

# 1 The Experience of Separating for Adults

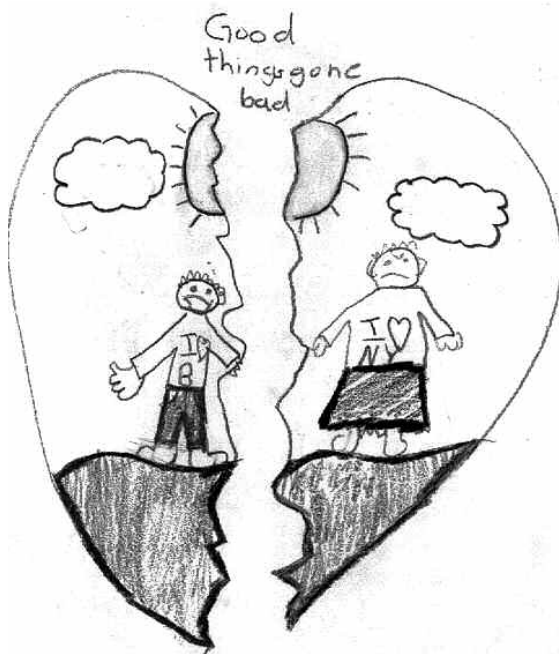
It is important that you hear and try to understand how your children feel about the separation process. To do this, you need to look at your own emotional experiences and try to understand them. When you are aware of what is happening with you, then you can better help your children.

## Losses and Changes

Ending a relationship can be challenging. It can mean:

- Dealing with your own emotions
- Helping your children make a positive adjustment
- Making legal decisions
- Developing new parenting arrangements
- Dealing with financial issues

Separation is a process that begins long before couples actually separate. The decision to separate was probably one that was not made rapidly or easily. Often couples try repeatedly to make the relationship work before deciding to end it. In the end, most couples do not come to a mutual decision. Usually one partner is more ready to take the final step.



