

SWEET AND SOUR ENDINGS TO A RELATIONSHIP

By Ginger E. Blume, Ph.D.

Not all relationships end on a mutual basis. Usually there is one person who is less interested in ending than the other. This is true of friendships, significant love relationships, business partnerships and marriages. We tend to think of the person who “initiated the ending” as having the least amount of pain and suffering. However, we’ve all know people who prompted the end of a relationship and later experienced great difficulty accepting the reality, once it had happened. Perhaps, they suffered from “the grass is greener on the other side,” phenomenon, only to discover they’d made a tragic mistake. Clearly, whether being the “one left behind or the leaver” doesn’t necessarily determine who manages to deal with the fallout the easiest.

Perception determines adjustment

How you perceive the nature of the break up, in large part, colors the way you recover from it. For instance, if you feel the break up was for the best (i.e. “We care about each other, but we’ve simply grown apart.”), you’ll probably find it easier to accept and move forward with your life. On the other hand, if you feel the break up represents a fatal flaw in you as a person, you’ll more likely feel devastated. Too often, people get stuck in the way they believe “other’s perceive them.” It is important to see your personal worth as related to many aspects of your being and not just connected to “whether you are in a partner relationship.” Perception is a determining factor in how one feels following a breakup and how soon they recover.

Regardless of whether an individual is in the so called “driver seat” or not, some emotional pain is predictable. This occurs because all “endings” are, by their nature, painful. They generally create a void in one’s life that must be dealt with. The reality of an ending/loss, whether unexpected, planned, delayed for a long time, or resulting from an abusive situation, etc. challenges us to deal with the sudden change in our lives. Change, for better or for worse, is like a stone thrown into a pond. There is a ripple effect that touches numerous areas of our lives. With change comes stress. With stress comes the need to utilize coping strategies. When it comes to coping, some people use effective approaches while others simply make things worse.

Breakups in today’s society

Is there a trend in the way people seem to be handling the breakup of a relationship these days? While there are always individual differences, there may be one of two preferred modes for coping in our current culture: massive denial or victimhood. These two strategies naturally have negative repercussions. As I describe how these get played out, you can assume that *doing the opposite behaviors represents a healthier approach.*

Unhealthy ways of coping with the ending of a relationship:

- 1) Jumping into yet another relationship before you’ve had time to mourn, recover, or understand the last relationship. Hence, history will continue to repeat itself when you don’t take the time to examine a past failure.
- 2) Refusing to accept the reality of the ending (i.e. hanging on by relieving the past, stalking the loved one, getting stuck and refusing to move forward, etc.)

- 3) Believing your life is worthless without the “lost other” (usually because you’ve neglected other areas of your life while over-focusing on that one person).
- 4) Acting out your ambivalence by breaking up and getting back together, over and over again. This creates a slow and painful death of agony.
- 5) Trying to numb out the emotional pain by using drugs, alcohol, compulsive sex, shopping, etc.
- 6) Searching for someone to “fix your life.” (i.e. not taking responsibility for your half of why the relationship ended).

Many of the above “ill-founded solutions” to healing the pain of a breakup are aimed to do one of two things: avoid the pain or refuse to accept one’s role in the ending of the relationship (feeling victimized by the loved one). Ultimately, these are dead-end solutions that keep the individual repeating their past. There are many great self-help books on coping with the loss of a love relationship and there are therapists and counselor who can help you cope with the pain you feel. If you recognize yourself in the above examples, get off the treadmill and get help.

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