

TIP SHEET FOR COPING WITH A RELATIONSHIP BREAK UP

The breaking up of an intimate relationship can provoke a variety of difficult feelings and responses which vary according to the nature of the break up.

What are common reactions to a relationship break up?

- As the ending of a relationship is often a significant loss, grief reactions such as sadness, depression, insomnia, anxiety, concentration difficulties and a loss or gain of appetite are common.

Other feelings and thoughts that may accompany a break up include -

- A sense of abandonment, rejection and loss of self-esteem.
- A feeling of relief that the relationship is over.
- A preoccupation with blaming, either oneself or the ex-partner. You may feel angry towards your ex-partner for causing so much pain or you may experience feelings of guilt and responsibility for hurting your ex-partner.
- A sense of personal failure that the relationship has ended. You may blame yourself for the problems in the relationship and continually replay past conflicts, saying to yourself, "If only I had done or said this differently".
- Fear of the future without the ex-partner, in particular the fear that you will never love or be loved again.
- Feelings of loneliness can be quite acute and many people describe their experience as akin to living in a vacuum. This can be particularly distressing if you have lost friends whom you had previously met through your ex-partner.
- Feeling overwhelmed and frightened by the intensity of your feelings.
- Confusion surrounding the cause of the break up and a need to make sense of it all.
- Difficulty in letting go of the relationship and finding any opportunity to contact the ex-partner.
- Fluctuating feelings towards the ex-partner, ranging from relief that the relationship is over to intensely missing the person.
- Viewing the relationship in 'black and white' terms. This can involve either a preoccupation with the good or the bad aspects of the relationship.
- Anxiety about finances and housing if previously shared with the ex-partner.
- Concern about parenting issues if children are involved.

Ways to Cope after a Relationship Break up

- Accept painful feelings – their intensity will subside over time. Experiencing such overwhelming feelings does not mean that the relationship should not have ended. It is normal that you grieve for the 'good things' in the relationship.
- Gain support from others. Surround yourself with non-judgemental family and friends with whom you can freely express your feelings.
- Try to understand the reasons for the relationship breakdown. If you have questions regarding the reasons for the break up or you feel that you need to directly communicate significant thoughts or feelings which are preventing you from moving forward, it may be helpful to arrange a meeting with your ex-partner. This is not however always possible or appropriate, particularly if the relationship was emotionally or physically abusive. An alternative can involve either communicating via email or writing a letter.
- Trying to make sense of a relationship breakdown can be confronting. This can be a time for self evaluation which may be challenging. Understanding the causes of the relationship break up can prevent similar mistakes with a future relationship.
- Avoid regular contact with your ex-partner. This can just prolong the pain and delay the healing process. If you decide to recontact, first give yourself time for the painful feelings to subside.
- Reduce your expectations. Accept that you may not be able to function at your best but remind yourself that this will be temporary.

- Try to avoid beginning a new relationship while you are still grieving from the past relationship. Unresolved issues from the former relationship can adversely affect the new one. Making decisions about the suitability of a new partner can also be problematic at this time as you are likely to make your decision in terms of what was lacking in the past relationship rather than all the characteristics of the new relationship.

Coping with Study

- Maintain your attendance at lectures, labs and tutorials. Skipping classes will only cause you to feel worse.
- Allow for a reduced ability to concentrate and loss of motivation by giving yourself lots of breaks when doing assignments.
- Take extended breaks by exercising and involving yourself in interests and hobbies as much as possible, even if they are not as enjoyable as before.
- Discuss your study with other students. Apart from assisting you academically, it will improve motivation.

Where can I get help from others?

- Talk to a counsellor at the Newcastle campus (0249215801) or at the Central Coast campus (0243484060).
- Make an appointment to see your doctor.

What other resources are available?

Website

www.relationships.com.au/advice/

A very extensive and reliable source of practical and very helpful information.

Books

Bruce Fisher & Robert Alberti (2005) *Rebuilding: When your Relationship Ends*: Impact Publishers.

Relationships Australia, *Women and Separation*, 2003.

Available free on line at www.relationships.com.au or call 1300 364 277 for details.

Relationships Australia, *Men and Separation*, 2003.

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