

Tips for coping with a breakup

Most people experience a breakup at least once in their lives. The situation can be particularly devastating for the person on the receiving end. Common reactions include severe grief, anger, loneliness, helplessness and even despair.

Post-breakup stages

Even though the reasons and circumstances leading up to a breakup vary individually, it has been shown that most people go through similar post-breakup stages. The duration and intensity of these stages are different for everyone. They may also overlap, and the order in which they are experienced may vary.

I. Denial

In this phase, the breakup is usually denied or ignored. In most cases, the abandoned party tries to win back their partner by acting exceptionally nice. Denial is considered a normal human reaction to a sudden breakup – it gives us more time to brace ourselves for the upcoming feelings and emotions.

II. Intense emotions

Feelings such as sadness, hopelessness, anger, self-doubt, and/or severe physical reactions such as insomnia, decreased or increased appetite, nausea, headaches or stomachaches arise as soon as the person starts to realize that the breakup has happened. Typically, in this phase, we also analyze the reasons for the breakup. This is mostly accompanied by feelings of guilt (“What could I have done differently?”). Usually, towards the end of this second phase, the initial feeling of sadness will increasingly be replaced by anger.

III. Readjustment

In this phase, strong feelings towards the lost partner start to decrease again – both feelings of bitterness and affection. Little by little, the aggrieved party manages to concentrate on themselves and their life again and gradually restores their self-esteem.

IV. New perspectives

This last phase is usually characterized by working out new perspectives for one’s future as well as restoring trust in oneself and other people. New strengths are discovered and the willingness to start a new relationship increases.

NOTE

Experiencing lovesickness is a totally normal post-breakup reaction. Overcoming lovesickness is not about forgetting the time you spent with your partner. Instead, it is important to learn how to think of the past without it resulting in extreme emotional outbursts. The goal is to reduce feelings of love, desire and anger as well as constant thoughts about your former partner.

10 ways to cope with breakups

What can you do to process a breakup, let go and have a fresh start? Below, we have compiled a list of tips for you. It is important to bear in mind that everyone is different and there is no universal solution for lovesickness. Try the following tips and see for yourself what helps you the most.

1. Take your time

This is probably the most important and probably best known advice when it comes to dealing with lovesickness. Going through the post-breakup stages can take some time. Find out for yourself which phase you're currently in and which ones (probably) still lie ahead. Understanding the different stages helps you allocate and understand your feelings. Again: Everyone is different; therefore the stages can also vary. Some might take longer, others might not even occur at all. Generally, getting used to changes always takes time, and that's totally normal!

2. Try to be more accepting

Even if it's extremely difficult in the beginning to accept the breakup, try saying to yourself: "I am willing to accept that the relationship is over". Tell other people about the breakup. Not talking about it will block the process of coming to terms with what happened.

3. Think about your positive characteristics

A breakup can make you forget about your strengths, successes and other positive aspects in your life. Try making yourself aware of what you like, what you're good at and what you have achieved. You can also ask your friends what they like about you.

4. Be patient with yourself

It is okay for you to not be as productive as you would normally be. Don't expect yourself to be able to go about your daily routine as if nothing happened. Try taking the pressure off yourself and avoid making any life-changing decisions during this difficult time.

5. Allow yourself to feel hurt and sad

This doesn't mean you should devote yourself to these feelings constantly, but, for example, rather schedule a daily "hour of grief" where you have the chance to intensively deal with your pain.

6. Remove objects that remind you of your partner

You don't necessarily have to throw them away. It can be enough to put everything in a box and hide it away in your basement.

7. Avoid contact with your partner (for now)

The "no-contact-rule" helps you concentrate on yourself and your own needs.

8. Avoid excessive consumption of alcohol, drugs or pills

Addictive drugs might "help" you for a short amount of time, however they will prevent you from developing long-term functional strategies required for coping with the breakup.

9. Make plans – especially for your free time

Find out what makes you happy and which friends might be able to help you out the most. Sometimes, it helps to accept invitations even though you might not feel like going at first. This strategy helps to prevent loneliness and makes room for positive experiences.

10. Make room for feelings of anger and disappointment

Suppressing these feelings will prolong the grieving process. Feeling angry will help bring you closer to a state of disengagement. You can express your feelings through pictures or letters. Even if you don't send the letter in the end, it will still help you.

Literature:

Based on: Wolf, D. (2014). Wenn der Partner geht. Wege zur Bewältigung von Trennung und Scheidung. Mannheim, PAL.