



when a
relationship ends

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'It was as if my whole world had ended. I felt as though I would never be happy again, that I had been robbed of a future.'

Relationships can bring so much joy and happiness to our lives. They can teach us how to love and care for others and, in turn, how to accept love and care from others. Yet sometimes, relationships can be the cause of intense pain, anger and hurt. So when a relationship ends, the impact can leave us overwhelmed and with a huge sense of loss.

People cope differently with the ending of an important relationship. Some common initial reactions include the following:

- Shock and disbelief – 'this can't be happening to me...'
- Denial – not thinking about what is happening.
- Anger.
- Bargaining with the other person – 'I'll change if you stay'.
- Blaming yourself or the other person – 'If only I...' or 'It's your fault. If you hadn't...'
- Guilt – the person who initiated the breakup may feel tremendous guilt, not wanting to stay in the relationship but also not wanting to hurt the other person.
- Despair and depression – day-to-day tasks like shopping, cooking and cleaning can become difficult. It may even feel like the world you knew has also ended. You may feel surrounded by painful reminders of the other person and the many ways in which they were involved in your life.
- Fear – 'How will I live without x?'
- Relief – there may be relief after years of relationship difficulties.

Coping with the initial feelings

During the early stages you may experience many conflicting feelings about the situation and the other person. Often the overwhelming feeling is anger. There can be so many reasons for feeling angry – being left alone with the children, infidelity, having to move out of a family home, having limited access to children, sudden financial insecurity, rejection and hurt. Anger is a natural response to being hurt. When you feel angry you don't have to cope with your sadness, hurt and rejection. Used positively, anger can help you to understand more about what you are feeling. However, when you use anger negatively it can be a way of controlling or manipulating a situation, a way of 'getting your own back' on the other person.

Coping with all that you are feeling is not easy. You will need to allow yourself time to grieve the loss of the relationship and to come to terms with what has happened. Finding someone you feel comfortable talking to will help.

This may be a trusted friend or a counsellor. If you don't feel comfortable talking to someone close to you, there are a number of organisations listed below that can offer you confidential support.

Sorting out the practicalities

‘It just felt like there was so much to sort out... every time I thought about all the business to be worked out I just felt sick.’

When you are going through such a stressful and upsetting time, often the very last things you want to face are the practical issues such as property, parenting plans, financial support, living arrangements and access to children. However, these issues need attention and the sooner you begin resolving them, the sooner the family can settle into new routines and arrangements. You might find it helpful to talk through your decisions with a person who is comfortable giving you honest feedback and whom you can trust.

Ensuring that you are not making decisions and acting out of the pain and hurt you feel is vital.

The guidelines below might help you to sort out practicalities more easily:

- Commit to open and honest communication even if the other parent is not prepared to do so.
- Communicate directly – do not use your child or another person to act as a message carrier.
- Be clear about what you want or need.
- Don't make assumptions about what the other person is thinking or doing.
- Be willing to compromise if necessary.

You may find it really helpful to attend mediation in order to find a

way forward. Mediation is not relationship counselling. It recognises that the relationship has ended and offers a process of sorting out the practical issues in a non-threatening environment facilitated by a trained mediator. Both people must voluntarily agree to attend.

If the breakup has been particularly difficult, with little cooperation from either person, sorting out the practicalities can seem like a nightmare. When there is little or no cooperation between people often the final option is legal assistance. It is important to get as much information and advice about legal services as you can. Many of the agencies listed in the ‘Contacts’ section will be able to assist you in getting such information. Ensuring that you have support and encouragement is vital as it may take time to sort things out.

A word about children

Separation and relationship breakup will have an impact on children. They may feel insecure, anxious and upset. Just like adults, children will experience a sense of loss and despair. How their parents interact during the breakup, how communication is handled and how they themselves are treated will influence how well they cope during the initial stages. The following guidelines will help you to make life easier for your children during this time:

- Tell them what is happening. If possible, both parents should do this together. Remember that although your relationship as partners may be over, your relationship as parents continues.
- Don't involve the children in conflicts between adults.

- Give them plenty of reassurance – don't presume a child is not upset just because they do not cry or tell you that they are upset.
- Give them plenty of time and space to talk about what has happened and how they are feeling.
- Make sure you really listen to what they are saying.
- Sometimes children can blame themselves for what has happened so reassure them the situation isn't anyone's fault.
- Don't forget children have feelings too – ask them how they are feeling, spend time together.
- Remember – it is okay to let your children see you are upset but make sure you don't use them as a 'shoulder to cry on'.
- It is not a good idea to bad mouth the other parent in front of children. Children can often see the criticism of the other parent as a criticism of themselves.
- It is not a good idea to put the children in situations where they have to choose one parent over the other.
- Try to keep life as normal as possible – stick to routines.
- If at all possible and if they are happy to do so, children should spend time with both parents.
- You may need to talk to teachers or other significant people in the child's life so that they are aware of what is happening.
- Don't try to make up for the situation by buying toys for your child.
- Don't forget the extended family, grandparents, uncles, aunts and friends can help to support children at these difficult times.

