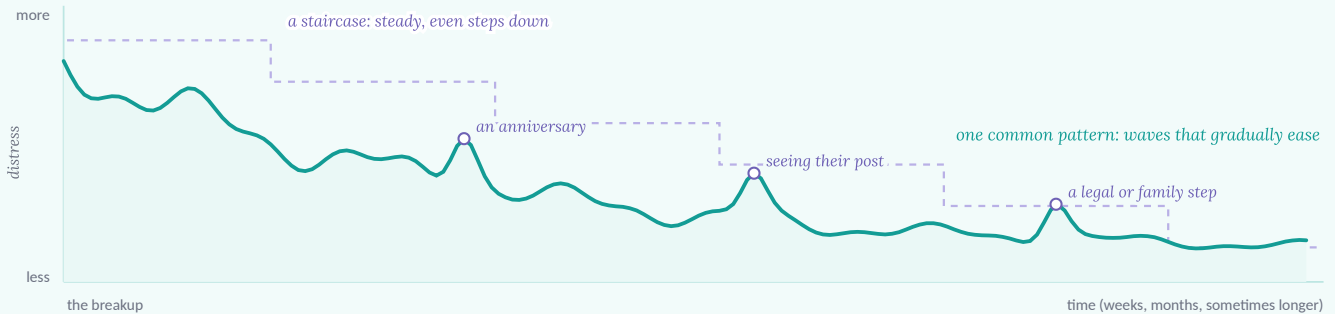


Through a Breakup or Separation

Understanding what's happening, and what can help

The end of a relationship, whether you chose it, didn't, or it was mutual, is one of life's most stressful changes. What follows is often a form of grief. These pages offer information, practical strategies and a plan you can use between sessions.

Recovery is often more like a tide than a staircase



An illustration of one common pattern, not a measurement. People differ: many stay fairly steady, some find the early weeks hardest before things ease, and some need more time and support (Mancini et al., 2011; Sbarra & Emery, 2005).

01 What you might be feeling

tick any that fit

- ☐ Grief and sadness
 ☐ Anger
 ☐ Relief
 ☐ Guilt or shame
 ☐ Longing
 ☐ Numbness
 ☐ Anxiety about the future
 ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Rejection
 ☐ Confusion
 ☐ Hope, then despair
 ☐ Sleep or appetite changes
 ☐ Replaying memories
 ☐ Urges to contact them
- ☐ Trouble concentrating

Feelings are often mixed, and can swing within a single day. Research following people after breakups found emotions were especially changeable early on, then gradually steadied. None of this means you're doing it wrong.

02 Why it can hurt so much

four losses at once

A bond, *interrupted*

A partner is often our main source of comfort. When that bond ends, the attachment system may keep "searching", which can show up as longing, alarm or the urge to reconnect, even when ending was right.

A sense of self, *unsettled*

Over time, "I" becomes partly "we". Studies suggest breakups can reduce clarity about who we are, and that rebuilding this sense of self is linked with recovery.

A future, *rewritten*

Plans, routines, a home, finances, shared friends and family, and for some, daily life with children, may all change at once.

A body, *under stress*

Sleep, appetite, energy and concentration are commonly affected. These usually settle, but they need care in the meantime.

03 Two kinds of work

adapted from a model of grief

Facing the *loss*

- Feeling and naming the pain
- Remembering, making sense of it
- Letting go of the future you'd pictured



Rebuilding *life*

- New routines, roles and practical tasks
- Reconnecting with people and interests
- Taking breaks from grief altogether

Moving back and forth between these, with rest in between, is thought to be healthy. There's no fixed timeline: for many people the sharpest pain eases over weeks to months, though separations involving children, homes or finances often take longer, and waves can return around anniversaries.

04 Common thoughts, gently reconsidered

not to argue with yourself, just to widen the view

"I should be over this by now."

Recovery has no deadline. Waves can return long after things have improved.

"If we just talk once more, I'll get closure."

Contact often reopens the wound. Closure is usually something we build ourselves, over time.

"Feeling relieved means I didn't care."

Relief and grief often sit side by side. Mixed feelings are very common.

"It was all a waste."

A relationship can have mattered, and still have needed to end.