Augustus, Nipisikopahk Middle School

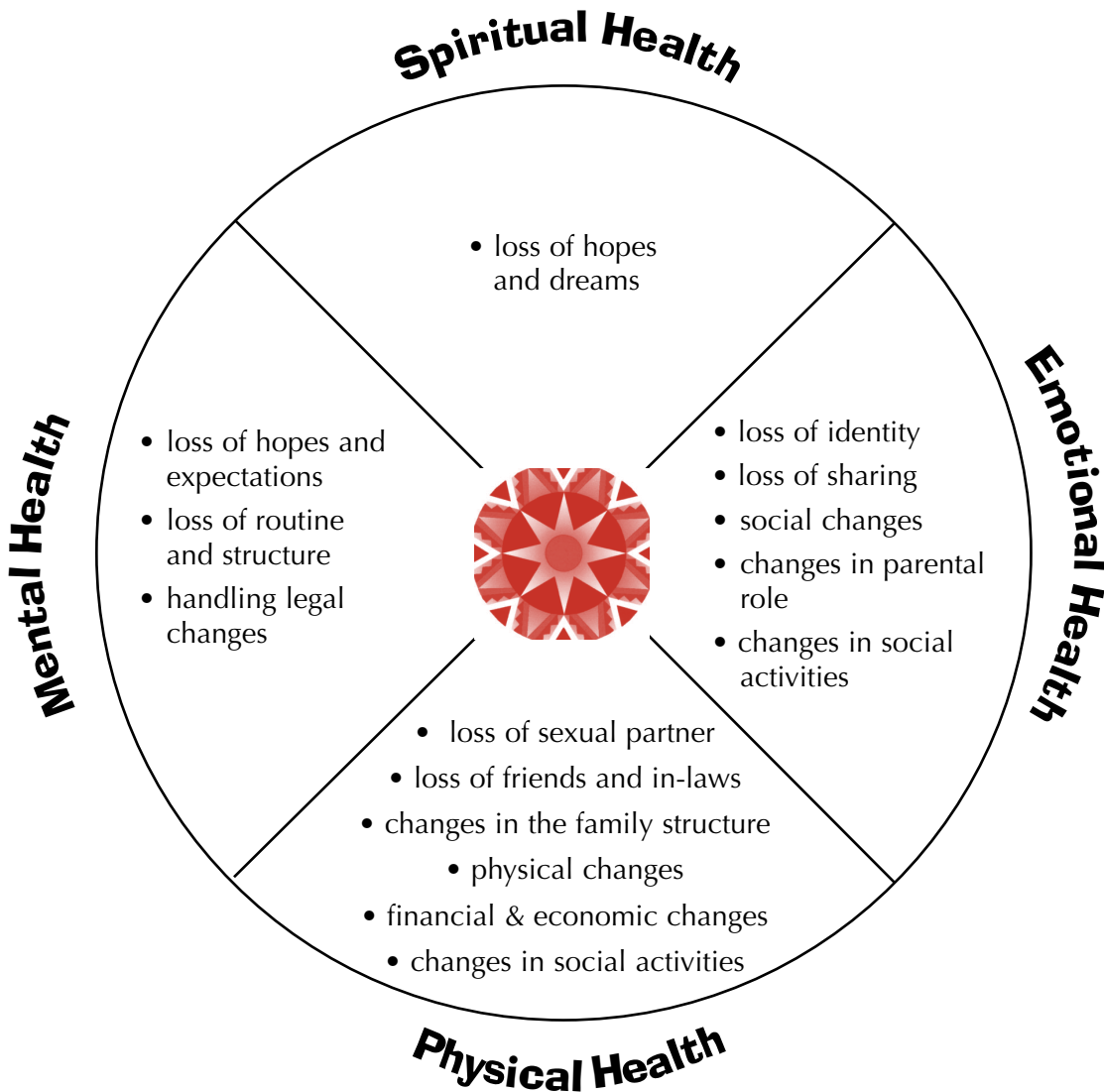
With separation, adults experience loss at many levels. On one level, you lose the person you were once involved with. At another level, you lose the hopes or dreams you had for the relationship. It affects your physical health, mental health, emotional health, and spiritual health. The diagram on the following page outlines some of the losses and changes you may be experiencing.

It may take years to fully recover from a separation. Many Aboriginal communities view the process of recovery as similar to the process of grieving. You might want to talk with Elders, clan members, or others in your community to deal with your grief.

Your children too, are going through a grieving process.



## Medicine Wheel



*“In a collective society the structure of the society is based on love. We have great love for our children, for our grandparents. In this society there is no tolerance for selfishness, boastfulness, deceit or vanity, but there is a generous amount of forgiveness. Holistic healing thrives on the generosity of the mind, body, spirit, and emotions. These four components must all work in harmony; each is dependent on the other.*

*“Love is in the centre of this mentality. It feeds only positiveness to all four. It is ready to forgive all ills; it is ready to plant new life through forgiveness; and it is ever so patient in acquiring and maintaining balance in a person. It may take time, but healing will come if the individual is ready to embrace it. The face of the Creator is painted on every leaf; it is carved in every rock and stone. It is our privilege to look for his face.*