Most importantly, children need lots of reassurance, honesty and love from both parents.

The extended family

When a relationship ends it can have a huge effect on other family members – such as grandparents, aunts, uncles etc. Members of the extended family can feel unsure as how best to help. They may fear that they will lose contact with the children, especially if they are the family of the non-custodial parent.

It is important to remember that while your relationship with the other parent has now changed, this does not mean that your relationship with the extended family has to end.

Extended families may find it difficult to understand the breakup and may take sides. If you have not had a positive relationship with the other parent's family, it may seem tempting to cut contact altogether.

Before you decide what is best, consider the following:

- Having regular contact with grandparents and relatives from both families can help children feel secure at a time when there may be a lot of upheaval and change in routine.
- Contact with the extended family on both sides can give children a sense of belonging.
- Many grandparents fear losing contact with their grandchildren.
- Being really clear and honest in your communication can help to avoid arguments.

Moving from despair to hope

The ending of a relationship is a life-changing event for most people. You may feel unsure and mistrustful of life after the pain and sadness you have felt. There is no denying that this is a particularly difficult time but trying to remain optimistic, acknowledging your feelings and taking extra care of yourself will help you to find healing and hope. These are some things you can do that may help:

- If possible, give yourself time and space away from your former partner before deciding the level of contact you may have in the future.
- If you can, try to reach out to your support network of friends and family.
- Make sure you pay attention to your health as times of stress can weaken the body. If necessary, visit your GP.
- Write down what you are feeling and thinking, as this can help.
- Try to avoid things that make the problem worse or that could create different problems such as alcohol.
- Keeping busy and active can be helpful and may also give you a sense of accomplishment.
- Keep reminding yourself that things will not always be like this and that the pain will pass.

Contacts

One-parent Families

Gingerbread Ireland

Tel: 01 814 6618

Email: info@gingerbread.ie

Web: www.gingerbread.ie

A nationwide, voluntary association of people parenting alone offering

support groups, professional counselling, legal advice, events and outings for families.

One Family

Voice, support, action for one-parent families. Services include information and support, parenting and self development courses, support groups, computer classes, training for workers, crisis pregnancy counselling and general counselling, campaigning and lobbying.

askonefamily

National Helpline: 1890 66 22 12

Email: support@onefamily.ie

Web: www.onefamily.ie

One Parent Exchange and Network

(OPEN)

The national network of local lone parent self-help groups

Tel: 01 832 0264

Email: enquiries@oneparent.ie

Web: www.oneparent.ie

Treoir

The National Information Centre for Parents Who Are Not Married to Each Other

Tel: Lo-Call 1890 25 20 84

Email: info@treoir.ie

Web: www.treoir.ie

Legal

AIM family services

AIM is a voluntary organisation offering non-directive counselling, legal information and a family mediation service to people experiencing marital, relationship and family problems

Tel: 01 670 8363

Email: aimfamilyservices@eircom.net

Web: www.aimfamilyservices.ie

Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)

The Free Legal Advice Service is a non governmental organisation campaigning for full and equal access to justice for all and which promotes and operates a range of services to

meet the legal needs of those living in poverty. Services include a network of legal advice centres throughout the country.

Tel: 01 874 5690

Email: info@flac.ie

Web: www.flac.ie

Legal Aid Board

Tel: 066 947 1000

Web: www.legalaidboard.ie

The Courts Service

The Court Service is a statutory body set up to manage the courts and provide information on the courts to the public.

Tel: 01 888 6000

Web: www.courts.ie

The Law Society of Ireland

The Law Society is the educational, representative and regulatory body of the solicitors in Ireland. The Society also deals with complaints from the public about members of the profession and administers a statutory compensation fund.

Tel: 01 672 4800

Email: general@lawsociety.ie

Web: www.lawsociety.ie

Counselling

Accord Catholic Marriage Counselling Service

Tel: 01 505 3112

Email: admin@accord.ie

Web: www.accord.ie

Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP)

IACP operates a telephone referral service.



Tel: 01 230 0061

Email: iacp@irish-counselling.ie

Web: www.irishcounselling.ie

Irish Council for Psychotherapy

Tel: 01 272 2105

Email: info@icpty.ie

Web: www.psychotherapyireland.com

Details of psychotherapists are available on the 'Find a Psychotherapist' section of website.

MRCS Counselling

Services throughout the country.

Tel: 01 678 5256

Email: info@mrccs.ie

Web: www.mrccs.ie

Mediation

Family Mediation Service

A free mediation service for any couple that has decided to separate or divorce.

Tel: 01 634 4320

Email: fmsearlfort@welfare.ie

Mediators Institute of Ireland

The professional association for practitioner mediators mainly in the Republic of Ireland.

Tel: 01 282 8952

Email: info@mediatorsinstituteofireland.ie

Web: www.mediationireland.com

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