

Breaking Up is Hard To Do

ENDING A RELATIONSHIP

Ending a relationship is one of 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.

COMMON REACTIONS

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 a reconciliation, that the parting is only temporary, 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.

HELPFUL 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 counselor at the Counseling & Testing Center may help.



THE UWL COUNSELING AND TESTING CENTER STAFF ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP THOSE STUDENTS WHO ARE DEALING WITH ANXIETY DISORDERS AND OTHER LIFE ISSUES. CALL (608)785-8073 TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO TALK WITH A COUNSELOR.