THE UNIVERSITY of ADELAIDE

BREAKING UP

Some idea about surviving the end of a relationship

Student Life - Counselling Support

Not all relationships go on with everyone living happily ever after. Friendships fall apart, marriages end in separation and divorce, intimate and romantic relationships sometimes end in a breakup. It's hardly ever easy.

Nearly all of us have to go through the end of a close relationship at one time or another in our lives. There is no recipe for coping with this because we are unique individuals and our relationships are very individual too. Nonetheless, we hope the following information may provide you with some hints to help you get through this difficult time.

Please note this booklet is not about the complex issues that most often occur at the end of a marriage or other long-term relationship, especially where children are involved. If you are coping with separation or divorce, or are considering the possibilities, you may wish to get specialist information or help.

A good starting place is Relationships Australia SA (1300 364 277, www.rasa.org.au). The Legal Services Commission of SA (1300 366 424, www.lsc.sa.gov.au) or Women's Information Service (08 8303 0590) can advise you about other counselling services or sources of legal, financial or social services information. University counsellors can help you to deal with the impact of your personal concerns on your studies.

It feels like I'll never get over it

It may not feel like it but we do recover, given time. It doesn't happen at once, and at first you may just need to concentrate on getting through one day at a time. Some things that can help include:

- Keep some sense of routine about your life. This can help anchor you to parts of your life and give you a sense of stability when other parts feel like they have been turned upside-down.

- Spend time with people who care about you. It usually helps to talk about how you are feeling to someone supportive in your life. Let them know what you need. At times you may want to talk, however

at other times you may feel that the best thing to do is try to forget about it and have some fun.

- Be prepared for some emotional roller coaster reactions (feeling all right one minute, overwhelmed the next).

- Gradually put your life back together again as an individual, not as part of a couple. Think about things you value and enjoy.

They threatened to hurt themselves

Sometimes people do not behave in ways that are fair and respectful of the rights of others and may do things which are unacceptable or possibly even illegal. These include persistent harassment (phone calls or other unwanted contacts), badmouthing you to friends, even stalking, threats or violence.

Sometimes a person may behave in a way that makes you feel scared to end the relationship because of what they might do to you or what they might do to themselves. You have a right to end the relationship at any time and it is not all right for the other person to make threats of harm to themselves or others in an attempt to make you stay. This is abusive and controlling behaviour.

Ask for help

You can confidentially talk with a counsellor at university or elsewhere about what is happening and what options you have. They can advise you about where to get help off-campus if you need it.

Appointments or enquiries for counselling can be made by contacting Counselling Support on 08 8313 5663. www.adelaide.edu.au/counselling/access-counselling.Alternatively, you can call 1800-RESPECT (1800 737 732, www.1800respect.org.au) 24 hours, 7 days a week, for support and advice.

I feel terrible

Being the one who says, "It's over" is not pain-free either. You may still care about the other person and do not want to cause them pain. He or she may have been your closest friend for a long time, and it is hard to let go of that. You might try to end it and find yourself feeling so terrible that you delay breaking it off, keep trying again, or try to stay 'just friends'.

These attempts to be kind, or hold on to what you still value, often do not work. More often they confuse the situation and leave the other person feeling disrespected and more hurt. In fact, trying to be kind can even be unkind. It can be damaging for the other person to keep on trying to win back love from you, if you just don't feel that way. It is like being rejected over and over again. So, a hard decision that you stick to may in fact be the best and kindest one that gives both of you the best chance to get on with your lives.

When a person breaks up with someone oftentimes they may still want to remain friends. This can be really difficult for the other person, especially if they did not want the relationship to end. To stay as friends, it may require them to stifle their anger and hide the fact that they are hurting or wishing for things to be different.

It is important to respect the wishes of the person you broke it off with. If they are saying that they need space from you, or cannot be friends with you, it is important that you listen to this.

