

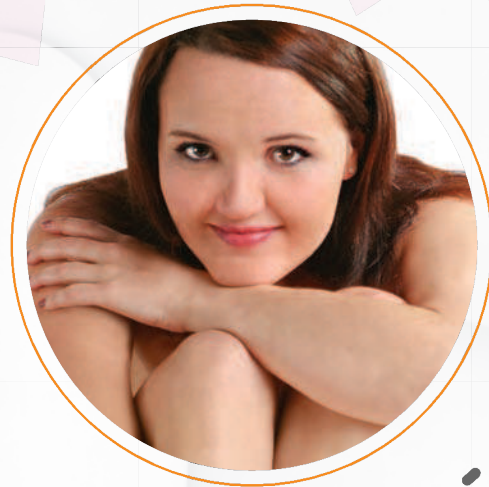
naked divorce

Your new life in 21 days

Naked Divorce

21
DAY

*Handling your Emotions
Powerfully*



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First published in Great Britain in 2014 by Luminous Limited trading as Naked Recovery
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Foundation #3 WORKING WITH YOUR EMOTIONS

“ I feel like a piece of fabric fraying at the edges, one piece of thread at a time. I can only really handle what is right in front of me. Almost like I have tunnel vision ”

Debbie, 42



My story:

It was within the first four days of my divorce. At 02:30 am I was on my third glass of wine and hadn't eaten in three days. I had been in my tracksuit for 36 hours straight and had chain-smoked 40 cigarettes (and I'm not even a smoker.)

There was a pile of laundry on the couch waiting to be ironed and used tissues everywhere. The house was in absolute chaos and I didn't feel like doing anything. I wasn't answering my phone or talking to my family or anyone else. I had a vision of being found dead of a broken heart at the age of 65, still wearing pajamas, with no love or man in my life.

The only time I left the house, I was so distracted, I almost drove into a wall. I thought that if I could convert my emotional pain into physical pain, I could take a pill for it. How bizarre my thoughts were!

The reality is that I was in despair. I felt completely out of control. For someone who is usually organised and structured, this was a very new feeling.

Nothing helped and I remember thinking, "Why the hell is this happening to me?"

I had read 27 books on breaking up in two weeks. I had spoken to two therapists. I had spoken to a counselor. I listened to music. I listened to a personal development CD. I spoke to friends.

Nothing helped. I was going crazy. I was so uncomfortable in my own skin. The pain felt unbearable, I just wanted to feel normal again.

If this sounds familiar to you or you can relate in any way, welcome to the club. You are completely normal and you will be okay. Here are some completely normal responses to divorce:

- ➡ Numbness – numbness can be physical, emotional, or both. The numbness lasts for different periods of time for different people.
- ➡ Disrupted sleep patterns – not being able to sleep or sleeping too much is completely normal.
- ➡ Changing eating habits – it's normal to have almost no appetite or a need to eat nonstop, or both, alternately.
- ➡ Rollercoaster of emotional energy – extreme ups and downs. As a direct result of these emotional highs and lows, you may feel emotionally and physically drained.
- ➡ Depression – feeling low and depressed is normal.
- ➡ Despair, desolation and desperation.
- ➡ Reduced concentration.
- ➡ Feeling hopeless.
- ➡ Feeling helpless.
- ➡ Feeling strong anger or rage.
- ➡ Experiencing dramatic mood changes.
- ➡ Exhibiting a change in personality.
- ➡ Losing interest in most activities.
- ➡ Experiencing a change in sleeping or eating habits.
- ➡ Performing poorly at work.

