



Divorce Stress: Coping with Anniversaries

by award-winning author and stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Q: "Dear Susie, Yesterday was my anniversary, and I've been crying for a week. How can I get over the profound sense of loss I feel ever since our divorce?"

A: Sadly, your question is a very common one these days. The idyllic marriages we dreamed of in which loving partners thrive and grow together through a lifetime, are increasingly rare, and require not only the commitment, respect and shared responsibility we intended when we said, "I do," but also some measure of timing, emotional stability and perhaps even luck. But each relationship we enter in our lives has had purpose, and brings lessons. Even those that end before we feel wish they had. The loss of a loved one, whether through divorce, death, geographic relocation, or end of a friendship, may trigger feelings of bereavement, abandonment, depression, insecurity, fear, and sometimes anger. All those emotions are reasonable short-term responses to a profound loss, but if they persist over time, they also cause stress responses that can be harmful. At such times, we need to muster all our inner resilience, and put ourselves in "intensive self-care." At these times we summon support from loving friends and family, and healthcare professionals we can trust.

Anniversaries can be particularly poignant. While such a loss as yours feels like an ending, and it is, it's also the beginning of a new chapter. We may feel angry, or unspeakably bereft. But we don't want to get stuck in the grief or anger. As the saying goes, "It's okay to look at the past--as long as you don't stare." Meaning often mitigates stress. What we gain from having loved, and what good we have shared for however long, are real and true and undiminished by the final outcome.

Life really is short, and there's a lot of living yet to be done! Rediscover joy in small moments, learn a new craft or skill or language. Plan what you would like your life to look like in five years. And, allow yourself to grieve as necessary. Good friends, "tincture of time," and a little laughter every day help us to heal. While finding our way through the period after a breakup, sometimes it helps to schedule some dedicated, but limited, "sad time." Block maybe a half-hour hour, a couple of times a week, to go ahead and feel really, really sad. Set a timer. Cry, feel angry, journal, whine to a patient friend. But schedule something uplifting and joyful to do when the timer goes off, something that reminds you that there is so much more to who you are, and who you will become, than whatever you may be feeling today.

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