Feeling overwhelmed or depressed or finding it difficult to make decisions

Things you could try:

- Find ways to comfort or look after yourself (e.g. go for a walk, have a bath, read a book, watch a DVD, cook yourself a nice meal).

- Find time to cry if you need to

- It is important to take time out to feel what you are feeling and express this. Crying does not mean that you are falling apart or not coping.

If you cannot concentrate and your studies are suffering, see a university counsellor who can support you in working through your feelings and the best way to manage your studies under the circumstances.

I wish we were back together

Breakups can be particularly hard when you do not want it to be over. Often it can be a real shock and it may leave you wondering, "How did I not know this was coming?" Breakups can be an emotional roller coaster that can involve all sorts of strong feelings such as shock, denial, sadness, anger and depression. This is often a very big or real loss and so a grief response may be the result. It is normal to experience grief in our lives sometimes, even when it is not a death that we are mourning.

Do not be too surprised if you find yourself at times reacting in ways you hadn't expected, but it is important to behave in ways that maintain your self-respect and are fair to you and your ex.

It is often hard to let go of the expectation that you somehow have entitlements over your ex, particularly when you still feel the same way about them as you did before. You may feel like you have a right to know what they are doing or who they are seeing, however they are under no obligation to share this with you now. Perhaps you are thinking that your ex somehow owes you for the hurt that you are feeling. As unfair as it may feel, it is important to work on accepting that if your ex says it is over, then it is over. You cannot bring a relationship back to life by yourself. Everyone has the right to end a relationship.

Moving on from anger

Sometimes after a breakup you may find yourself feeling really angry.

This is a common feeling and it is important to acknowledge it and find ways to express this emotion safely. Some people find they can get stuck in the anger and are not able to feel anything else or move on from this feeling.

For some people, anger is easier to feel than sadness or grief, and anger can be used as a way to block out other feelings. For others, anger is really hard to feel and they find themselves stuck in depression and sadness as a way to avoid getting angry.

It is important to acknowledge the anger, but it is equally important to explore what feelings and thoughts are sitting underneath the anger (e.g. fear, confusion, feeling the situation is unfair).

A friend or counsellor may be able to help you with this and assist you to find appropriate ways to express your anger. Anger does not always have to be directed at someone else. It is just a feeling and will dissipate in the same way it arises and may simply be part of the grieving process.

Remember anger is a healthy emotion for healing and needs to be felt and expressed safely so that you can move on with your life.

Some safe ways to express anger include:

- Exercise - sweat it out of yourself
- Throw a ball hard against a wall, or towards a soaking wet towel on the ground (repeatedly)
- Listen to music or play an instrument loudly
- Write down how you are feeling - maybe rip it up or burn it
- Through creative outlets - poetry, art, song-writing
- Talking to family, a friend who understands, or other trusted people

Moving forward

Allow yourself time to get over the breakup. Well-meaning friends or family might advise you to ‘get over it’ or ‘just forget about him or her’ but that can often be really hard to do.

Some people find that doing something symbolic or ritualistic safely can help them to move on from the hard feelings associated with the relationship breakup. As long as you are not hurting someone or breaking the law, try not to judge yourself too much. Trust in what feels right for you. Hold back on making major decisions or big changes until you are feeling more like yourself again, as you may regret that new tattoo or quitting your job, later on.

It may be particularly hard to move on if you have to see an ex around campus all the time. If you cannot work out how to deal with this situation, talk with trusted people.

Remember, you do not have to block out the relationship and all the associated memories from your mind to move on. If your feelings are getting on top of you or you’re feeling stuck, or if your friends are getting worried about you, do get help.

Counselling Support is available to assist students with personal difficulties that are affecting their study.

The service provides:

- Individual counselling by appointment
- Face to face, virtual and phone appointments
- Mental health emergency response

Counselling Support
Ground Floor, Horace Lamb Building
The University of Adelaide
Ph: +61 8 8313 5663
After hours support: 1300 167 654 or sms 0488 884 197

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