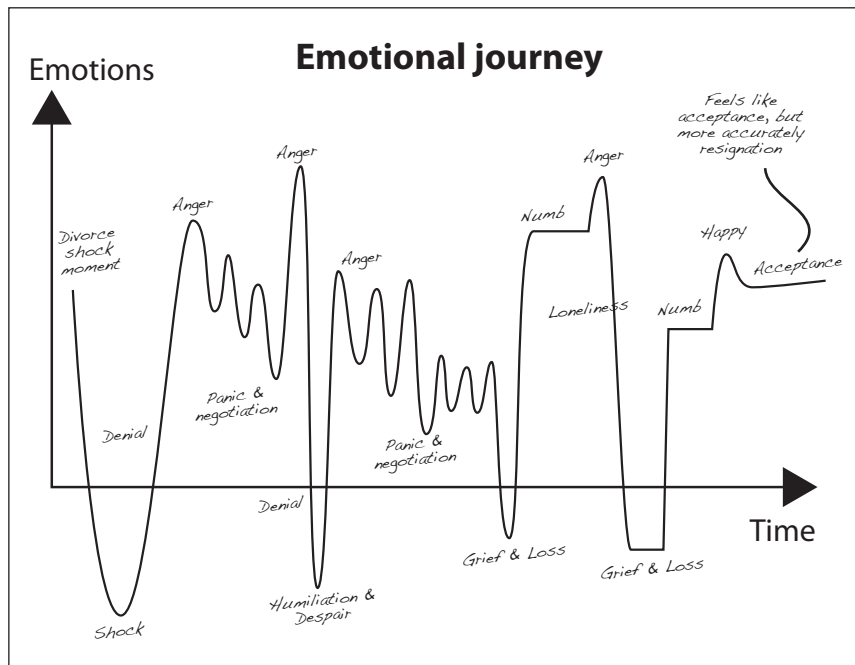
You will feel low for the first few weeks, even months. That's normal. After that, you'll start to feel more like your old self. You'll start to rationalise things and you'll begin to work out what to do next. This is a turning point, and it means you're thinking about your future. The pain will still be there, but it will become easier to bear and in the *naked divorce* programme you'll find many things you can do to work through the pain and speed up your recovery.

You may feel it tempting to keep busy and avoid being alone. However, if you want to heal, the KEY is to FACE your emotions and process them. I know this may sound like a frightening idea. I remember thinking that my own sadness and grief would swallow me whole. What I did realise after a few days was that every single emotion had another emotion underneath it, almost like there were layers of emotions which needed to be peeled off.

My job was to simply move through each emotion, find the boundary or ending of the layer and move onto the next emotional layer. There was actually a natural ending to each emotion but only

when I truly experienced and acknowledged the preceding emotion. And none of the emotions lasted particularly long and they certainly didn't swallow me up whole. I realised I had nothing to fear by feeling them. When you resist your emotions and avoid being with them by indulging in *Short Term Emotion Avoidance Tactics*, you prolong the healing cycle unconsciously. You will consequently have no say about how much time your healing will take or what will happen.

Lucy's emotional journey: This graph below tracks the healing experience of one of my clients prior to meeting her. It illustrates the first year of the past five years of her life as drawn by her.



Lucy's rollercoaster started off with a big shock stage, an initial paralysis at hearing the bad news of her husband leaving her. She described it as a big kick in her stomach and an indescribable ache.

This was followed by a denial stage where she spent days trying to avoid the inevitable, telling herself it was not happening. This was followed by an anger and betrayal stage where Lucy was very angry with her husband. Unsure of how to process the emotions she simply ignored them, and began panicking that she had lost him. She spent weeks pleading for him to return, promising to be a better wife to him. When she realised that he wasn't coming back, she again felt anger. She shouted and screamed at him. When he didn't retaliate she felt humiliation and disgust with herself. This disgust soon turned into despair, closely followed by more anger, which she didn't process and more pleading with her husband to take her back.

She momentarily felt grief and loss then went out and slept with a colleague from work. Afterwards she felt numb, briefly angry, then numb again. When the colleague didn't call her back, she was overcome by loneliness and more grief and loss. She then started drinking more alcohol and soon returned to numbness. As the divorce came through, she felt momentary happiness. Her life continued along this path for several years. In the second and third and fourth years, she continued the cycle of up and down. The numbness lasted days, then weeks, then months. She said for years, she simply went through the motions in her life. Almost feeling like she was dead inside.

