



## 7 stages of relationship breakdown recovery

**Divorce and relationship breakdown cause enormous stress and emotional pain, but the cycle we go through is similar to that of the grieving process.**

**Where are you in the cycle? And if you're stuck at a certain stage, what can you do to shift yourself forwards?**



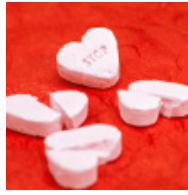
**The Starting Over Show  
Brighton March 2009  
[www.startingovershow.co.uk](http://www.startingovershow.co.uk)**



The Starting Over Show is the first event of its kind in the UK and has been designed to provide useful information, expert advice, resources and support to anyone who has experienced a relationship break up or significant life crisis or change, all under one roof.

Exciting guest speaker **Daily Mail columnist and author Anna Pasternak**, will giving a talk and providing a book signing of her novel "Daisy Dooley Does Divorce". **Channel 5 'The Wright Way' Divorce Doctor Francine Kaye** will be staging a workshop for the benefit of our visitors on the day.

## 7 STAGES OF RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN RECOVERY

**One: Breakdown**

I remember standing outside my house knowing it was to be sold and with no idea whether I would see a penny of it, three young kids, no career, and a fortieth birthday looming. I felt like such a fool, and really guilty for having got my kids into this position, even though I really hadn't seen it coming.

Whether it creeps up on you, or hits you like a sledgehammer, the breakdown of a relationship with your spouse, business partner or with yourself, will change your life forever.

Don't expect to be at your best – you may not even like yourself very much at this time and despite feeling sympathy for you, others may seem to shy away.

*HOW TO GET THROUGH THIS STAGE:*

Panic and even paranoia can easily set in. Get hold of real facts from professionals, and don't just rely on second hand information from well meaning friends.

Get out and about as much as you can. Physical exercise and fresh air will help prevent an insular perspective and even depression. Don't rush into any big decisions at this time – the need to create stability and certainty will be strong, but don't be rushed into making rash emotional decisions based on fear. Give yourself time for reflection.

**Two: Shock**

I was paying for my groceries at the shop, and my hand was trembling so much I could hardly hold the money. Time seemed to drag incredibly slowly, and it was hard to connect with my emotions.

Withdrawing for a while will temporarily protect you from the emotional hell that awaits you. That's fair enough. Don't let anyone rush you through this stage. It will be short enough as it is.

*HOW TO GET THROUGH THIS STAGE:*

Even though you may feel like hiding away and waiting for the world to end, this is a time when sympathetic friends and some self nurturing is really important. Even though everything you do may feel pointless, focus on what really matters (family, close friends, anything you have a passion for). Just because nothing seems to give you pleasure any more – even eating food – find inspiration in positive influences, books and films.

You may not be ready to take much action, but looking ahead to positive possibilities, and noticing others who have gone through the same process and come through successfully, will help you move through this stage and not sink into depression.

Talking about what is happening to you can help connect you back to your emotions (painful though they may be). Don't rush – it takes courage to connect with feelings that stab you like knives. Be gentle with yourself.

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**Three: Anger**

I have never known such venom as what poured forth post relationship break up even a year after the event. I was shocked how much anger stayed in me when I thought I was really quite ok with everything. I sought help to get rid of it – and discovered that dealing with anger was something I had never really learned to do before, so it was a valuable process for me.

People who are unable to shift the anger become bitter. This can be the most difficult stage to really completely shift, and it takes a few years. Don't think that telling your friends what a terrible person you ex was will help – telling them how you FEEL is great, but negative thoughts will exacerbate your moving through this critical part of the process.

*HOW TO GET THROUGH THIS STAGE:*

Find people who you can laugh with – even about how awful the whole experience is or the things that are happening to you. Humour can help you stand outside your situation, get a perspective, and not get stuck in a victim mentality.

I was blessed in having friends who said things like “what's happened to you is so awful it makes me laugh!” Those friends helped me focus on what I was going to do next, not on what seemed now just a miserable past.

