

Is it depression or adjustment disorder?

Melissa is a 45 year old woman who lives in a major city and has two teenage children (Tom, 17 and Jess, 15). Eighteen months ago, she separated from her husband of 18 years after he had an affair with one of her best friends. Melissa thought she was coping, but recently she has been feeling stressed as her bills are piling up.

The children's private school fees are in Melissa's name and are now close to \$20,000 in arrears. The school has offered Melissa a payment plan however her wage from her part-time hairdressing job barely covers her day to day expenses. Melissa and her ex-husband have recently decided to sell the family home however the process will take some time. Melissa hopes that once the settlement is finalised she will feel less stressed about her finances, although she is aware that she will have to move and that it will be difficult to find an affordable rental in her area, especially as she has no recent rental history.

Melissa and her husband are still on speaking terms but she finds conversations with him very distressing. Every time they speak about their pending settlement she finds herself non-stop crying and feeling so low she has had to ring her work and say she is feeling unwell.

Melissa's work has been asking her to do additional evening shifts but Melissa feels she can't leave her children to take the shifts, even though she is under financial stress. She has also been feeling exhausted after each of her regular shifts because one of the other hairdressers is very bossy. Melissa isn't enjoying her work lately because of her colleague's attitude. She doesn't feel strong enough to raise it with her boss; she just doesn't have the energy to take on another battle.

Before the separation, Melissa led a quiet life focusing on her job and kids although she did have regular lunch dates with her girlfriends. For the last few months, she has been declining these invites because she has been feeling so sad. She's also embarrassed that her husband had an affair with her best friend. Melissa's friendship circle feels difficult now because her friends keep regular contact with her husband's new partner.

Melissa has encouraged Tom and Jess, her children, to spend time with their father but they are refusing to visit him because he is now living with his new partner. The children don't like her because they feel she betrayed their mother's friendship and split up their family.

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Melissa's mood has generally been low and she is feeling very lonely. She isn't sleeping well and is crying a lot. Melissa feels that she must have done something in her marriage to make her husband have an affair. She is feeling guilty as she is very conscious of the effects a separation can have on children – her own parents separated when she was 11 and Melissa remembers how difficult that was. Melissa's mum has noticed her low mood and has suggested that she should visit her GP to explore getting sleeping tablets to help her sleep.