When we started working together five years later, she was feeling very numb and resigned. She told me that life since her divorce was a series of ups and downs and that over time she just felt quite numb and had understood the numbness to be a form of acceptance. Upon examination, we actually found that deep sadness, resentment and anger were still very much present in her life. The numbness was masking the deep grief and upset over her husband leaving her. She has fallen victim to being passive over time and thought that simply the passage of time would cause her healing. We also discovered that she made use of *Short Term Emotion Avoidance Tactics* (S.T.E.A.T.s) like alcohol, food, sex with random strangers, and spending hours and hours at work to avoid feeling the pain of her heartbreak.

She realised then that although she had learnt a great deal during the past five years, she had not healed from her divorce and did not know what to do to heal. She commenced the *naked divorce* journey and achieved the inner peace she had been seeking all those years.

Lucy's emotional rollercoaster is not too dissimilar to any of my client's emotional rollercoaster's after divorce. The problem for Lucy was that there was no knowledge of which emotion was coming next or how long the emotional ride would take. She realised that although she achieved moments of happiness, they were often fleeting and shallow like a mirage in a desert. She would then jolt back to earth as if awakening from a dream.

“ Go towards the pain. It will hurt but not for long. Be brave, you can do it! ”



Lucy's healing cycle also didn't stop, it kept going for five years and just when she thought she was healed after an extended period of numbness or false acceptance, she would get knocked back by something that happened in her life and the emotional rollercoaster would speed up again,

revealing another emotional dip or bend or loop. To avoid feeling the feelings at each point, she sought out *Short Term Emotion Avoidance Tactics* (S.T.E.A.T.s) to bring her instant relief, and what she didn't know at the time was that those *Short Term Emotion Avoidance Tactics* just prolonged the cycle of the rollercoaster ride. She felt extremely stuck in her life and that there was no way for her to get off the emotional rollercoaster, or exercise any control over decreasing the time on the ride. She was simply strapped into her seat and needed to hold on for the duration of her journey.

I could tell you hundreds of similar stories and to me this is the saddest part about divorce healing – the years of your life that are spent in purgatory or in a departure lounge. Because there is no clear process to follow to overcome the emotional grief, no grief cycle which maps out what emotion might come next, and no structured support along the way; everyone deals with divorce as best they can. This can often lead to long-term depression and a lack of contentedness with life.

Lucy was very brave when she proactively confronted and dealt with her emotions so they didn't hang around polluting her life.

The *naked divorce* grieving cycle

The *naked divorce grieving cycle* is something I created based somewhat on the work of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, my experience as a change management consultant, the invaluable lessons I learnt from my divorce, during my Post Grad in Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and from studying numerous cases as a *Divorce Angel*.

If you can learn to truly FEEL each emotion and stand strong within it, each layer of emotion will pass and a new emotion will arise.

The emotional highs and lows experienced after a divorce can feel very extreme as they alternate between activity and passivity in our very human and desperate efforts to avoid the change.

The difference between Lucy's emotional journey and the *naked divorce grieving cycle* is that by taking the right courageous steps throughout your healing journey, you are in the driver's seat of your divorce and are not allowing your life to be buffeted around by your emotions.