*Thoughts of Murlena Marshall,  
Miqmaq, Nova Scotia*



## Emotions of Separating

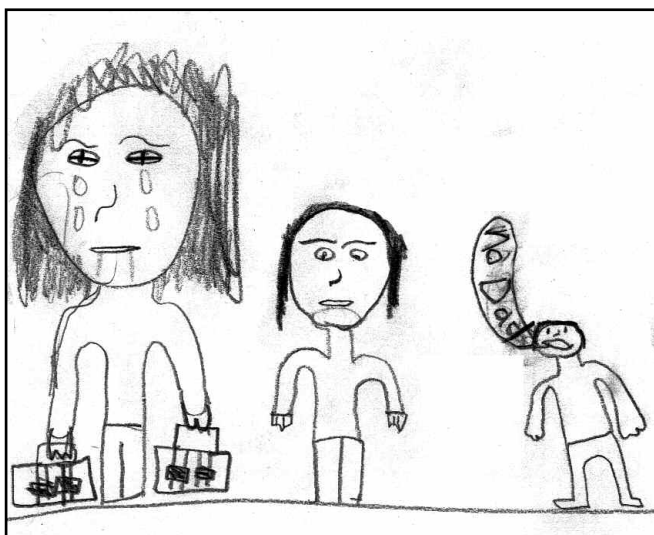
You may feel like you are on an emotional roller coaster.

Remind yourself:

- It is normal.
- It will not last forever.
- You will survive.

Everyone who separates from a partner experiences many different types of emotions. You may feel:

- Depressed
- Angry
- Afraid
- Anxious
- Guilty
- Out of control
- Difficulty coping
- Relieved
- Vulnerable



Colten, Nipisikopahk Middle School

People who are separating say that they experience more than one emotion and that their emotions are unpredictable. You may feel happy and relieved in the morning, but angry and hurt in the afternoon. Most people say they feel shaky and vulnerable. Some feel alone and depressed.

Sometimes parents may feel that they have failed their children, and may doubt their own worth. These emotions and difficulties are often a natural part of getting through separation.

Feelings do not cause behaviour. We have no choice about what we feel, but we do have a choice about how we act on those feelings. We can choose to respond in ways that help the children make a positive adjustment.

**How you handle your own feelings and how you relate to the other parent will affect how well your children adjust to the separation.**

**Example:** If you are aware that you are feeling depressed or angry or upset, you can choose what to do about it. You may choose to call on a friend or relative to help with the role of parenting while you take time to deal with your emotions.

## Stages of Loss and Grief for Adults



These are stages everyone goes through when healing. During separation, you are grieving for the end of your family as you have known it. Your individual healing process may flow differently from this outline.

# Healing Principles

Healing means dealing with the things that happened in your past so that they don't interfere with your everyday life. Healing involves maintaining one's balance: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.



## Safety

- Safety is being free from physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional threat; a safe environment is needed for healing.
- Experiencing fear is part of each individual's life experience, but living in constant fear of abuse or neglect is damaging to healing.
- Safety is an individual, family and community responsibility.

## Responsibility

- Responsibility means that you are in charge of your life choices and actions and that you are willing to learn and change how you think about yourself and your behaviour.
- Responsibility means understanding that the wounds you received as a child, at the hands of adults, were not your fault; it also means that healing in your adult life is up to you.
- Passing of these wounds onto others, by blaming or hurting, interferes with healing.

## Respect

- Respect is treating others and ourselves in a "safe" manner, and accepting that each adult is responsible for their own choices.
- Respect for an individual's choices of how to heal or to protect themselves is important. Lack of respect for different views has sometimes divided families and communities.

## Co-operation

- Co-operation involves people coming together to accomplish goals of healing which are not possible for one person alone.
- Co-operation requires a balance of safety, respect, and responsibility.
- Co-operation builds on communal strength to support healing through a balance or sharing of power in the family and community.

