

# A guide to **DEALING WITH BREAKUP**

Developed as part of  
ICMR's Multistate Implementation Research Study on Improving  
Mental Well Being Among School and College Students



# Let's talk about **DEALING WITH BREAKUPS**

As people, we are constantly forming new relationships with others.  
These relationships can take many forms.

Some may be romantic in nature while some may be  
non-romantic or platonic.

**A romantic relationship** is one in which two people may share feelings of romantic attraction, emotional intimacy and commitment to each other.

**Non-romantic or platonic relationships** may be based on slightly different forms of closeness and connection, such as friendship, family ties, or professional camaraderie. Non-romantic relationships can also be deeply meaningful and supportive, with a foundation of mutual respect, trust, and emotional support, but they lack the romantic element typically associated with romantic relationships.



Source: Freepik.com

While we may try to nurture and maintain our relationships, there may be times when some of these might end. Ending a relationship can often be a difficult experience, more so, if the end was not mutually decided or agreed upon.

## What is a break up?

The term 'break up' is typically used to describe the end of a romantic relationship.

Breakups can be difficult to cope with and often bring up various challenging feelings.

### Did you know?

**Adolescence and young adulthood are a period of many firsts — first crushes, first relationships, and sometimes, first breakups.**

Relationships during this time are often intense and can feel all-consuming because you are experiencing new emotions and figuring out who you are. When a relationship ends, **it is completely natural to feel sad, angry, confused, or even relieved — all at once.**

With so many emotions being felt, it is important to give yourself the time and space to process these feelings and take steps to heal.



Source: Freepik.com

## Why do people break up?

Ending a relationship can be a tough decision to make. There are many reasons for which two individuals might end a relationship:

- ❖ You discover that you like or want different things

- ❖ It feels like the relationship is moving too fast or too slow
- ❖ You both have different ideas of what it should be like in a relationship
- ❖ You are still discovering who you are and who you want to be
- ❖ You do not get along very well
- ❖ You do not feel safe or comfortable
- ❖ Your values have become misaligned or changed over time, leading to differing priorities or outlooks on life.

## What makes breakups complex in nature?

Going through a break up may look different for different people. The breakup itself may include complex steps like initiating and making the decision to end the relationship, having tough conversations with your partner and drawing appropriate boundaries.

You may experience the breakup differently based on:

### Who initiates the break up?

The decision to end a relationship may lie with you or your partner.

**If ending the relationship was your decision, you may be experiencing the following:**

**Relief:** If the relationship had significant issues or was causing stress, you might feel a sense of relief or liberation after ending it.

**Guilt:** You might feel guilty about hurting the other person, especially if you care about them deeply or if the breakup was unexpected for the other party.



Source: Freepik.com

**Sadness:** Even if you believe it was the right decision, you may still feel sad about the end of the relationship and the loss of shared experiences and connections.

**Fear:** You might be apprehensive about the future, worried about being alone or uncertain about whether you made the right choice.

**Confidence:** If you felt strongly that ending the relationship was the right decision, you may feel a sense of empowerment or confidence in your choice.

**Confusion:** Sometimes, even after initiating a breakup, you might feel unsure or conflicted about your decision, especially if emotions are fresh and deeply felt.



Source: Freepik.com

**If the decision to break up was made by the other party, you might:**

**Feel Like You Were Caught Off-Guard:** The breakup might come as a surprise, leaving you feeling confused or shocked.

**Question What Went Wrong:** You could find yourself going over things in your mind, trying to understand the reasons for the breakup.

**Feel Rejected or Hurt:** You might feel a sense of rejection or wonder if you did something wrong.

**Feel Vengeful towards the person:** Being at the receiving end of a breakup can feel unjust and unfair. These feelings can also make you angry towards your partner. Though these feelings are valid, taking revenge or harming the other person in any way can never be the solution to deal with your feelings.

**Miss the Relationship:** It is natural to feel sad and miss the good moments and the connection you had with your partner.

**Feel Like You Were not Enough:** You might feel a loss of self-esteem or think that you weren't enough in the relationship, which can be very painful.

### Does a breakup have stages?

Sometimes, a breakup may define a definite end of the relationship - this may involve a conversation about the break up and clear boundaries around meeting or speaking with each other. These steps often allow each partner to be fully aware of the situation and what they can expect from each other.



Source: Storeenvy.com

There are also times when a breakup may not be as definitive and the boundaries set may not be as clear. This would mean that two individuals remain in touch while considering ending a relationship or may take a break from it to contemplate what may be the best course for the relationship. Feelings of frustration and confusion may be common in this phase.



### **What is closure? Do we always need it to be able to move on?**

Closure in a breakup refers to achieving a sense of resolution or understanding about the end of a relationship.