What Can Help

Evidence-informed ways to care for yourself through a separation

You don't need to do all of these. Choose one or two that feel possible this week, and return to the rest later.

05 Eight things that can help

pick one or two to start

Be kind to *yourself*

☐ this week

Speak to yourself as you would to a good friend going through this. Self-criticism tends to keep pain going.

Try: "This is really hard, and it makes sense that I'm hurting."

Self-compassion predicted better recovery after divorce

Create *space*

☐ this week

Where it's safe and possible, limit contact to what's necessary, and mute or unfollow on social media.

Try: move their chat out of your favourites, or mute for 30 days.

Contact and online checking linked with slower recovery

Reflect with *structure*

☐ this week

Use short, guided prompts, then return to your day. Open-ended writing about feelings may not help, especially if you tend to go over and over things.

Try: the guided prompts on page 3, with a timer.

Structured reflection helped; unstructured writing sometimes didn't

Rebuild "*me*"

☐ this week

Reconnect with friends, interests and values you may have set aside, and try something new.

Try: one small thing this week that's just yours.

Rebuilding self-concept linked with less distress

Keep your *anchors*

☐ this week

Protect sleep, regular meals, movement, daylight and a basic daily routine, even when motivation is low.

Try: a set wake-up time and a short daily walk.

Foundations for mood and energy

Let people *in*

☐ this week

Say yes to support, and tell trusted people what actually helps: company, practical help, or just listening.

Try: tell one person, "Could you check in on Sunday?"

Social support buffers stress

Ride the *urges*

☐ this week

Urges to text, call or check tend to rise, peak and pass. Delay, distract, or notice the wave without acting.

Try: write the message, don't send it, and wait.

See the Urge Surfing Log

One practical step *at a time*

☐ this week

Legal, financial and housing tasks can feel overwhelming. Break them into small steps and get professional advice.

Try: list tasks, then choose the smallest first step.

Mediation may help where it's safe

06 When a wave hits

a few minutes at a time

1 · *Name it*

"This is a wave of grief. Waves pass."

2 · *Soften*

Slow your out-breath. A hand on your chest can help.

3 · *Wait*

Hold off on messages or big decisions until it eases.

4 · *Do one kind thing*

Water, a walk, a shower, or a call to someone you trust.

07 If you're parenting

children through separation

What tends to *help children*

- Keeping them out of adult conflict, and never using them as messengers
- Telling them it isn't their fault, in words that suit their age
- Keeping routines as steady as possible
- Letting them love both parents, where this is safe
- Telling them together, if that's possible and safe

What research *suggests*

Many children adjust well over time. Ongoing, intense conflict between parents, especially when children are caught in the middle, is one of the clearest risks, so how parents manage conflict matters more than the separation alone.

08 When to reach for more support

you don't have to wait

- Distress isn't easing, or daily life is hard to manage after several weeks
- You're drinking or using more, or struggling to eat or sleep
- You feel afraid of your ex, or they're controlling or threatening you
- The practical side of separating feels unmanageable

Any of these is a good reason to talk things through with your psychologist.

My Recovery Plan

A week at a time, with room to rebuild

Fill this in between sessions. Brief notes are enough; the aim is noticing patterns, not getting it perfect.

09 My week

tick each anchor you looked after

Day	Mood 0–10	Urge to contact 0–10	Sleep	Move	Eat	Connect	One thing that helped today
Mon	/10	/10	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Tue	/10	/10	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Wed	/10	/10	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Thu	/10	/10	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Fri	/10	/10	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Sat	/10	/10	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Sun	/10	/10	☐	☐	☐	☐	

10 My contact plan

where safe and possible

Contact I need (children, logistics) _____ How and when _____ Accounts I'll mute or unfollow _____	When the urge hits, I'll _____ _____ Someone I can message instead _____
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11 Who am I now?

rebuilding my sense of self

Parts of me I'd like to reconnect with _____ _____	Something I can now choose for myself _____ _____	People who help me feel like me _____ _____
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12 Guided reflection

10 to 15 minutes, then move on to your day

What I'm learning about what I need and value in a relationship _____ _____	To bring to my next session _____ _____
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13 Practical steps

small and specific

Task (legal, money, housing, other)	Next small step	By when

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