



## **How to Cope With a Breakup, So You Don't Have a Breakdown: A Road Map**

Navigating a break-up can leave you feeling like you are on an emotional roller coaster. You may experience symptoms of grief and focus on what is lost. Even more, it can be challenging to accept the loss when you have invested so personally, creating dreams and shared experiences that you want to hold onto. This can lead to wishing, pleading, begging, and a variety of behaviors that only serve to create more painful thoughts and interactions. You might be tearful, isolated, have trouble sleeping, and experience a wheel of thoughts going through your head, "If only, if only I had...."and then the next minute feel a wall of anger rise up around you. How you manage these feelings makes a difference in how you shift gears from idling in loss to moving forward in life.

**Here are five ideas on how to avoid a breakdown when your relationship comes to the end of the road.**

**1. Use distraction to move towards a new path.**

If you are distracted by intrusive thoughts about the breakup, use the distraction method to turn the tables. Here are a few ideas on how to distraction yourself: Dive into projects at work; focus on hobbies, such as building model airplanes, scrapbooking, and anything you enjoy. Participate in activities such as an online meetup group, volunteer in your community, or start a running group to redirect your attention to a positive focus. To stay on target when you have free time, create some index cards with tasks such as "exercise for 20 minutes", "cook a new recipe", or "turn on some upbeat music". Keep a good fiction book by your bedside to distract your thoughts before bedtime. Having an emotional moment at work or in a public situation? Switch your thoughts to math! Calculate a few addition or subtraction problems. Your emotional moment will pass as you calculate.

**2. Find your way with support from family, friends, and mentors.**

It's not just a Beatles song "A Little Help from My Friends", part of being human is the desire and need to connect with others. Avoid the temptation to isolate, which can leave you feeling alone and empty. You obviously had a life before your relationship and you still do. If you have a sense that you've lost yourself in the relationship because you focused a great deal on your partner, reach out to those who are willing to focus on you. Just about everyone has been through a breakup. It's a normal part of life, so there is no shame in saying it out loud. To gain support, arrange to meet friends for coffee or lunch. Join a book club with a friend; plan a girls or guys night out at a restaurant, bowling, or comedy club. Phone your family and friends for pep talks. Social media offers a quick way to connect with friends, but be careful not to share the gory details of your breakup online. Bashing him or her publicly won't change anything except increase and prolong any verbal fighting and hurt. And, if you think about it, how can fighting, especially drawing others into the center of public humiliation, help you move on? When tempted to post about your hurt and anger, consider asking "Do I want to fight or do you want

to get past the breakup?” Mentors may offer new ideas on how to see yourself happy in the future. Seek professional services such as counseling if you have thoughts of harming yourself, or your grief does not resolve within three months.

**3. Come to the end of the road by accepting the loss of the relationship and shift your energy to the future.**

Relationships are a two way street. You may look back on the relationship to learn what works and what does not, but you can't blame yourself. Allowing your energy to stay focused on the past can hold you hostage from your life. Self-criticism derails your passion for life. Another way to stay in the past is wishful thinking, it can feel magical, and it can also cast a spell that makes it more difficult to let go of the relationship. You may want to call, plead, or bargain with your ex, but avoiding contact is often the best means to separate emotionally. Rehashing what might have been, playing the blame game, or giving up your self-esteem by begging to resume the relationship often prolongs your pain. Acceptance opens the door. The “If only I had...” syndrome creates a thread that keeps you spinning stories from the past, but you can't relive the past; it's a dead end. Instead, develop goals, hopes, and dreams to fit with your life's purpose whether it is to help others, participate in social justice, or maximize your talents and strengths in a new way. Research topics of interest and take steps to participate in something that allows you to experience fulfillment. Create new traditions with friends and family for holidays and special occasions.

**4. Sit with your experience: Allow things to be as they are.**

Running away from your painful experience only assures that it will follow you. Allow yourself to experience your feelings and just notice them without having to do anything. Over time, many people find answers. Begin by allowing your concerns without pressure to resolve them; this opens space for new ideas to form. Called sparkling moments, they can provide new insights and meaning on how to cope. Steve Jobs, (2006) quote gives voice to this idea “you first start off trying to solve a problem, the first solutions you come up with are very complex, and most people stop there. But if you keep going, and live with the problem and peel more layers of the onion off, you can often times arrive at some very elegant and simple solutions”. Remember, grief is not an illness; it is a normal response to loss, including the loss of a relationship. Your feelings matter, but many people find that grief resolves with a bit of effort and time.

**5. Self-care**

Relationships call for attention and the relationship you have with yourself is extremely important. Think about what happens if you disconnect from self. Tuning out might lead to shutting down or running away from your personal needs, even the people you value most in life. It is important to be gentle with yourself, avoid the urge to blame self and others. Focusing on negative thoughts creates negative feelings and erodes your self-esteem. To build your emotional wellbeing, practice good self-care. Use exercise to reverse stress and tension. Have a daily schedule with regular meal times and make healthy food choices to feed your soul. While skipping meals leaves you depleted, emotional eating can lead to weight gain. Meditation and Yoga practice quiet the mind. The key components of self-care are your mind and body, but don't forget to stand your ground. Don't give up your property and possessions in hope it will bring your partner back. Make choices based on your own sense of fairness, give gifts because

you chose to with no strings attached, and seek mediation or legal advice to understand your rights and the law regarding division of property if you have combined your assets. Even more, if you receive threats of harm from your ex don't ignore them. Threats can increase or begin when one partner leaves a relationship. Your safety comes first, so report any threats of violence to the authorities.

A breakup has been described like a death where no one sends flowers. To avoid a breakdown after a breakup, send yourself metaphorical flowers by trying some of the steps listed above. You have more to learn and do in this life, right? Remember your ideal life and/or partner may be out there somewhere in your future. If you have recently experienced a breakup and decide to experiment with some of the tips listed above, reread this article in six months or a year to see how far you have come and what has changed. You may be surprised how getting a life tune-up leads to new adventures.

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