

Breakups

Ending a relationship is one the most avoided and feared human experiences. As a culture, we have no clear-cut rituals for ending relationships or saying good bye to valued others. We are often unprepared for the variety of feelings we experience in the process.

Some common reactions are as follows:

Denial

We can't believe that this is happening to us and that the relationship is over.

Anger

We are angry and often enraged at our partner or lover for shaking our world to its core.

Fear

We are frightened by the intensity of our feelings. We are frightened that we may never love or be loved again. We are frightened that we may not survive our loss, but we will do so.

Self-blame

We blame ourselves for what went wrong. We replay our relationship over and over, saying to ourselves, "If only I had done this. If only I had done that".

Sadness

We cry, sometimes for what seems an eternity, for we have suffered a great loss.

Guilt

We feel guilty, particularly if we choose to end a relationship. We don't want to hurt our partner, yet we don't want to stay in a lifeless relationship.

Disorientation and Confusion

We don't know who or where we are anymore. Our familiar world has been shattered. We've lost our bearings.

Hope

Initially we may fantasize that there will be reconciliation, that the parting is only temporary, and that our partner will come back to us. As we heal and accept the reality of the ending, we may dare to hope for a newer and better world for ourselves.

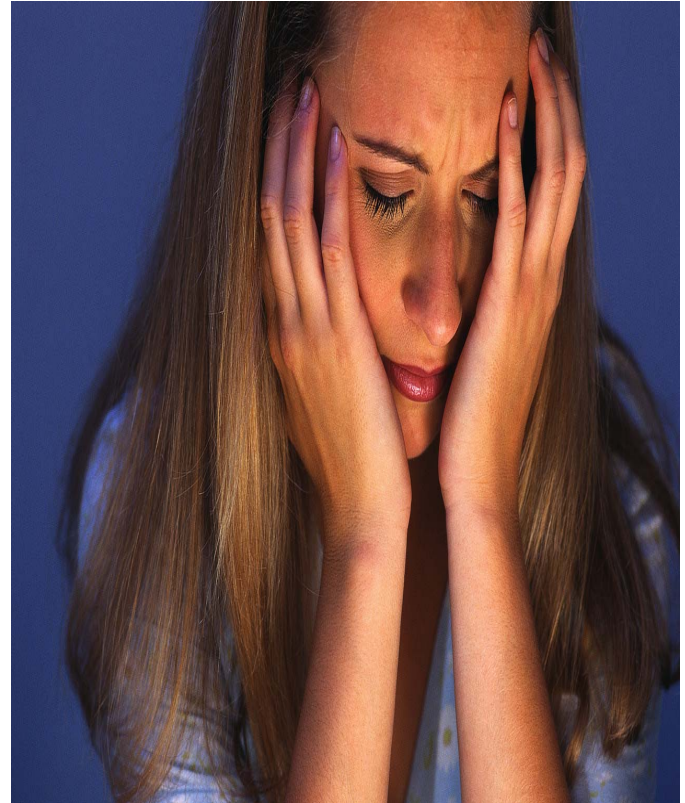
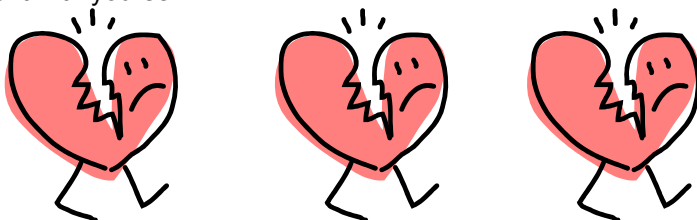
Bargaining

We plead with our partner to give us a chance. "Don't go", we say. "I'll change this and I'll change that if only you'll stay".

Relief

We can be relieved that there is an ending to the pain, the fighting, the torment, and the lifelessness of the relationship.

While some of these feelings may seem overwhelming, they are all "normal" reactions. They are necessary to the process of healing, so that we can eventually move on and engage in other relationships. Be patient with yourself.



Some Guidelines

Here are some guidelines many people find helpful:

Allow yourself to feel the sadness, anger, fear, and pain associated with an ending. Denying those feelings or keeping them inside will only prolong them.

Recognize that guilt, self blame, and bargaining are our defenses against feeling out of control and unable to stop the other person from leaving us. But there are some endings we can't control, because we can't control another person's behavior.

Give yourself time to heal, and be kind to yourself for the duration: pamper yourself, ask for support from others, and allow yourself new experiences and friends.

Talk it over with someone. This can often give us perspective. If you feel "stuck" in a pattern and unable to change it, talking to a professional counselor may help.