It often involves coming to terms with what happened, why it happened, and what it means for you moving forward. This can include having final conversations, understanding the reasons behind the breakup, or processing your feelings and experiences.

The need for closure to move on may vary from person to person. Some people might find it important to fully understand the reason behind the breakup in order to accept it, while others may focus on the experience itself.

Ultimately, while closure can help, it's not always necessary for everyone. What's important is finding a way to make peace with the past and focus on your own healing and growth.



### **Why do breakups feel so Intense?**

**New Emotions:** For many of us, breakups may be our first encounter with deep emotional pain. The intensity of these emotions can feel overwhelming because they are unfamiliar.

**Identity and Belonging:** During adolescence and young adulthood, you may still be figuring out who you are and where you fit in. Relationships often play a big role in shaping your identity, so when a relationship ends, it can feel like a part of you is lost too.

**Social Dynamics:** Peer relationships are crucial during this time, and a breakup may affect your friend group and also disrupt your sense of belonging. The fear of how others might perceive you or talk about you can often add to the stress.

**Shared Memories:** The many memories associated with the person can make it harder to let go, adding to the emotional weight of the breakup.

### **It is Okay to Feel Confused**

You might find yourself questioning if you made the right decision or wondering if you will ever find another relationship. These thoughts are natural, and it is important to remember that everyone experiences breakups differently.

It is also common to feel a mix of emotions—sadness, relief, anger, and even loneliness. These emotions might change from day to day or even hour to hour, and that is okay.



**“Some days might be tougher than others - but it’s important to try and take it one day at a time.”**



## Breaking up Well

Being the one to decide to break up can be really hard – especially if you are worried about hurting the other person. Here are some tips for breaking up in a considerate and respectful manner:

**Choose the Right Time and Place:** Aim for a private, calm setting where you can have an uninterrupted conversation. Avoid doing it in a public place or over text if possible.

**Be Honest but Gentle:** Share your feelings honestly, but do so with kindness. Avoid blaming or criticising the other person, and focus on expressing your own feelings and reasons for the breakup.

**Be Clear and Direct:** Avoid ambiguous language. Be clear about your decision to end the relationship to prevent misunderstandings or false hope.

**Listen to and Validate Their Feelings:** Allow the other person to express their emotions and listen actively. Acknowledge their feelings even if you don't agree with them.

**Set Boundaries:** Discuss and agree on how to handle communication and interactions moving forward. It may be helpful to take a break from contact to allow both parties to heal.

**Be Prepared for Various Reactions:** Understand that the other person might react with sadness, anger, or confusion. Try to stay calm and compassionate in response.

**Take Care of Yourself:** Ending a relationship can be emotionally draining for both parties. Make sure to seek support from friends, family, or a therapist if needed.

**Respect Their Space and Privacy:** Give the other person time and space to process the breakup without pressure. Respect their need for distance and avoid posting details of the breakup on social media.



## Coping with a break up

Here are some ideas that might help you cope with a painful break-up:



**Allow yourself  
to grieve**



**Talk to people you trust**



**Give yourself time  
to heal**



**Try to maintain  
a routine**



**Keep busy doing  
things you enjoy**



**Try to learn from  
the experience**

## Remember

**You are Not Alone:** Many of your peers are going through similar experiences, even if they do not talk about it openly.

**It is Okay to Take Your Time:** Healing from a breakup is a process, and it is important to give yourself the time and space to heal.

**Accept Your Emotions:** Instead of suppressing or distracting yourself from your feelings, acknowledge and accept the emotions you are going through as a natural part of the healing process.

**Do Not Associate Your Self-Worth with Rejection:** Remember that rejection in a relationship does not define your value or self-worth. Your worth is inherent and not dependent on any relationship.

**You Are Resilient:** This experience, as painful as it may be, can help you grow stronger and learn more about what you want and need in a relationship.

## Time to Reflect!

### Heart-to-Heart Letter

Write a letter to your ex-partner (or the friend you lost). Remember, you do not need to send it to them but are merely writing a letter addressed to them.

Try to express what you are feeling—anger, sadness, gratitude—whatever comes to mind. Then, either keep the letter as a way to remember how you have grown, or tear it up as a symbol of moving on.



## What Have You Learned?

Reflect on what you have learned from this relationship. Answer the following:

- **What did this relationship teach you about yourself?**
- **What qualities do you want in future relationships?**
- **How have you grown from this experience?**

## Coping Strategies Checklist

Check off the coping strategies that appeal to you, and add any of your own. These are simple activities that can help you feel better and stay positive.

