

It's never easy when a marriage or other significant relationship ends. Whatever the reason for the split – and whether or not you wanted it – the breakup of a long-term, committed relationship can turn your whole world upside down and trigger all sorts of painful and unsettling feelings. But there are things you can do to get through this difficult time. Even in the midst of the sadness and stress of a divorce or breakup, you have an opportunity to learn from the experience and grow into a stronger, wiser person.

## Healing after a divorce or breakup

Why do breakups hurt so much, even when the relationship is no longer good? A divorce or breakup is painful because it represents the loss, not just of the relationship, but also of shared dreams and commitments. Romantic relationships begin on a high note of excitement and hope for the future. When these relationships fail, we experience profound disappointment, stress, and grief.

A breakup or divorce launches us into uncharted territory. Everything is disrupted: your routine and responsibilities, your home, your relationships with extended family and friends, and even your identity. 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 often seem worse than an unhappy relationship.

Recovering from a breakup or divorce is difficult. However, it's important to know (and to keep reminding yourself) that you *can* and *will* move on. But healing takes time, so be patient with yourself.

## Coping with separation and divorce

**Recognize that it's OK to have different feelings.** It's normal to feel sad, angry, exhausted, frustrated and confused—and these feelings can be intense. You also may feel anxious about the future. Accept that reactions like these will lessen over time. Even if the marriage was unhealthy, venturing into the unknown is frightening.

**Give yourself a break.** Give yourself permission to feel and to function at a less than optimal level for a period of time. You may not be able to be quite as productive on the job or care for others in exactly the way you're accustomed to for a little while. No one is superman or superwoman; take time to heal, regroup and re-energize.

**Don't go through this alone.** Sharing your feelings with friends and family can help you get through this period. Consider joining a support group where you can talk to others in similar situations. Isolating yourself can raise your stress levels, reduce your concentration, and get in the way of your work, relationships and overall health. Don't be afraid to get outside help if you need it.

### **Allow yourself to grieve the loss of the relationship**

Grief is a natural reaction to loss, and the breakup or divorce of a love relationship involves multiple losses:

- Loss of companionship and shared experiences (which may or may not have been consistently pleasurable)

- Loss of support, be it financial, intellectual, social, or emotional

- Loss of hopes, plans, and dreams (can be even more painful than practical losses)

Allowing yourself to feel the pain of these losses may be scary. You may fear that your emotions will be too intense to bear, or that you'll be stuck in a dark place forever. Just remember that grieving is essential to the healing process. The pain of grief is precisely what helps you let go of the old relationship and move on. And no matter how strong your grief, it won't last forever.

### **Tips for grieving after a breakup or divorce:**

**Don't fight your feelings** – It's normal to have lots of ups and downs, and feel many conflicting emotions, including anger, resentment, sadness, relief, fear, and confusion. It's important to identify and acknowledge these feelings. While these emotions will often be painful, trying to suppress or ignore them will only prolong the grieving process.

**Talk about how you're feeling** – Even if it is difficult for you to talk about your feelings with other people, it is very important to find a way to do so when you are grieving. Knowing that others are aware of your feelings will make you feel less alone with your pain and will help you heal. Journaling can also be a helpful outlet for your feelings.

**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 still have a future.** When you commit to another person, you create many hopes and dreams. It's hard to let these dreams go. 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.

### **Reach out to others for support through the grieving process**

Support from others is critical to healing after a breakup or divorce. You might feel like being alone, but isolating yourself will only make this time more difficult. Don't try to get through this on your own.

Reach out to trusted friends and family members. People who have been through painful breakups or divorces can be especially helpful. They know what it is like and they can assure you that there is hope for healing and new relationships.

**Spend time with people who support, value, and energize you.** As you consider who to reach out to, choose wisely. 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.

**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 divorce or breakup, make an effort to meet new people. Join a networking group or special interest club, take a class, get involved in community activities, or volunteer at your school, synagogue, or church