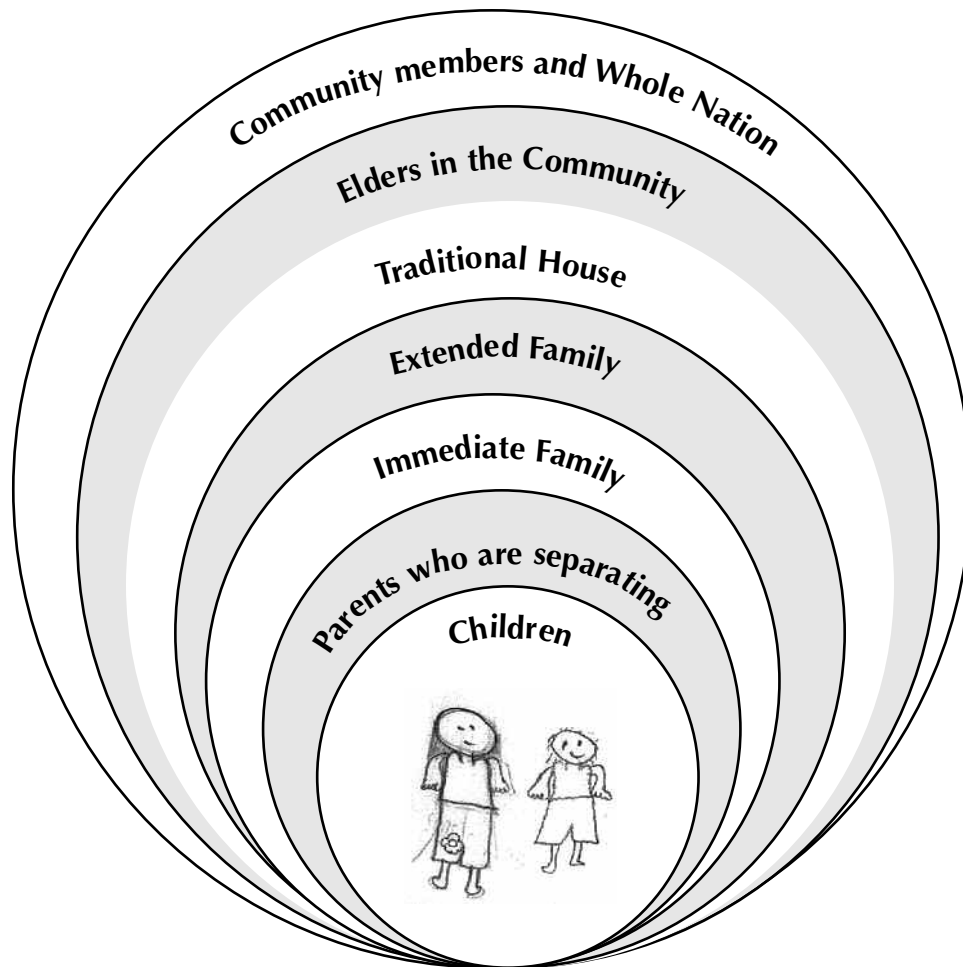
## Celebration

For healing, it is important to take the time to celebrate your survival. You have made it this far despite the things that happened to you. Praise yourself for the healing that you have already done.

These principles are basic to healing.

## Community Support

The separation of parents in a small community can affect everyone. The diagram below shows the support systems that may be available to assist children and parents who are going through the stress and difficulties of separation. These layers of the community can help with the healing process.



*“A teaching that existed in many Northwest tribes as well as others was that aunts and uncles were called mother and father; cousins were brothers and sisters. In this extended family system everyone shared the responsibility for a child’s needs. No one person had the sole responsibility for a child. Grandmas and aunties kept a watchful eye to make sure children were treated in the proper way. Children could be corrected by anyone in the community, and so child supervision was everyone’s job. The community acted as a parent.”*

*Positive Indian Parenting, Northwest Indian Child Welfare Institute*

## Assessing Myself: How Am I Doing?

Consider the following questions:

### Who I was

Did I rely on my partner to tell me who I was?  yes  no

Did I do too many things for his or her approval?  yes  no

Did my behaviour affect my children?  yes  no

How did I see myself in the relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What have I learned about myself and about parenting my children:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

### Where I am now

Think about the “Stages of Loss and Grief” (shock, denial, anger, blaming, transition, acceptance and healing) and then think about your own reactions over the past week. Where are you within these stages?

	Not there yet	Have experienced this	Past this stage
Shock	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Denial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anger	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blaming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acceptance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