- ☐ **Talking to a Friend:** Share how you are feeling with someone you trust.
- ☐ **Journaling:** Write about your emotions and what you are going through.
- ☐ **Physical Activity:** Go for a walk, do some yoga, or play a sport.
- ☐ **Creative Outlets:** Draw, paint, or engage in another creative activity to express your feelings.
- ☐ **Listening to Music:** Create a playlist of songs that uplift your mood.
- ☐ **Spending Time in Nature:** Go outside, breathe fresh air, and connect with nature.
- ☐ **Practising Mindfulness:** Try deep breathing exercises or meditation to calm your mind.
- ☐ **Learning Something New:** Focus on a new hobby or interest to keep your mind engaged.
- ☐ **Setting Small Goals:** Break down your day into manageable tasks to help you stay focused.
- ☐ **Self-Care Rituals:** Take a long bath, read a book, or do something that relaxes you.

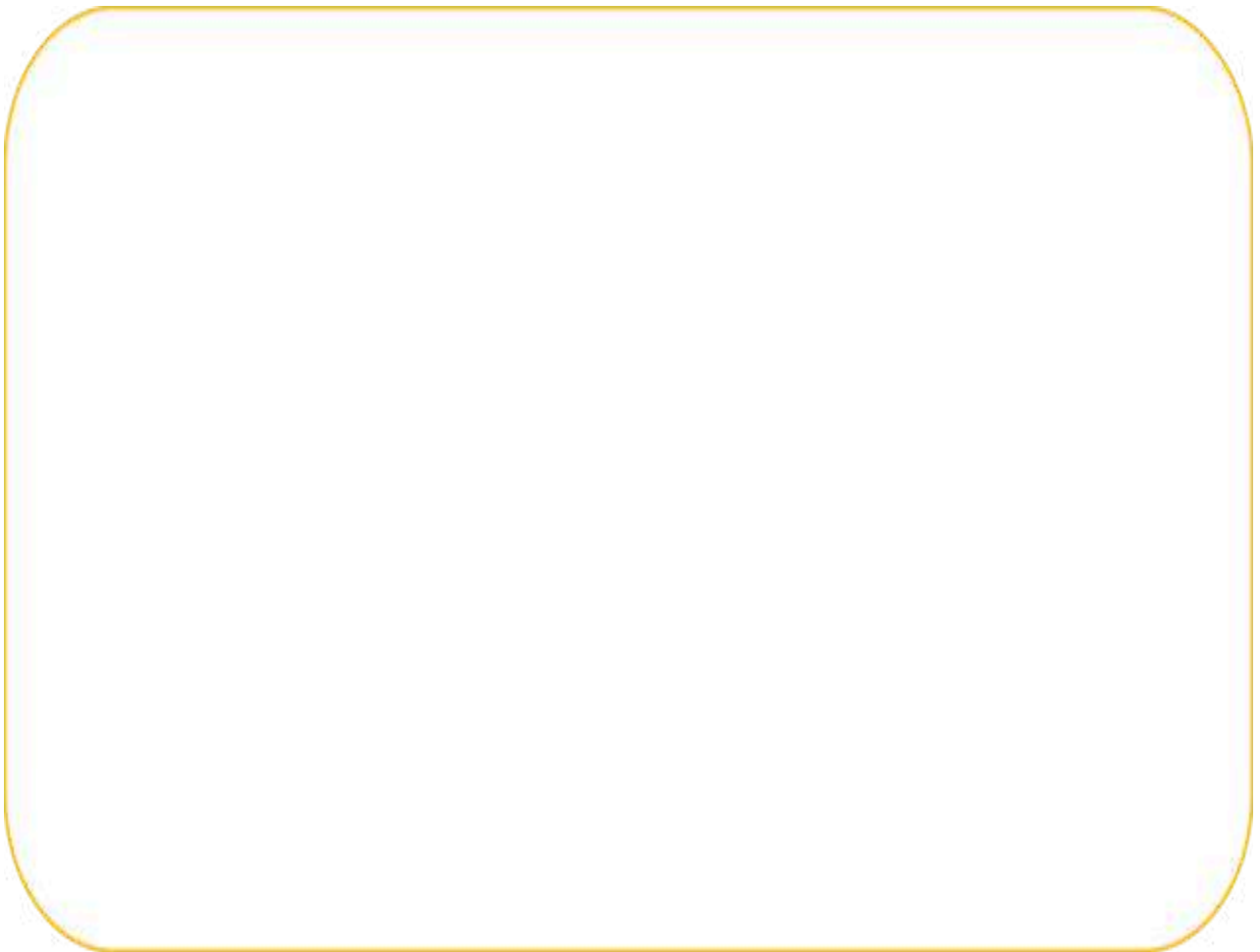
- ☐ **Connecting with Family:** Spend quality time with family members who support you.

You can add your own ideas on activities that can help you feel better and stay positive here:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Draw Your Feelings

Sometimes words are not enough. Take some time to draw how you are feeling about the breakup. Do not worry about making it perfect—just let your emotions guide your art.





Developed by  
School of Human Ecology (SHE)  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai

August 2024