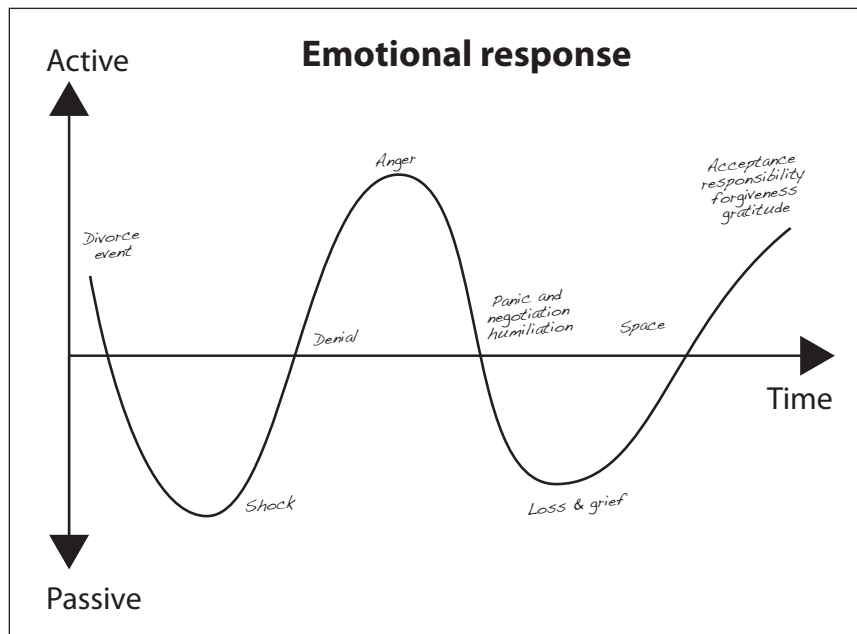
The initial state before the cycle begins is often quite stable, at least in terms of the subsequent reaction to hearing the bad news (compared with the ups and downs to come, even if there is some variation, this is indeed a fairly stable state).

And then, in the calm of this relative paradise, a bombshell bursts...

The *naked divorce grieving cycle*

- 1 **Denial stage:** trying to avoid the inevitable.
- 2 **Anger and betrayal stage:** frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion.
- 3 **Panic and negotiation stage:** seeking a way out. Making deals with your ex. A strong sense that if you could only change X then your ex would stay.
- 4 **Humiliation, fear of failure or looking bad stage:** gradually sinking into a spiral, feeling embarrassed and avoiding seeing people.

- 5 **Despair stage:** realisation that something awful is coming your way and you're strapped into the rollercoaster and helpless.
- 6 **Loss, grief and depression stage:** a final realisation of the inevitable, surrendering to the grief.
- 7 **Space and nothingness stage:** once you have grieved and grieved, experiencing loss and pain, you're left with a feeling of nothingness. It's different to numbness because you feel very present and can notice things around you. Your senses are heightened. You may also find that you cannot cry anymore. You experience an emotional vacuum.
- 8 **Acceptance stage:** seeking realistic solutions and finally finding the way forward, it's not a feeling of resignation. It's a feeling of profound understanding of the way things are and the way things are not.
- 9 **Responsibility and forgiveness stage:** taking responsibility for where you may have caused cracks in the relationship and contributed to its subsequent breakdown and divorce. Forgiving your ex and yourself for any failings during the relationship is a critical part of true and real healing.
- 10 **Gratitude stage:** transformational experience. Learning from your divorce and seeing positives and negatives from the experience. This stage completes the healing.



Often, just understanding where you are in the process and accepting that it is a process that you will get through, really helps. It's important to keep in mind that although the graph looks linear, you will bounce between the first six stages many times.

One minute you may be feeling angry and the next minute you're back in despair. But by feeling the emotion deeply and profoundly, it will pass and reveal the next emotional layer. If you avoid

Short Term Emotion Avoidance Tactics whilst processing your emotions, the emotional rollercoaster will end sooner. It's only when you're finished grieving authentically, to the point of being aware of only space and nothingness around you that will you be truly ready to move through to the advanced stages of the cycle.

By the time you complete the 21-day programme you'll achieve those most advanced stages of the *naked divorce grieving cycle*.



Acknowledging and truly feeling your emotions is the key to your healing

In describing the importance of acknowledging our emotional states, American psychologist Dr Maurice Elias says, “emotions are human beings, i.e. warning systems as to what is really going on around them. Emotions are our most reliable indicators of how things are going in our lives. Emotions help keep us on the right track by making sure that we are led by more than the mental/intellectual faculties of thought, perception, reason, and memory.”

