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For Teens: Getting Over A Break-up

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

If you've just had a break-up and are feeling down, you're not alone. Just about everyone experiences a break-up at sometime, and many then have to deal with heartbreak — a wave of grief, anger, confusion, low self-esteem, and maybe even jealousy all at once. Millions of poems and songs have been written about having a broken heart and wars have even been fought because of heartbreak.

What Exactly Is Heartbreak?

Lots of things can cause heartbreak. Some people might have had a romantic relationship that ended before they were ready. Others might have strong feelings for someone who doesn't feel the same way, or maybe a person feels sad or angry when a close friend moves out of their life. Although the causes may be different, the feeling of loss is the same — whether it's the loss of something real or the loss of something you only hoped for. People describe heartbreak as a feeling of heaviness, emptiness, and sadness.

How Can I Deal With How I Feel?

Most people will tell you you'll get over it or you'll meet someone else, but when it's happening to you, it can feel like no one else in the world has ever felt the same way. If you're experiencing these feelings, there are things you can do to lessen the pain. Here are some tips that might help:

- **Share your feelings.** Some people find that sharing their feelings with someone they trust — someone who recognizes what they're going through — helps them feel better. That could mean talking over all the things you feel, even having a good cry on the shoulder of a comforting friend or family member. Others find they heal better if they hang out and do the things they normally enjoy, like seeing a movie or going to a concert, to take their minds off the hurt. If you feel like someone can't relate to what you're going through or is dismissive of your feelings, find someone more sympathetic to talk to. (OK, we know that sharing feelings can be tough for guys, but you don't necessarily have to tell the football team or your wrestling coach what you're going through. Talk with a friend or family member, a teacher, or counselor. It might make you more comfortable if you find a female family member or friend, like an older sister or a neighbor, to talk to).

- **Remember what's good about you.** This one is really important. Sometimes people with broken hearts start to blame themselves for what's happened. They may be really down on themselves, exaggerating their faults as though they did something to deserve the unhappiness they're experiencing. If you find this happening to you, nip it in the bud! Remind yourself of your good qualities, and if you can't think of them because your broken heart is clouding your view, get your friends to remind you.

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- **Take good care of yourself.** A broken heart can be very stressful so don't let the rest of your body get broken too. Get lots of sleep, eat healthy foods, and exercise regularly to minimize stress and depression and give your self-esteem a boost.

- **Don't be afraid to cry.** Going through a break-up can be really tough, and getting some of those raw emotions out can be a big help. We know this is another tough one for guys, but there's no shame in crying now and then. No one has to see you do it — you don't have to start blubbering in class or at soccer practice or anything. Just find a place where you can be alone, like crying into your pillow at night or in the shower when you're getting ready for the day.

- **Do the things you normally enjoy.** Whether it's seeing a movie or going to a concert, do something fun to take your mind off the negative feelings for a while.

- **Keep yourself busy.** Sometimes this is difficult when you're coping with sadness and grief, but it really helps. This is a great time to redecorate your room or try a new hobby. That doesn't mean you shouldn't think about what happened — working things through in our minds is all part of the healing process — it just means you should focus on other things too.

- **Give yourself time.** It takes time for sadness to go away. Almost everyone thinks they won't feel normal again, but the human spirit is amazing — and the heartbreak almost always heals after a while. But how long will that take? That depends on what caused your heartbreak, how you deal with loss, and how quickly you tend to bounce back from things. Getting over a break-up can take a couple of days to many weeks — and sometimes even months.

Some people feel that nothing will make them happy again and resort to alcohol or drugs. Others feel angry and want to hurt themselves or someone else. People who drink, do drugs, or cut themselves to escape from the reality of a loss may think they are numbing their pain, but the feeling is only temporary. They're not really dealing with the pain, only masking it, which makes all their feelings build up inside and prolongs the sadness.

Sometimes the sadness is so deep — or lasts so long — that a person may need some extra support. For someone who isn't starting to feel better after a few weeks or who continues to feel depressed, talking to a counselor or therapist can be very helpful.

So be patient with yourself and let the healing begin.

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