ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

THE END OF A RELATIONSHIP

HOW LONG WILL I FEEL LIKE THIS?

Breaking up with someone you love or care deeply about is very painful. The pain and sadness (which feel as if they will continue forever) are normal reactions to any significant loss: the end of a relationship, the death of a loved one, moving house, the death of a pet, the letting go of a wish, the end of your time at uni, ...

The event may trigger negative and also sometimes positive feelings:

- rejection, confusion, frustration, anger, regret, shame, hurt, guilt, sadness, depression, despair, anxiety, fear, betrayal, humiliation, bitterness, insecurity, loneliness, self-blame, grief...
- relief, contentment, lightness, aliveness, hope, optimism, peace, acceptance...

Your negative emotional reactions to your loss will wash over you like a wave, and then recede until next time. It helps to remember that each wave will help diminish the pain, and each will pass.

*Recovery and a return to normal emotional equilibrium is a gradual process, not an event. It takes time. Healing can’t be forced or hurried.*

WHAT’S THE POINT OF TALKING ABOUT IT?

**Myth:** “The pain will go away faster if I ignore it.”

**Fact:** Trying to ignore your pain or to keep it from surfacing will make it worse in the long run.

**Myth:** “It’s important to be ‘be strong’ in the face of loss.”

**Fact:** The feelings listed above are normal reactions to loss. Crying doesn’t mean you are weak. You don’t need to ‘protect’ your family or friends by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them to support you, and you to deal with the loss and move on.

The single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people, as an antidote to feeling so alone and empty. Even if you aren’t comfortable talking about your feelings under normal
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circumstances, and usually take pride in being self-sufficient, now is the time to lean on the people who care about you. Draw friends close, rather than avoiding them.

Often, people want to help but don’t know how, so tell them what you need: a shoulder to cry on?/someone to listen?/someone to walk to lectures with?/…what else would feel supportive?

Wherever the support comes from, accept it and don’t grieve alone. Connecting to others will help you heal.

HOW CAN I FIND MY WAY THROUGH THIS?

First steps: being pro-active about your recovery

- Decide to read a book on loss, or go online, to find out how others have dealt with it.
- Try to keep to some of your normal routines, even if it feels hard. Avoid withdrawing from the world.
- Distract yourself now and then, but in between, allow time to feel the pain.
- Spend time alone thinking about the loss. Even though you fear the grief will never end, you won’t drown in it.

Next: change your self-talk

Say to yourself:

- "It’s time to let go."
- "I’m letting this ruin my life. I don’t want to do that anymore."
- "I need to start a new chapter of my life. I deserve to start afresh."

Be careful. Beginning a new relationship while you’re still hurting about the old one is likely to cause pain for yourself and a new partner.

Avoid using someone else to fill the gap, and try to see being single as an opportunity to find out about yourself for a while.

Then: acknowledge the hurt

By confronting the hurt, you’re beginning to take control, rather than be controlled by it.

- Talk about what’s happening, with a close friend/ a family member/ a counsellor/ Samaritans
- Meditate: focus on your physical feelings and notice your emotions
- Using symbols, devise a ‘letting-go’ ritual, e.g.
  1. Gather items that represent something about the relationship (letters, photos, souvenirs…) and when it’s time to let go, throw them away. Delete texts and think about how you want to deal with social media sites like Facebook.
  2. Write a ‘goodbye’ letter to your ex. Remember the good times as well as the bad. Important: Don’t send the letter straight away. Wait at least a week, and re-read it. You may be surprised at how different your perspective is. Repeat this process of waiting a week and re-reading, as many times as necessary, and eventually send it if this feels appropriate, or preferably burn it or tear it to pieces as part of your ritual closure.
  3. Visit a place that was significant in your relationship and mentally say ‘goodbye’.
Finally: move on into a new phase of your life

Loss leaves a vacuum in your life. You need to replace the emptiness with positive experiences.
- Take up a new activity: go walking, running, meet up with friends, visit museums (London? Oxford? Reading?), go to the cinema, join a new society. Keep this new activity up for at least 6 weeks. Remember, it takes time to feel different.
- Recall the things you enjoy, and start returning to things you’ve probably given up on lately. At first you won’t feel enthusiastic, but persist. Eventually you may find that you’re looking forward to the future, rather than running away from the past.

Still hurting badly even after taking these steps to help yourself? Sometimes we need extra help. See the list below for other support available.

**SUPPORT**

The University Medical Practice  (0118) 987 4551
The University Counselling Service  (0118) 378 4216
The Students’ Union Advice Centre  (0118) 378 4110
The Chaplaincy Centre  (0118) 378 8797
The Samaritans (24 hour)  08457 909090
Cruse (Bereavement) Local Helpline  0870 1671677
National Helpline  (0181) 332 7227

Counselling and Wellbeing:
Email: counselling@reading.ac.uk
Or visit us at the university website: www.reading.ac.uk/counselling
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