

rebuilding blocks in the divorce process

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Have you been divorced in the last year or two? If you have, you may be interested in the following model of the divorce process.¹ Also, this divorce model should help you work with divorced clientele.

Although there are great individual variations, most people are able to work through the building blocks of the divorce process in the first year. In fact, some people have worked through some of the beginning steps before the separation has taken place.

Working through divorce requires working through relationships—past and new relationships. Depression often accompanies divorce and divorced people have a much higher suicide rate than the general population. Divorced males have a higher suicide rate than divorced females.

Divorce is still not readily accepted in today's society. This makes it more difficult for all people involved, including not only family members but friends and work associates. Some people will accept you and your divorce; others will find acceptance difficult. I suspect that being a divorced Extension professional has caused many a raised eyebrow, many an unkind remark. Divorced people are a persecuted minority. I know because I'm divorced.

The number of marriages in the U.S. have been going down and the number of divorces have been going up since 1972. In 1974, there were 44 divorces for every 100 marriages in this country. In 1975, this had risen to over 47 divorces for every 100 marriages according to the Bureau of Vital Statistics. The success rate, by the way, of second marriages is going up.

Although there usually is a "dumpee" and a "dumper," it should be remembered that divorce is always a cooperative

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venture. It's not a question of "why you got divorced" but one of "why you got married." Often a couple married for the wrong reasons, including strong societal pressures to get married.

Religion and children are two building blocks not specifically in my model. These two building blocks are very important to many people. If you're willing to deal *with them, these too can become positive building blocks.*

The rebuilding process of the divorce model can be seen in Figure 1. The blocks are arranged in approximate chronological order from the base to the top.

1. *Self-acceptance of your divorce.* We want to at first deny that we're becoming divorced—after all, only losers become divorced.
2. *Rejection and/or guilt.* The dumpee feels more rejection; the dumper feels more guilt. (Dumpee—I must really have something wrong with me if the person who has known me the best is now unwilling to continue a love-relationship with me.) (Dumper—I feel so guilty for having hurt the person I loved.)
3. *Loneliness.* I didn't realize so many of my daily living habits revolved around that person. How can I face life alone?
4. *Grief.* A person must mourn and grieve the loss of any love-object, whether it be a person or a thing. The grief process of divorce is similar to the grief process of death. A person must experience the pain of grief rather than avoiding it.
5. *Self-concept.* We build our self-concept socially. Ending a love-relationship is very damaging to our self-concept.
6. *Rebuilding friendships.* Friends are very helpful to us in times of grief and trauma. Most people find while going through the divorce process that they need to develop new friendships because it's difficult to keep the old ones.
7. *Feeling loveable.* We feel that we failed in our love-relationship; therefore we must be unloveable.
8. *Disentanglement.* We must dissipate the strong emotional feelings that we had for the former love-object person—whether the feelings be love, hate, anger, or whatever.
9. *Anger.* We find ourselves totally consumed with anger at times and we must find ways to express that anger in a positive and constructive manner.

10. *Sex*. It's hard to sleep alone now after sleeping with another person for so long. We must decide what to do with our unmet sexual needs.
11. *Trust*. It feels safer to be out in the lonely cold than to get burned again.
12. *Leftovers*. The old patterns of interacting aren't left behind with the former love-object person, but persist into our new relationships. We must throw out the leftovers through changes in our patterns of interacting if the patterns are self-defeating behavior.
13. *Aliveness*. We eventually begin to feel alive again after feeling numb. We find that we can trust our feelings and act on them rather than fearing what we're feeling.
14. *Singleness*. It's enjoyable to have our own daily living habits without having to conform to another person's living habits. It feels good being a single person.
15. *Freedom*. We find the freedom to be ourselves. We can make a choice of either living alone or entering into a committed relationship, and we feel free to be able to do either choice and remain happy.

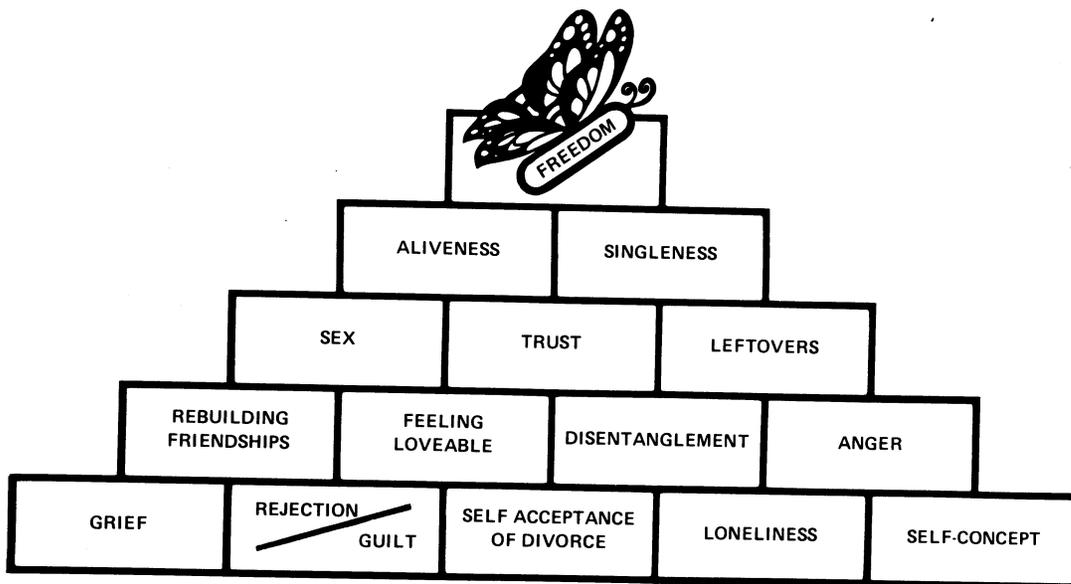


Figure 1. The rebuilding blocks of the divorce process model.

In my own research,² the two longest building blocks are social relationships and anger. These two blocks usually take about three years to work through to the point where they become building blocks rather than stumbling blocks for you.

The building blocks described in this model will give you an intellectual understanding of the divorce process. You will then need to work through these building blocks on an emotional level. Good luck on your rebuilding process!

Footnotes

1. From a forthcoming booklet, *Making Divorce a Growth Process* (Greeley, Colo.: Family Relations Learning Center, 1977).
2. Bruce Fisher, "Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Formerly Married People Through a Divorce Adjustment Seminar" (ED.D. dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, 1976).

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