

Have you thought about how appropriate it is to feel very angry when a relationship ends? "What" you may ask "is appropriate anger?" Anger that is related to the present situation.

So the healthy approach to such anger and dealing with it is:

1. Recognise and allow yourself to believe that anger is a natural, normal, healthy, non-evil human feeling. Everyone feels it; we just don't all express it. So basically you needn't fear your anger.
- 2 - Remember you are responsible for your own feelings. You got angry at what happened; the other person didn't 'make' you angry.
3. Remember that anger and aggression are not the same thing. Anger can be expressed assertively.
4. Get to know yourself, so that you recognise those events and behaviours which trigger your anger. As some say 'find your buttons, so you'll know when they are pushed.'
- 5 . Learn to relax. If you have developed the skill of relaxing yourself, learn to apply this response when your anger is triggered.
6. Develop assertive methods for expressing your anger, following principles such as being spontaneous and not waiting to let anger build into resentment; stating it directly; avoiding sarcasm and innuendo; using honest and expressive language; avoiding name calling, put downs and physical attacks.
7. Keep your life clear. Deal with issues when they arise, when you feel the feelings - not after hours/days or weeks of stewing about it.

Go ahead and start to get angry but develop positive, assertive styles for expression. You and those around you WILL appreciate it.

**CHECKLIST** Now before our session check these statements and remember to be honest with yourself.

- I can communicate with my former partner in a calm and rational manner
- I am comfortable seeing and talking to my former partner.
- I no longer feel like unloading my feelings of anger and hurt on my former partner
- I have stopped hoping that my former partner is feeling as much emotional pain as I am or as much emotional pain as I WAS
- I no longer feel angry at my former partner
- It is not important any more that my family, friends, and associates be on my side rather than my former partner's side.
- I have outgrown the need to get even with my former partner for hurting me.
- I no longer blame my former partner for the failure of our relationship
- I have stopped trying to hurt my former partner by letting him/her know how much I hurt emotionally.
- I have overcome my anger and I have begun to accept the things my former partner has been doing.
- I am expressing my anger in a positive manner that is not destructive to me or to those around me.
- I am able to admit it when I feel angry rather than denying my angry feelings.
- I understand the emotional blocks that have kept me from expressing anger in a positive manner.
- I am able to express my anger constructively rather than venting it inappropriately.



- I am reaching a stage of forgiveness rather than remaining angry.

## STAGE RE-BUILDING SIX

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### LETTING GO and Moving On

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You now need to stop investing in your former relationship and it is easier to let go if you realise your life is now full rather than empty. Dumpers tend to let go more quickly, often because they have let go even before they acted and left the relationship. Failure to let go may be a symptom that you are not facing some painful feelings within yourself.

Stella: 'Harry left me four years ago and he immediately remarried.'

Steven 'I notice you are still wearing a wedding ring.'

Stella: 'Yes it is very important to me.'

Steven: 'And when you wrote a cheque for your therapy Harry's name is still on the bank account.'

Stella: 'yes I guess I just can't let go.'

First what is the definition of letting go? Imagine your hands clasped together with the fingers intertwined, and then imagine pulling those hands apart while you continue to clasp. That gives you a graphic image of what we are talking about. It involves the painful letting go of all the strong emotional feelings for another person.

It is common for people to claim that they want to be friends during the 'honeymoon period' of relationship ending then when the dumper guilt

and dumppee anger emerges the desire to stay friends begins to disappear. But many people strive so hard to remain friends that they fail to let go and with this fail to let the anger come and help them do it. As a result it is often desirable not to maintain the 'friendship' during the early stage and wait until after you have moved forward within yourself let go of the belief that the relationship can continue. Essentially what I am saying is that trying to be friends may prolong the process and even endanger the possibility of being friends later on.

### **Have you finally let go?**

- I think of my former partner only occasionally now.
- I rarely fantasise about being with my former partner.
- I no longer become emotionally upset when I think about my former partner.
- I have stopped trying to please my former partner.
- I have accepted that my former partner and I will not get back together again.
- I have stopped finding excuses to talk to my former partner.
- I rarely talk about my former partner with friends.
- I have outgrown any feelings of romantic love with my former partner.
- I no longer wish to continue a sexual relationship with my former partner.
- I have given up my emotional commitment to my former partner.
- I can accept my former partner having a loving relationship with another person.

- I feel like a single person rather than a person in a committed relationship with my former partner.
- I am no longer angry with my former partner.