

## **Coping with College Series**

### **When Your Relationship Ends.....Growing From the Heartache...**

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There is nothing much more painful than the ending of a love relationship. Even if the ending is wanted, many intense feelings often surface. Not many of us move through life without at least one relationship ending. We may leave or be left. We endure the crying, fitful sleep, blues, loss of concentration, longing, broken trust, fury, and reshuffling of friendships. The ending may be a formal divorce, the break-up of a three-year relationship, or the unexplained demise of a promising short-term "fling". We may be left wondering if people ever get over heartache. Is there life and hope after a break-up?

The answer is a definite YES! A relationship ending can become the catalyst for significant personal growth, deeper wisdom, positive life changes, healing issues from the past, and entering better relationships in the future. The healing process is similar to climbing a mountain with stumbling blocks and dangers along the way (Fisher, 1992). Some people never climb the mountain (for instance, exiting the path too soon to start a new relationship). Others get stuck at points along the trail, climb partway, slide back down, or take long detours. They often have to end several similar relationships before they finally commit to the hard climb.

What are the significant markers on the path of healing from relationship loss? Typically, one must look at how one learned to "do relationships" in one's family, evaluating if that stance still works in adulthood. Grieving important associations of the lost love, as well as other life losses, is essential. Disentangling one's life from a former love's is often facilitated by experiencing anger and working through feelings of rejection or guilt. As pain subsides and new perspectives emerge, the climb becomes more focused on personal growth. Individuals shift to discovering who they are, what they feel, and clarifying who they want to become. They gain greater appreciation and respect for themselves. They develop more compassion for others, often finding new friendships marked by emotional intimacy and reciprocal caring. They become wise about what constitutes a healthy love relationship. Surprisingly, individuals often say that the ending was one of the best things that ever happened to them.

If you are healing from the loss of a love relationship and are interested in talking to someone and getting help, come by the Student Counseling Services or give us a call at 438-3655.