

How To Survive When Your Heart's Been Broken



by Mary Guindon, Ph.D., NCC

Mid-February may be cold and icy in most places, but it's also the time for warm, fuzzy, positive thoughts about love and relationships. From the anonymous Valentine's cards passed around in grade school classes, to the TV and magazine ads for serious investments in diamond jewelry, February 14th brings constant reminders of how wonderful it is to be in love.

But despite all the starry-eyed publicity that relationships receive at this time of the year, it's also a fact that not all of them last forever. Love may be wonderful, but having the present love of your life announce that it's just not working out and that he or she is out the door, is anything but wonderful. When it happens, and it does to almost everyone at one time or another, it can leave us feeling shattered, unlovable, abandoned, and very much alone. It can make you feel your life can never again be the same and bring pain that is truly excruciating.

What can you do? Start by following the age-old advice given to everyone with a broken heart. Let time be the healer. As time passes and you gain distance from the breakup, you'll also gain perspective. Realize you will heal and give yourself the time you need. Recognize, also, that you will heal at your own pace, not someone else's.

Such advice, of course, is of little consolation when the wound is new and the ache immense. Here, then, are ten practical tips to help you get through this initial period of pain:

- 1. Recognize this as a loss,** similar to the death of someone close to you. That means you will mourn. That's natural and inevitable. Don't beat yourself up or feel guilty for being sad or angry.
- 2. Acknowledge that the day will come when you will get better.** When you have the flu, you know it won't last forever. Think of this pain as a flu of the heart. It's going to go away, too.
- 3. Take care of yourself physically.** Get lots of rest but don't languish in bed. Exercise. Eat well and sensibly. This is not the time to junk out nor the time for stringent dieting.
- 4. Put structure in your life.** Stick to your regular schedule as much as possible during the week. Make plans for evenings, weekends and holidays.
- 5. Realize you really aren't alone.** Seek the support of others. There's nothing to be ashamed about. It's okay to accept comforting, but don't wallow in repeated story telling. Instead, do something for or with someone else. Consider the help of a professional counselor.
- 6. Invest your energies in life.** Surround yourself with things that are alive: plants, pets, and kids. Nurturing others is a fantastic way to nurture yourself.
- 7. Be aware of the rebound.** This is not the time to rekindle old, failed relationships, nor the time to start a new one. You need time alone to get to know yourself again.
- 8. Start something new, interesting and involving.** Develop a new interest or rediscover an old one. Take a class at the community college... pick up that craft project gathering dust... go on a tour, even if it's in your own town.

9. Forgive your ex-lover. Forgive yourself. Celebrate the good in the relationship ended, but don't hold on to mementos from it. They can keep you stuck in the past. Honor what you had, then let it go. Burn, bury, throw out, or give away those reminders. Don't go out of your way to revisit those special places. And don't contact your ex-lover, hoping for unrealistic reconciliation. Accept that when something's over, it's over.

10. Reaffirm yourself. You have value. Be gentle with yourself. Your life is well worth living. Anticipate a positive outcome and accentuate your positives. Learn from this experience and evaluate your own growth. Take stock and make realistic adjustments where you need to.

Taking these simple steps can help minimize that pain and put your life back on a positive, solid footing. And one day soon you will be able to commend yourself for your courage and your survival. You made it! And hopefully, come next Valentine's Day, you'll again be a participating member of the relationship celebration.

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