In her article titled ‘How to Understand, Express and Release your Emotions’, author Mary Kurus, a renowned psychologist based in New York, writes that emotions control our thinking, behaviour and actions. If you ignore, dismiss or repress your feelings, you're setting yourself up for physical illness.

The most advanced Trauma therapies and techniques in the world (and I have studied a few of them in my Post Grad) use techniques to tap into those emotional memories and bring them into the foreground. There is no short-cut: healing happens THROUGH your emotions.

“ The unconscious mind is the domain of your emotions. To truly heal on an unconscious level, you need to pay attention to your emotions and sensations. ”



You cannot control your emotions BUT truly acknowledging them and feeling them, allows them to move on

You cannot control your emotions. You can try invalidate them but you cannot actually avoid them. Think of the people who trundle along day after day, seeming to function normally. And then one day they'll suddenly explode over something seemingly trivial and ram someone with their shopping trolley. This example of behaviour is a result of a pressure-cooker syndrome where the simple application of a little heat in the form of a tense situation causes repressed emotions to boil over. The more you try to control your emotions, the more your emotions resist. Eventually you lose emotional control.

It's not popular in today's society to express negative emotions in public. Seeming 'out of control' is interpreted as a sign of weakness. We're often uncomfortable around people who express strong emotions. As a society we're taught to hide our emotions, to be ashamed of them and to be afraid of them, so we talk about our emotions instead of simply feeling them.

It's easy to want to judge our emotions and make some emotions bad or some good. The interesting thing that I have observed in working with so many people is that you cannot turn down the dial of one emotion and simply turn up the dial on another. You can try, but it will feel fake and can kill your true aliveness.

Suppression of anger means your ability to express deep love or peace is also suppressed. Suppression on any level impacts your ability to be truly vulnerable or truly connected with someone else. There is no dial on your emotions so you cannot turn up your happiness whilst turning down your anger. Suppress one emotion and you suppress them all. To feel MORE in life, you need to turn up the dial to ALL of your emotions - even the undesirable and not-so-nice emotions.

Allow yourself to heal THROUGH truly experiencing all of your emotions. All of my clients who experience Day 9 of the *naked divorce* later say that they are no longer afraid or confronted by their emotions and feel a sense of freedom and ease in being with their emotions.

My story:

I was staring into my coffee mug when it dawned on me. I had been experiencing a very deep and anxious depression for over a week. I realised that the depression stemmed from trying to run away from how I was feeling and that it was the running away that was delaying my healing. I was trying to avoid feeling sad, crazy and depressed. The avoidance was debilitating me. After this realization, I began letting go of avoiding all the emotions I was feeling and began to truly feel them. Don't get me wrong – it hurt like hell – but it's still the most profound experience of my life: knowing that my emotions didn't kill me, they made me stronger.

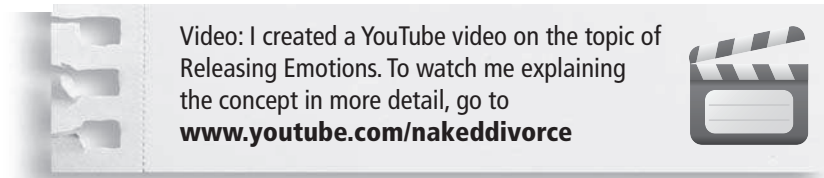
We are emotional creations and we must learn how to know our emotions, be with them, and release them. The journey to becoming a powerful woman includes having the capacity to BE with strong emotions around you. The only way to achieve this state of being is by having the compassion to BE with your own strong emotions. Men and women used to heal through their emotions for centuries, and it was part of the initiation journey from girl to woman. You will find if you truly feel your emotions, they will carve new powerful womanly characteristics within your psyche.