Find ways to express anger. Hitting pillows, energetic sport, screaming you head off whilst driving alone in the car. Crying – or laughing till you cry – at sad movies and songs and really letting go, is a very powerful way of reducing stress and anger. It's what children do so naturally, and insanely, we train them to `be brave'.

Alcohol and wild parties may seem attractive at this stage, but you will be vulnerable to seeking `rescue' from a new relationship before you are ready. This is not the time you will easily attract the kind of people into your life who will be gentle and supportive. Let your anger be expressed freely but in ways that does not harm others. Don't be afraid to seek any form of help that is productive and works for you. Allow yourself to be vulnerable. Gandhi, Jesus, and other deeply gentle and vulnerable people, possessed immense strength.

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**Four: Pain**

The trouble with getting through the anger stage, is that you have no protection from the pain. And boy does it hurt. I remember feeling like my heart had been in an argument with a chainsaw. Just when I thought it must all start to be over, and the crying would stop – it seemed it was only now really beginning.

*HOW TO GET THROUGH THIS STAGE:*

It felt mad at the time, but listening to sad songs and really letting the pain go right through me and not trying to block it, actually seemed to help. This stage can be very cathartic. It's like jumping off a cliff and knowing that it's going to be rough when you hit the ground, but I began to develop an empathy for others I had never felt before. By tuning in to other's suffering, I felt not so alone, and my deepest friendships have been formed during that time of vulnerability and compassion not just for others, but for myself.

For some of us, this can be the first time that we have ever accepted that we are not omnipotent, that we do need the help of others, and truly appreciate the value of shared experience.

**Five: Acrimony**

I tried to avoid this stage, but I ended up paying a high price for ignoring a natural human emotion. Albeit one that you don't want to spend too much time engaged with.

I drove myself forward with so much positivity, that it took a burst appendix (still don't know when it actually burst, I was too busy creating my new life to notice) to bring me to a sudden halt. A near death experience was what made me take time to acknowledge some truths, and to accept that it is perfectly natural to not like someone who has hurt you badly emotionally. Trying to do the right thing is not right if you are not being truly honest with yourself.

*HOW TO GET THROUGH THIS STAGE:*

Acrimony (or even hatred), like anger, needs to find outlets of expression that will not harm others. A deeper self awareness and self honesty can come from this part of the process. It will often throw up much deeper issues, that go way beyond the situation that acted as a catalyst to bring you to this place in your life.

Difficult decisions may need to be made at this time, and self honesty and a passionate commitment to your own positive future will help you steer a steady course. Don't be afraid of your own emotions, even if they seem over the top. This is a new you being born, and the chick doesn't get out of the egg by flapping its wings. Bashing it's beak to smash the shell is what is needed. Use the energy and focus that comes from the emotions you are feeling, and act honourably. Lead by example.

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*You may need to re-asses earlier information, legal or financial, and if compromises need to be made, ensure that you are focusing on the future you want to create, not things that you are trying to hang on to from the past.*



### Six: Grief

I remember starting to remember some of the 'good times' – and realising the part I played in the relationship break up. Without any blame or beating myself up, things were no longer so black and white. However, I felt no sense of regret – I had changed so much that I barely recognised the person I had been, and had no desire to go back to that time.

The pain that you felt at an earlier stage can now be more completely expressed – to yourself – without any self pity or feeling of weakness. The sense of loss can be all encompassing, and often involves a strong sense of personal responsibility and lack of blame for others.

#### *HOW TO GET THROUGH THIS STAGE:*

Put yourself first. Stop trying to be superhuman and focus on what really matters to you, what gives you pleasure and joy, and all that you dream of creating in the future. Even in the depths of grief you can feel deep gratitude for all that is good and healthy in your life, and for all the support and love that you have received going through this long process. Gratitude makes you concentrate on the good things in your life, and what you focus on is what you attract more of into your life.



### Seven: Acceptance & Hope

A clear vision of the positive future you are creating for yourself is crucial, and a mature acceptance of your own vulnerability and weaknesses. This acceptance of who you are and what you have to give, will be the greatest source of strength you have ever experienced.

