

Pain relief needed when parting

The more people are satisfied with their partner relationship, the higher their level of satisfaction with life in general.

So it follows that losing the relationship can be devastating.

Unfortunately, separation is a fact of life. It always involves pain for both parties.

Separation is painful because the two people involved have been in a close, intimate relationship and have most likely made plans for the future, and now it has all come unstuck. There is enormous feeling of loss and grieving for a future that is not going to happen.

Ending a relationship brings all kinds of upheaval, including issues over where to live and the time you have with your children.

Your world has been turned upside down and emotionally you have lost a limb.

In 80 to 90 percent of separations there is clearly a person who wants to leave and one who doesn't. In more than 60 percent of cases the one who leaves is the woman.

Separation is different from bereavement because the partner is still here but out of reach.

And it's no bowl of cherries either for the one who initiates the separation. Often a long period of pain precedes the decision.

Separating couples often get caught in a confusing dance of intimacy soon after separation. The person who leaves may feel guilty or responsible and initiate friendly overtures to help the person who is left, such as inviting them around to discuss parenting.

The recipient of these overtures can see this as a chance to reconcile, because it seems to be evidence that they are still cherished. They may think the separation was just a glitch. They overstay their welcome, the other person becomes angry and everyone ends up frustrated.

For some, the separation is a genuine mutual decision, but that would comprise no more than 20 percent of separating couples.

In most separations, leaver and left feel anger, sadness and some lingering attachment. The leaver tends to have experienced his/her greatest emotional turmoil some time before the person who is left.

So how do you help yourself through this pain? Whether you have initiated the separation or not, it is really important to have an independent third person to talk to and to act as your sounding board – perhaps a supportive close friend or a pastor.

Some people can draw more easily in these resources than others; women tend to be better connected socially than men.

If you don't have a sounding board, seek out a professional counsellor with experience in separation issues, or you may find yourself increasingly isolated.

Once the separation is accepted as definite, consider going to professional mediators (FDR practitioners). They can help you discuss the "nuts and bolts" of the separation, such as the adjustments that need to be made around finances and parenting.

If you can do this jointly, you can avoid a costly situation whereby third parties raise the barriers between the partners rather than help them to find mutually acceptable solutions.

The Family Court, Relationships Australia Victoria and your nearest Family Relationship Centre can help you to access mediation /FDR services.

Some people face a dilemmas about whether to tell their boss and people at work. If you're the one who has initiated the separation, you may be able to manage your life without involving work colleagues.

But most people will appreciate the support that should come from close workmates or their boss – they, too, may have had to cope with separation.

It's nice to know the people around you care about the trauma you are going through.

Survival tips

- **Have an independent third person you can talk to and use as a sounding board**
- **Read books about adjustment to separation and divorce**
- **Consider professional assistance if you are feeling overwhelmed**
- **Have hope, you will survive and thrive.**