

# *Road to Recovery*

*Healing from  
Domestic Violence*

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# STAGES OF RECOVERY

In his book *Why Does He Do That?*, Lundy Bancroft describes the recovery process as having three main stages to it. These are:

1. The Establishment of Safety
2. Remembrance and Mourning
3. Reconnection with Ordinary Life.

I will explain what they are in some detail so that you can begin to understand the recovery process and identify where you are or have been.

The establishment of safety is absolutely crucial before any other recovery can actually commence. For you to start feeling like you can rebuild your life and have a future, you must first be safe and away from the abuse and violence. Without this physical safety, recovery cannot take place because you are too busy trying to survive daily life. When every day is taken as an individual day, it will feel like there is no visible future.

The second stage of remembrance and mourning can be further divided up into what is commonly known as the bereavement process. The bereavement process involves four main stages as follows:

- a. Denial – where an individual cannot accept what has happened to them. Coupled with this will be elements of shock.
- b. Rage – this is where the individual begins to realise what they have been put through and starts to feel anger at the oppression and wrongdoing – anger which in some cases can feel like complete rage.
- c. Sadness – As an individual starts to come to terms with the fact that they have been let down and hopes and dreams broken, a deep sadness can begin to seep over them.
- d. Gradual acceptance – Finally an individual will slowly start coming to terms with what they have been through, accept it for what it is and try to put it in its proper place. In some cases, this will not be possible without professional help depending on the severity of the impact of what has been endured.

Remembrance and mourning are essentially about coming to terms with all the hopes that you had for your marriage and family and accepting that those hopes were broken and therefore can no longer be part of your future plan. You will find that the above four stages do not necessarily have to happen in that order and that they can occur for the overall experiences you have had as well as for individual incidents. Therefore, you may find that you fluctuate between different elements of the bereavement process at different times of your life, depending on what is happening around you and how much you have been able to put behind you. You should note a very important factor in this. You may have thought that you were making very good progress and then all of a sudden something happens which triggers an old memory and you feel like it takes you all the way back to where you started. This is completely normal and does not in any way mean that you have regressed in your recovery process. It is in actual fact a healthy part of the recovery process even though it may not feel that way. It allows for you to slowly work on the issues which affect you and deal with them so that the next time you have the same trigger it does not affect you in the same way, until gradually it no longer has any of those negative associations. Rather it

either becomes a neutral issue for you or it turns around into something positive instead.

An example of this is a case where one woman was finally granted a divorce by her husband after a lengthy wait. However, he chose to finalise it on her birthday. Although she was not in the habit of celebrating her birthday, she understood how cheap a tactic this was on his behalf and how he had attempted to prove a power point over her on this matter and leave her with negative feelings about that day every single year. So with time she eventually chose to look at it as the best birthday present she could have been granted and now has positive associations with that date. With certain things, it will take some work on turning the negative associations into positive ones, but with persistence and consistency it can be achieved and have remarkable results on your life.

The final stage of reconnecting with ordinary life is where you begin to carry out everyday tasks again. For some women this might be something that others deem minor, such as choosing what meal to prepare. However, when you have had all those rights of making basic decisions stripped away from you, these 'small' decisions should be taken as absolutely huge steps in the recovery process. Each one of them is a mountain that you have surpassed and for each one you are entitled to congratulate yourself for your achievement. Take comfort in the fact that you can now make those decisions for yourself, enjoy making those decisions and do not be shy to admit to yourself that you are achieving great things and moving forward in leaps even if you cannot quite see it or others do not recognise it. That is one of the beauties behind the recovery process. Between you and Allah, you both know just how much you are achieving every single day and it will never stop you if no one else ever recognises it because you ultimately have the best Witness and Support behind you.