

Surviving Your First Heartbreak: Don't Let Your Breakup Derail Your Momentum in College

by Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Experiencing your first heartbreak is tough. The pain is intense and unlike anything else. It feels like withdrawal from a drug addiction, making it hard to focus on anything else in your life. But you can get through it without letting it derail your academic trajectory.

A romantic relationship fills you with hope and excitement as you envision a future together, making plans and promises. When it ends, the loss is colossal. It's not just the loss of that fantasized future but also the loss of who you were within that relationship. Being in love can inflate self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of well-being. This boost is incredibly gratifying when you usually struggle with low self-esteem. Yet, it torpedoed your self-worth even more when it feels like you've given everything only to be abandoned.

Breakups challenge our assumptions about relationships, ourselves, and reality itself. We expect payoffs for our emotional investments in a partner. We expect support and acceptance from our partner. When they hurt us, it's a betrayal of trust. It's like losing your best friend when you need them the most. Betrayal creates disbelief in your ability to trust your judgment and perception. How could you have been so blindsided? Can you trust your perceptions even now? This self-doubt can undermine everything that you are trying to accomplish in your life.

So, how do you heal? It takes time and effort. When you feel like crying, cry. Of course, you are sad, hurt, and angry. It is appropriate to feel what you are feeling. Go ahead and grieve. Talk about your feelings. Write about

them. Reach out to people who can be there for you. Let them comfort you and be patient with their advice.

Get out and about as soon as you can. Invite the people back into your life from whom you have withdrawn. Spend time with people you may have neglected due to your focus on the relationship. Get back into your life. Reclaim who you are, and start living without a romantic partner.

Avoid the urge to stay friends; it only prolongs the pain. Resist any urges to make contact to reunite when you are the only one interested in this. Use cognitive therapy to help you challenge thoughts that keep you stuck in the past and permit yourself to move on.

Resist any urges to act out your pain or seek revenge. It won't make you feel better and only hurts you in the end. Instead, seek counseling if you're struggling with depression or anxiety. Use this opportunity to learn about yourself and your patterns in relationships. Identify any red flags that may have been present early on.

Replace your relationship with a renewed focus on personal and academic goals. Stay committed to your studies and invest in yourself. Get out, volunteer, and pursue your passions. Life will go on, and you will love again. Trust yourself to handle it like an adult. Love is worth the risk.

Surviving your first heartbreak is tough, but it's not the end of your story. Keep moving forward, and brighter days will come. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2013 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.**

Surviving heartbreak to regain your focus on your academic and personal goals can be assisted by eliminating the unwanted recurrent thoughts that keep drawing you back to the breakup.

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