“ Healing from divorce is about surrendering to the feelings surrounding the event. Let go and feel each emotion. You will note that each emotion, once truly experienced, does not last much longer than 30 minutes ”



The steps to releasing your emotions

I developed these steps to releasing emotions over many months of trial and error, using a myriad of techniques I'd learnt over the years. They've not only worked for me but they've been effective for my friends and clients.

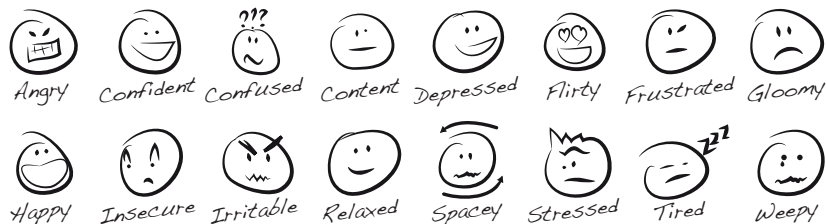


STEP 1: Articulate what the emotion is that you're feeling

You start by labelling your emotion. You've heard the expression, "I just don't know how I'm feeling anymore." The *naked divorce* provides a daily exercise to articulate your emotions by selecting the emotion label that mirrors how you're feeling from the table below.

Begin by identifying the emotion as best you can.

For example, feeling fidgety and bored can be an indication of anxiety and panic and at the heart of those emotions is unexpressed despair.



I have drawn up an emotional chart for you to assist you in articulating your emotional state. It's not a definitive list as each of us are different, but the list can be used as a prompt to help you think about your feelings and work out which emotion your physical sensations represent. Understanding your emotions is key to really getting to know yourself better.

Possible Physical sensations	What you may be telling yourself	Possible Emotions
Pain in the chest, nausea, numbness against the skin, an inability to concentrate or stomach anything.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is not really happening. • This cannot be happening. 	Denial, shock, heartbreak.
Fiery feeling in the chest, heartburn, feeling fidgety accompanied by a need to shout or scream, like you cannot sit still, fists want to clench, tightness in throat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could you? • Why is this happening to me? • Why does this always happen to me? • Why me? • This is not fair! • I feel so much rage! 	Irritability, anger, sense of betrayal.
Feeling fidgety and restless accompanied by an ache. Cannot sleep, pain in your chest, feeling that you will hyperventilate, panic sensations across your skin, fluttering in your throat, heart palpitations, stomach ache, feeling crazy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can fix this. • If I just do X and Y, my ex will come back to me. • Explanations for what happened and making excuses for your ex. • Bargaining with my ex in an attempt to get them back. • The feeling that your ex is like a drug accompanied by feeling addicted to them. • Strapped into the rollercoaster, helpless. Total panic and feel like melting down. • Feel completely out of control. • Want to run away/numb the pain with alcohol/ drugs/seeing people/food. • Restless/not at peace. • House/routine descends into chaos. • Feel like going crazy and driving car into a wall. 	Anxiety, desperation, craziness and despair accompanied by a sense of needing to bargain and negotiate.

Cannot get out of bed, don't like bright lights, want to run away and hide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal/hiding. • Beating yourself up. • Can't talk to anyone about this. • Pretending everything is fine when it's not. • Doing things out of character to prove you are fine. 	Denial, humiliation, shame and a fear of failure.
Pain in chest, can't stop crying, can't sleep/eat/function normally. The feeling that you are dying inside.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oh no, this is really happening! • My heart feels ripped out. • I think I may do something to myself. • Moping around the house. • Feel like a zombie. • Feeling desperate and lonely. • Morose thoughts. Will I ever recover? • Emotions are overwhelming. • Can't function. • It's all my fault, I failed. 	Loss, grief and depression.
Feel quiet and empty, but not grieving any more. Feel alert and present. Can't cry any more. Feel nothingness. Noticing things around you: cars, birds, trees, washing not done.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No thoughts. Your mind is quiet. You are present and feel at peace with everything. • Getting into action again. 	Space and nothingness.
No more pain in your chest or body, a feeling that life goes on and everything will be ok.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am OK. I went through hell and I am still here. • I can cope and haven't died of a broken heart. • Realising that the relationship was actually not that good for me. I am able to see both sides. • The fairy tale is gone and I am actually OK with that. 	Understanding everything accompanied by feeling victorious, proud and accepting of the situation.
Head up, shoulders back, standing tall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I failed in the following areas... • I can acknowledge and take ownership of my part in the divorce. • I can see how I contributed to the divorce without beating myself up. 	Taking responsibility. Being courageous, strong, peaceful and clear.
Relaxed body posture, a sensation of gliding rather than walking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This has happened and I am so grateful it did. I have learnt so much. I am in a better place. 	Grateful, happy and at peace.