#### *THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE:*

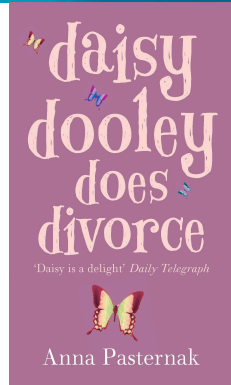
Life is never still, and good and bad things can be repeated during your life. But despite the pain and intense emotions you have undergone over the last few years, you now have a freedom to move forward unencumbered by your past.

Most importantly, by taking responsibility for all that has happened in your life (without blame or shame) you will know that history need not repeat itself. You are in charge of your own future, and how you deal with what life brings you. By accepting what life offers, and being grateful for all that is beautiful in your life, you will invite in people and experiences that you were not ready to receive in the past. The future can be a wonderful place to live – in the present.

## OUR PARTNERSHIPS:



The **Divorce Doctor**



**wikivorce**  
the divorce support community



**FAMILIES NEED FATHERS**

So where has the SOS concept come from?

Austria and Holland have already staged similar shows. Around 500 people and 20 exhibitors attended the first ever divorce fair at the Vienna Marriott Hotel in October 2007.

Our Partnerships at the Starting Over Show, Brighton 15 March 2009

Among our partners are Wikivorce and Families Need Fathers. [See our full list here:](#)

**A new and ongoing survey by professional services directory 'Certain Shops – Professionals Online' supports anecdotal evidence that, following a relationship break up, people are more likely to buy new properties, update their wills and insurances, and spend money on themselves.**

Results to date show that in the three years following the break up of a relationship:

- 26.5% rented a property more than once
- 36.7% bought a new property
- 51.0% went on a foreign holiday more than once
- 27.3% joined a gym
- 20.0% changed their appearance
- 35.3% changed their job

Financial advice and legal advice were considered 'definitely important' for people going through a relationship break up (53.1% and 50% respectively) with well-being advice also as a definite at 45.5%.

The highest score for 'definitely important' was 82.8% for 'people to listen to them sympathetically'.

See our current press page here, which includes articles and features in [Eve Magazine, The Telegraph and The Mail](#)

## MORE ABOUT THE SHOW



Suzy Miller (featured in September 08 Eve Magazine) is the creator of the Starting Over Show, an event designed to give people going through relationship breakdowns access to a wide range of resources and specialists who can help them break up without breaking down. The SOS event takes place at the Barcelo Old Ship Hotel in Brighton on 15 March 2009 and will include a workshop with Divorce Doctor Francine Kaye and a talk by Daily Mail columnist Anna Pasternak (Daisy Dooley Does Divorce)

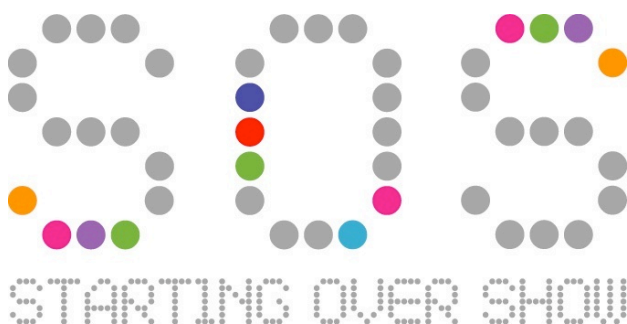
SOS is the first UK event designed to help people bounce back from relationship break ups and life crises. It will be a safe haven in which soon-to-be singletons can take professional advice to build the confidence and skills they need to go it alone. The philosophy behind the show is useful information, honest communication, personal transformation.

[www.startingovershow.co.uk](http://www.startingovershow.co.uk)

Suzy has also created an independent online resource hub - SOS Village <http://www.sos-village.org>, which allows people to access a range of resources and to share personal stories to help them through a break up.

To find out more and to buy tickets for the Starting Over Show go to:

<http://www.startingovershow.co.uk>



Suzy Miller

Event Producer

Starting Over Show

[suzy@startingovershow.co.uk](mailto:suzy@startingovershow.co.uk)

[www.startingovershow.co.uk](http://www.startingovershow.co.uk)