

## Navigating Relationship Breakup: Suffer Less, Gain Wisdom and Strength, Get on with Life

Relationship breakup happens for many reasons. It has multiple faces and can elicit a host of emotions when it occurs: loneliness, isolation, depression, despair, frustration, anxiety, to name a few. There can be anger at a partner's, small-mindedness, refusal to try again, abuse or real betrayal. There can be fear too at the prospect of coping with changes in financial and social circumstances or housing, and fear at the anticipation of being single again. One might feel guilty over perceived failure. Or, there can be an overwhelming sadness at the thought of having to cope with all the changes required in your life.

Whatever the feelings raised, the core emotion involved in every case of relationship breakup is LOSS, which triggers the complex human experience of GRIEF, as a natural response.

Grief is not a simple emotion. It is experienced *instinctually* as an emotional process. As it runs its course, this emotional process elicits all sorts of feelings and reactions. It is also a *normal* process and occurs in *everyone's* case no matter how strong they are or think they are – though not always in the same way or with the same intensity. *How* we experience grief tends to unfold in ways that are predictable. Most often, people move back and forth between a state of shock and emotional numbness. In so doing, they go between feelings of fear, vulnerability, anger – and denial, depression, and minimizing the importance of the loss. The dialogue between these two states (of being either numb or upset) continues as gradually, over time, the person emotionally digests the nature of the loss.

What is needed *in response* to grief, as a natural process to deal with the loss felt in a breakup, is **a healthy means of coping**. The emotions that result from a breakup are extremely painful yet they are *natural* reactions to grief in what is a very difficult, life-changing situation. There is no “cure” for these feelings, but the good news is that there *are healthy and helpful* ways to cope with them with the aim of suffering as little as possible, gaining understanding, wisdom, and strength from having gone through the experience, and acquiring the ability to move on with one's life.

A healthy means of coping starts with *allowing one's self the freedom to grieve*. How?

- **Let yourself experience your emotions.** Avoiding or becoming numb to painful feelings prevents healing. Don't fight the feelings of grief. It's counter-productive. One has to first experience emotions to then get over them.
- **Talk about it.** Suffering is lessened when we talk about feelings with sympathetic listeners such as trusted family and friends. Working through one's grief requires letting the emotions flow, not attempting to block or judge them.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for or accept assistance** from the people you trust to talk with, as they are able to offer it.

Not everyone is a good listener however, and even those friends and family who are, also have lives of their own and may get tired or impatient over time if they are your primary source of emotional support. Other sources of help are support groups or working with a professional therapist.

**Support groups** provide a face-to-face forum where people in different stages of adjustment to their breakup come together to share information and experiences, and provide support for one another.

**Psychotherapy and counselling** can also be an excellent choice for support. A qualified and experienced therapist has an expert understanding of how relationship breakup affects and alters lives. He or she is trained as an empathetic listener who provides a safe place to talk about fears and vent feelings. Particularly, a therapist offers a place to let out those emotions such as anger and shame that may be too intense or private to express elsewhere. A therapist can provide expert guidance on coping with the grief and stress you are experiencing. He or she can help you deal with negative thoughts that may be undermining your efforts to feel better. Too, a therapist can help you remain an effective parent to your children, and support you in rebuilding your life after the breakup.

Ultimately, the goal is to work through the loss and grief resulting from a breakup in a *healthy* way and move on with one's life. What matters in the healing process is *making sense of what happened* in the breakup, *facing the difficulties in a way that gives you strength, learning about yourself* from having gone through the experience, and *accepting the reality of one's current circumstances*, because acceptance leads to hope for the future.

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