Breaking Up is Hard To Do

Do you still remember the sense of euphoria, the feeling of union that you experience when you first enter a romantic relationship? Yet no one could have prepared you for the blow of losing the connection with another human being. Whether it was you or your partner who decided to make the break, you may be feeling really bad about the termination of the relationship. It is difficult to know just how heartbreaking it can be until it happens to you. The following are some common emotional reactions to the loss of an intimate relationship which you may be experiencing:

- **Denial** - It may be very difficult to believe that this is really happening to you and that the relationship is over.

- **Grief and Despair** - It is normal to feel sad and lonely, and to cry a lot. You may feel an intense need at times to resume contact with your ex-partner. It may be especially distressful at particular times during the day or on special days, such as waking up in the morning or during weekends.

- **Fear** - It may be frightening and difficult to imagine life without the significant other, particularly if you have grown to become overly dependent on him/her. You may fear that you will never have the courage to love or be loved again.

- **Anger** - You may experience anger with a partner who has caused pain by initiating or contributing to the breakup, resent him/her for making your life so miserable.

- **Self-blame and Guilt** - You blame yourself for what went wrong. You replay the relationship over and over, saying to yourself, “If only I had done this. If only I had done that.” Your self-esteem suffers a serious blow if you perceive yourself as the ‘rejected’ or ‘abandoned’ one. On the other hand, you may feel guilty if you were the one who had chosen to end the relationship.

- **Confusion** - Life may feel very different without your significant other. Your familiar world is no longer there and you seem to have lost your bearings and purpose in life amidst the emotional turmoil.

- **Jealousy** - You may experience jealousy towards your partner potentially being with someone else.
How Can You Mend A Broken Heart?

When a relationship dissolves, you may wonder if you will ever feel better. It is as if your life has been shattered and you do not know how to put the pieces back together.

It is important to understand that it is normal to feel the way you do and that your mixed feelings about the breakup are valid. Identifying these emotions and acknowledging why you have them is an essential step in coping. At first, your feelings may be intense, almost unbearable. Fortunately, this intensity will not last forever. The cliché “time heals all wounds” often resonates with many people’s experiences and your pain will gradually diminish. As time passes, you may also have a different perspective on the experience. Your challenge is to find ways to reorganize your life. Although you cannot determine when you will fully recover, you can take the following steps to start moving in that direction:

- **Mobilize your support system**
  Do not be afraid to ask for help. Seeking support from friends and family is one of the most important factors in coping with a loss. Spending time with people who care and who will listen to your feelings is essential at this time. In addition to offering you the opportunity to ventilate your emotions, they can also provide you with alternative perspectives as well as support and encouragement.

- **Take steps toward closure in the relationship**
  “Loss rituals” such as writing a letter which you may or may not choose to send may help in the process of letting go. Drawing, painting or writing a journal can help to get your feelings out and aid in the grieving process.

- **Try to be objective**
  Understand that it takes both parties to make a relationship work. It is therefore unfair to attribute failure to one person alone. Even though your partner may have been the one who initiated the breakup, it does not mean that you are the ‘culprit’ or that you are the inferior or less worthy party.

- **Maintain your daily routine**
  Structure your time and follow a regular daily schedule. This can help lessen your distress and preoccupation with your ex-partner. It can also give you a sense of accomplishment and adequacy. However, you may not be as productive for a while when you are grieving, so give yourself some allowance. As your concentration may be affected, it helps to make lists and take breaks.

- **Redirect your focus**
  Instead of grieving on the loss, you can try to re-examine the quality of the relationship more objectively. This may enable you to understand more clearly the underlying causes for the breakup and perhaps be more ready to accept the outcome.

- **Nurture yourself**
  Take good care of yourself while you are going through this grieving process. Spend some time each day on something pleasurable. It is important to enjoy key aspects of your life while other components are mending.

- **Seek professional help**
  It may be necessary to get professional help if you are still unable to feel better despite all your efforts or if you are finding it hard just to get through the day. Consider making an appointment with a Counsellor at the Student Counselling and Development Service or approaching other professionals for help.

The ending of a relationship is something that many people may go through at one time or another. Despite the emotional upheaval, things will start to look better after a while. When you are able to put some distance between yourself and the experience, you will find that you have learned something about yourself and intimate relationships, as well as grown from the experience.

Successful healing ultimately involves a process of self-discovery, personal growth and self-affirmation.

---

Student Counselling & Development Service

Address: 2/F, Benjamin Franklin Centre
Telephone: 3943 7208
Fax: 2603 7388
Email: scds@cuhk.edu.hk
Webpage: www.cuhk.edu.hk/osa/scds

Acknowledgement:
Comic illustrations are provided by courtesy of Miss Maggie Lau
All rights reserved.
Unauthorized duplication is forbidden.