

Dealing with the Pain of Lost Love

Why do breakups hurt so much, even when the relationship is no longer good?

It's never easy when a significant relationship ends. Breakups are painful because it represents the loss, not just of the relationship, but also of shared dreams and promises. Romantic relationships often bring excitement and anticipation for the future. When they fail, we can experience profound disappointment, stress, and grief.

A breakup brings uncertainty about the future. What will life be like without your partner? Will you find someone else? Will you end up alone? These unknowns can seem worse than an unhappy relationship at first. However, it's important to know (and to keep reminding yourself) that you *can* and *will* move on. In fact, it's likely that you will learn from the experience and grow into a stronger and wiser person.

What can you do about it?

- **Understand that grief is a natural reaction to loss** (see *Dealing with Grief* for more helpful tips)
- **Talk about how you're feeling** – Even if it is difficult for you to talk about your feelings with other people, knowing that others understand will make you feel less alone with your pain and will help you heal. Journaling can also be a helpful, or write a letter to your ex and do not send it.
- **Remember that moving on is the end goal** – Expressing your feelings will liberate you in a way, but it is important not to dwell on the negative feelings or to over-analyze the situation. Getting stuck in hurtful feelings like blame, anger, and resentment will rob you of valuable energy and prevent you from healing and moving forward.
- **Remind yourself that you have a future** – As you grieve the loss of the future you once envisioned, be encouraged by the fact that new hopes and dreams will eventually replace your old ones.
- **Spend time with people who support, value, and energize you.** Surround yourself with people who are positive and who truly listen to you. It's important that you feel free to be honest about what you're going through, without worrying about being judged, criticized, or told what to do.
- **Stick to a routine.** A relationship breakup can disrupt almost every area of your life, amplifying feelings of stress, uncertainty, and chaos. Getting back to a regular routine can provide a comforting sense of structure and normalcy. A breakup can be very stressful and exhausting. Make certain to eat well and get enough sleep.
- **Take a time out.** Try not to make any major decisions in the first few months after a separation or divorce, like starting a new job or moving to a new city. If you can, wait until you're feeling less emotional so that you can make better decisions.
- **Avoid using alcohol, drugs, or food to cope.** When you're in the middle of a breakup, you may be tempted to do anything to relieve your feelings of pain and loneliness. But using alcohol, drugs, or food as an escape is unhealthy and destructive in the long run. It's essential to find healthier ways of coping with painful feelings.
- **Explore new interests.** A divorce or breakup is a beginning as well as an end. Take the opportunity to explore new interests and activities. Pursuing fun, new activities gives you a chance to enjoy life in the here-and-now, rather than dwelling on the past.

- **Be patient and allow yourself time to heal.** Avoid rebounding into another relationship without resolving your feelings first.
- **Get outside help if you need it.** If reaching out to others doesn't come naturally, consider seeing a [counselor](#) or joining a support group. The most important thing is that you have at least one place where you feel comfortable opening up.
- **Cultivate new friendships.** If you feel like you have lost your social network along with the breakup, make an effort to meet new people. Join a networking group or club, get involved in community activities, or [volunteer](#) at a school, place of worship, or other community organization
- **Know the difference between a normal reaction to a breakup and depression** – Grief can be paralyzing after a breakup, but after a while, the sadness begins to lift. Day by day, and little by little, you start moving on. However, if you don't feel any forward momentum, you may be suffering from [depression](#).

Some symptoms of depression include; feelings of hopelessness, loss of interest in pleasurable things, changes in appetite or sleep patterns, anger or irritability, loss of energy, problems concentrating, unexplained aches and pains. The more symptoms you have, the stronger they are, and the longer they've lasted—the more likely it is that you're dealing with depression. **When these symptoms are overwhelming and disabling, it's important to seek help from a counselor, therapist or doctor.**

Original Article by Jeanne Segal, Ph.D., Gina Kemp, M.A., and Melinda Smith, M.A. **can be found at:**

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/family-divorce/coping-with-a-breakup-or-divorce.htm>

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/depression-signs-and-symptoms.htm>

Resources for more advice and tips:

<http://counseling.ucr.edu/hot-topics-students/Pages/RecoveringBreak-Up.aspx>

To talk with a Bucks Student Planning Counselor, call 215.968.8189 or email counseling@bucks.edu to schedule an appointment. It's free and confidential.