

TWU Counseling Center

How to Cope with a Broken Relationship

You didn't see it coming...the realization that "it's over" just hit you...and it hurts. No one could have prepared you for the blow of losing the connection with another human being. Whether you decided to end the relationship or it was ended for you by a break up or death, you may experience symptoms of grief and periodic despair. It is not easy finding a path to true intimacy and then severing that bond with minimal impact. The foundation of love is sharing, trust, and intimacy. Inherent in that bond is a willingness to be vulnerable. Intimate vulnerability allows your thoughts and emotions to be expressed in the context of shared experience. When circumstances no longer provide a trusting environment for a bonding love, the separation can feel devastating.

In many cases, the partner is also the best friend. Coping with relationship loss can be particularly difficult if the couple has relied on each other as best friends. By having limited options to confide in, the 'newly' single person may feel isolated, lonely, and frustrated.

It took work to develop a bond between two people. With that bond being severed, it will take time to rebuild. If you find yourself watching the telephone in hopes of getting a call or listening to romantic songs as you reminisce about your ex and the way it 'could have been', you may be holding on and need to incorporate some strategies for transitioning to your new life of independence.

Coping with the Loss

1. It is important to make time for the healing process. Too often, we are encouraged to be 'strong' and keep it all inside. This method only serves to keep the former loved one on your mind and you frustrated. There needs to be a grieving period. Whether you care to admit it or not, that person did mean a great deal to you at one time. You honor the love that you shared by validating the relationship as a worthwhile experience.
2. Engage in 'self-help' practices. Some people benefit from reading self-help books. Others enjoy creative writing as a means of healing and expression. Find a way that complements your personality and do it! Whether it's reading, writing, or singing, expressing your feelings is a great way to learn about yourself and your current needs.
3. Realize that you might not be functioning at your best right now. Give yourself some space to 'be' without pressure or high demands. Efforts to organize the more routine activities of your life may be helpful to streamlining your energy expenditure. Do the activities that you need to and leave your remaining time for nurturing, self-discovery, and healing.
4. Mobilize your support system. Spending time with affirming friends is essential at this time. In addition to venting your emotions as you sort through your next step in life, you can share the relationship's shortcomings. If this was an addictive relationship, your friends can help you avoid an unhealthy reconciliation by providing true accounts of the circumstances.
5. Use this time for self-renewal. When you are involved in a relationship, the other person receives your attention and focus. Being single offers you the opportunity to redirect that attention to yourself. Connect with areas of your life that have been neglected as a result of the relationship. Recharge your body through exercise. Reflect on your spiritual awareness and life journey. Replenish by engaging with nature. Renew your commitment to yourself to be the best person possible.
6. Spend some time each day on something pleasurable. It is important to enjoy key aspects of your life while other components are mending.
7. Highlight the reasons that the relationship was less than perfect. During times when loneliness sets in and the reason why the relationship ended may not be so clear, it may be helpful to review your thoughts from a more focused period.

Most research indicates that it takes about half the time the relationship existed in order to heal from the pain. Even then, many carry a portion of the painful memories for longer periods of time. Time does help ease the discomfort of relationship loss. However, it usually takes a while to feel better. Remembering the suggestions above may help as you patiently discover the relationship with yourself again.

This information was received from the University of Florida Counseling Center, www.counsel.ufl.edu