

WELL-BEING

Column



Surviving the shipwreck

The ship is sinking

Coming to terms with loss is one of life's biggest challenges. When the loss is the break-up of a marriage or other significant relationship, regardless of who wanted to end it, the intensity of the emotions can be even more overwhelming, because the other person will always be around. Often, the pain and confusion of the break-up is prolonged when circumstances require that contact with an ex-partner be maintained because children, mutual friends or family are involved.

The grieving process, it is said, involves a number of stages. First, there's the shock of hearing the news, followed by a period of denial when you think "he'll change his mind tomorrow" or "I think she still loves me."

The next stage is anger. Nothing is going the way it should be, frustration sets in, there is bitterness and resentment, we lose control, and it's all very trying. After navigating the tidal wave of emotions, reality sets in. Now comes the actual mourning stage: the sadness, the sense of loss and the feeling that everything is over. This stage, which can last several weeks or months, should ultimately lead to acceptance. Acceptance does not necessarily mean happiness, but understanding, in your heart and mind, that the relationship is over. Some people will skip a stage, and some will loop back to a previous stage. Depending on the circumstances, the grieving process may have already started before the break-up. Either way, grief is a journey and a universal response to a significant loss; give yourself time.

Clinging to the lifeboat

There is no "normal" length of time for a person to remain single after a break-up; it varies depending on the individual. Diving headlong into another relationship or hiding behind excessive alcohol or food consumption are not the best way to deal with intense, rebound-related emotions. A good first step would be to take a long,

hard look at what you want and need. Of course, it's normal to yearn for someone to wrap your arms around and snuggle up to. Normal, too, to want to have a good time, a drink or two, and leave reality behind from time to time. With your broken heart and confused feelings, it will become pretty clear that you're dealing with more intense emotions than you're used to. In your vulnerable state, you're more exposed to the temptations of excessive or risky consumption habits. As you come to terms with your loss, you will learn to live with the unhappy memories and unpleasant feelings. But, if you haven't worked through them and you try to erase or suppress them with drugs, alcohol or other compulsive behaviour, you run the risk of prolonging the agony as they resurface time and again.

Setting sail again

If you see your relationship as being a failure, your confidence will inevitably suffer. You'll be wary and scared to enter a new relationship. At the same time, try to see this as an opportunity to grow and learn about yourself as a partner and a person. A breakup happens when two people have been growing apart, have too many differences to work around, or are no longer compatible. Once you're ready to move on and meet new people again, you will have a better idea of the type of person who could make you happy. This could be your chance to give your next relationship a better chance for success.

If you're in conflict with your partner or you're going through a separation, our support and counselling services are available to help you focus on what you want and need out of a relationship or to guide you through the grieving process and help you begin a new chapter in your life. Now that you no longer have that other person to consider, take the time for yourself. Contact your support services and let one of our professional counsellors steer a course to get you back into calm waters.