

Surviving A Relationship Break –Up

The UCA Counseling Center will work with many students who are experiencing stress related to a relationship break-up. The following are suggestions designed to give you healthy strategies to cope with the loss of a relationship. These suggestions will not stop you from experiencing the pain of the loss, but instead, will help you move through the grieving process quickly, and help you move towards more satisfying relationships in the future.

1. Do Not Fight Your Feelings:

A break-up is often accompanied by a wide variety of powerful and negative feelings including sadness, anger, confusion, resentment, jealousy, fear and regret, to mention a few. If you try to ignore or suppress these feelings you will likely prolong the normal grieving process and may totally get stuck in it. Healthy coping means *identifying* and allowing ourselves to experience these feelings. Experiencing these feelings will allow them to decrease over time and will speed up the grieving process. The stages of grief frequently include: shock/denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and eventually acceptance. Extreme grief feels like it will last forever, but it does not if we cope in healthy ways.

The following are several conditions that will likely intensify your negative feelings:

- Not being the one who decided to break up.
- Not seeing the break-up coming.
- This is your first serious relationship.
- Your ex being your only real close friend.
- Continuing to run into your ex.
- The relationship made you feel whole or complete.
- Your ex starting to date someone right away.
- Thinking about your ex being sexual with their new partner.
- Believing that your ex is the only one in the world for you.

Accept that these conditions may occur but try not to dwell on them.

2. Openly Discuss Your Feelings

Talking about your feelings related to the break-up is an equally powerful tool to manage them. As we talk to supportive friends and family members we can come to some new understandings and relieve some of our pain. As we talk to others we usually discover that our feelings are normal and that others have survived these feelings.

3. Write Out Your Thoughts and Feelings

In addition to talking to others it can be very helpful to journal your thoughts and feelings related to the break-up. People are not always available when you need to get your feelings out. The act of writing down your feelings can be very freeing and can often give you a different perspective.

4. Understand That Break-Ups Are Often An Inevitable Part of Dating

Remember that many of our dating relationships will end up in a break-up. This is the nature of dating. Relationships usually end for some good reasons and they should end if we want to find our most suitable partner.

5. Do not Personalize The Loss

It is natural after a break up to blame yourself but try not to personalize the loss for too long. It is far more helpful to see ending as a result of conflicting needs and incompatibilities that are NO ONE'S FAULT. Each person in a relationship is trying to get their own needs met and some couples are able to help fulfill each other's needs and others are not.

6. Prioritize Basic Self-Care

Self-care refers to ensuring that your basic needs are being met despite the fact that you may be feeling upset/depressed. Eat well, sleep well and exercise.

7. Get Back Into a Routine

Going through a break-up can create a sense of chaos in many areas of your life. Continuing your routines will give you a better sense of stability or normalcy. This might include routines around waking up and going to sleep, meals, school, work related activities, exercise, and time with others.

8. Indulge Yourself

You need to do something that will actively make yourself feel better. Indulgence/self-care can include going to a special restaurant, going to a movie with a friend, having a hot bath, trying a massage, going on a short trip, buying something new, taking the weekend off, taking a yoga class, or reading your favorite book.

9. Give Yourself Some Slack

Expect that you are not going to be functioning at full capacity for a time due to the distress you are experiencing. It is not unreasonable to lighten your load.

10. Don't Lose Faith in People or Relationships

Since you may be feeling very hurt after a break-up, it is easy to assume that people are untrustworthy, but this is not true. By holding on to this belief you will deny yourself opportunities for a great relationship in the future. Do not over generalize your limited relationship history. The more people you meet the greater your chance of finding a match.

11. Let Go of the Hope You Will Get Back Together

Unless there is strong evidence that you will reunite with your ex, try to let go of the possibility. Bringing closure to the relationship is impossible if you continue to hold onto the hope that the relationship will resurrect.

12. Don't Rely on Your Ex For Support Or Try to Maintain A Friendship

It makes it a lot harder to get over someone if you're continuing to see them or trying to maintain a friendship. After a significant period of no-contact a friendship may be possible.

13. Avoid Unhealthy Coping Strategies

Engaging in unhealthy coping strategies will only compound your pain. You may be tempted to do whatever you can to avoid feelings of loneliness and sadness, but it is essential to find healthy ways to cope.

14. Make a List of Your Ex's Annoying Qualities

If you have been feeling bad because you keep thinking about how much you miss your ex or how well suited you were to them, it can be helpful to make a list of all their less enduring qualities. If you spend some time reflecting, you may come to see incompatibilities in the relationship, that may make it easier to let go.

15. Avoid the Temptation to Take Revenge

The idea of retaliating against someone who you feel may have hurt you significantly is very tempting, but making this choice may have unforeseen consequences. As much as this may feel like a good idea in your height of passion it only makes you feel more out of control.

16. Examine What You Can Learn From the Relationship

It is very helpful after a relationship to spend some time thinking about what you have learned so that you can have better relationships in the future. However, do not use this an opportunity to beat yourself up, or blame yourself for the relationship not lasting. Learning promotes growth while self-blame (i.e. feeling you're a failure) only extends your suffering.

17. Make a List of ALL the Benefits of Being Single

- You can put your own needs first
- You will have the excitement of dating again
- You will have more control over your daily routine
- You can spend more time with friends and family who may have been feeling neglected
- You can do some traveling
- You may have more time to study
- You can be as messy as you want

18. Perform a Closure Routine

At some point in the letting go process it may be helpful to have a closure ritual. This could involve removing all photos you have of your ex, or writing a letter to yourself, or your ex, regarding the relationship.

19. Remember that You can Survive on Your Own

Relationships do not and should not make us whole, even though they are part of our lives, and our happiness. We all need to be able to stand on our own and meet our own needs regardless of the status of any one of our relationships. Remember the healthiest relationships are with two people who are able to meet their own needs.

20. Start Dating Again

Although it is often hard to decide when the best time to date again is, don't just jump right back in, and don't wait forever. You do need to grieve the loss, and discover what you can learn from the past relationship, but you also have to move on, which means beginning to date again.

Original version written by Dr. Kim Maertz

University of Alberta (Mental Health Center)