STEP 2: Ensure you're in a safe place before expressing your emotions

Ensure you're in a safe space before expressing your emotions. You shouldn't be at work or in a public place. You need a private space where you're free to let go and express yourself. So find a room or a quiet location to let go. I alternated between driving my car to a remote location, using a back room in my house or a hotel room. It is incredible how soundproof hotel rooms are (well at least I hope so!).

STEP 3: Fully feel your emotions whilst keeping your heart open

There's no need to fear your emotions. Don't fight them, run away from them or block them. Regardless of what they represent, welcome them in, hug them towards yourself and be with them. Emotions dissipate and slowly disappear if you feel them and allow yourself to be present with them. Close your eyes and feel them as deeply as you can. You know that sensation when you have sat in the bath for too long and your skin becomes 'pruny'? In the same way, feel your emotions until you get pruny and are naturally ready to let them go. Whilst feeling your emotions, keep your heart open. What this means is FEEL the emotions deeply but allow each emotion to wash over you and not become stuck anywhere in your body or in anger within your heart. Keep feeling the one emotion till it moves onto the next emotion, allowing a natural movement.

There are several ways you can begin to release your emotions, especially those related to anger and hurt.

1. Go into an empty room, put a pillow over your mouth and scream. Or go for a drive alone, pull over at the side of the road and shout it all out. Do it as loudly as you can. Scream the words, "I hate being hurt!", or whatever it is you're feeling. So many people have never screamed out their hurt or their rage. Continue to do this as long as it feels right inside. And allow yourself to cry your feelings out.
2. If you don't have the space to scream aloud, imagine you are screaming out your rage, hurt, and pain. Imagine it completely. See it, and hear it and feel it as deeply as you can.

My story:

I remember screaming for 20 minutes. I kept shouting, "Rage! Rage! Rage!" I fully felt every part of that rage in every part of my body. I did not stop until it felt like the emotion was gone. By doing this, I released the emotion to ensure no blockages occurred within my body. It was exhausting but felt fantastic.

3. If you're a physical person, take a pillow, take a stick and hit something, feeling your hurt every time you lash out. Each time you hit out, say the words, "I hate being hurt!" or, "I'm so f*&^%&^ upset!" or whatever it is that you are feeling.
4. If you like to write, write about your anger, your hate, sadness, upset, frustration or disappointment.

Tip-

One of the most important things about releasing an emotion is to concentrate on the emotion rather than what caused the emotion. Forget who did what to you. Concentrate on the "I hate xxx" or "I'm SO angry" or "I'm SO hurt". It's the emotion you need to release.



STEP 4 – Acknowledge yourself and drink water

Expressing emotions is thirsty work. You may even lose your voice a little. When you're done expressing your emotions, stop, breathe, and then drink a big glass of water. Sit quietly and notice what you're present to. When you've fully expressed your emotions, you will probably be feeling a sense of what I call space, or nothingness, which is step seven in the *naked divorce grieving cycle*.

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Your new life in 21 days



Adèle Theron helps high powered professional career men and woman heal from divorce using an intensive 21-day process. She has written other trauma programmes too which can all be accessed online and used around your busy schedule to maintain your high performance.

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