

Breaking-Up Bravely

A Guide to Holistic Healing
when Your Heart Hurts



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But, I Thought We Said 'Forever?'

Yet, it's over.

How did this happen?

I thought things were okay.

What if...

Was it me?

The pain is real. The sadness is deep. No matter what happened, how the ending came to be, or who may have decided to leave the relationship, separating from someone you love/ed can be damn hard. But people go through this all the time - *why does it hurt so bad?*

Just because break-ups are common amongst us humans, doesn't mean they're simple. Quite the opposite. Romantic relationships can actually change our neurophysiology. For example, we often experience increases in oxytocin and dopamine in relationships. **Oxytocin** is involved in our creation and maintenance of relationships, like when we fall in love, as well as trust, loyalty, and devotion. **Dopamine** is very important to our motivation, mood, and experiences of reward. So, when the relationship ends and we are hungry for two biological sources of pleasure, it can be like having drug withdrawals. This shock to our system can be part of what makes "breaking up" so hard to do.

And I would be amiss to not mention the powerful role that our pesky **thoughts** can play. While our nervous systems are feeling lonely, our thoughts can get us caught up in stories and beliefs that may or may not be true and may or may not be helpful. Perhaps you're experiencing a storm of thoughts that may sing to the tune of: "*What if that one thing hadn't happened? How did I not see this coming? When did it change? Why did it take me so long to leave? I can't believe I didn't see the red flags.*" Even worse are those mean thoughts like, "*I must not have been enough in this way or that way...(good enough, successful enough, smart enough, worthy, valuable).*" Our thoughts can make tough experiences feel extra exhausting, especially when **they replay like an old movie** in our minds.

Our nervous systems want a cuddle; our minds might be running a marathon; and let us not forget about our **emotions**. *How could we forget?* I would venture to guess you likely feel deeply sad and hurt, perhaps betrayed, possibly very angry, and/or confused - in addition to many other genuine feelings. Emotions during a break-up can be overwhelming.

Bottom line: This. Is. Rough.

Change is happening on so many levels. With so much change swirling chaotically around, which way does one go to start getting through it?

*The only way there is to go - Forward.
One. Step. At. A. Time.*

The End.

Before we take our first steps, join me on a quick detour about why your break-up process matters to me. Like so many, I have walked in your shoes of grief after love. Heartbreak was not in my 5-year plan when it struck the hardest.

As we now know, the ending of an important romantic relationship is so much more than a simple “break-up.” After a break-up, life may feel turned upside down. Remember those plans we had a few months from now? *They’re off.* Oh, and I don't need to ask someone else what they feel like for dinner? And where did all of this time come from (*or where did it all go*)? Depending on your circumstances, time may feel like an assault to your lonely senses, or you may feel frazzled by the growing to-do list - because it is now also your job to get the fire alarm to stop beeping (*hint: the batteries need to be changed and it can be a snug fit*).

In this quick and dirty guide to navigating a break-up the holistic way, I share with you some of my favorite ways to help the

mind, body, and soul

as you ride the wave of one of life's changes.

Breaking-up can be scary. And facing the grief (*rather than trying to run around it*) is brave. **This is breaking-up bravely.** My hope is that these tools may help you navigate a painful time with vulnerability, integrity, self-respect; and, gratitude for the joy and happiness that lives on in the world, despite heartache. Empowerment can be at the end of the rainbow.

What's the Mind Got to Say About it?

... A Lot

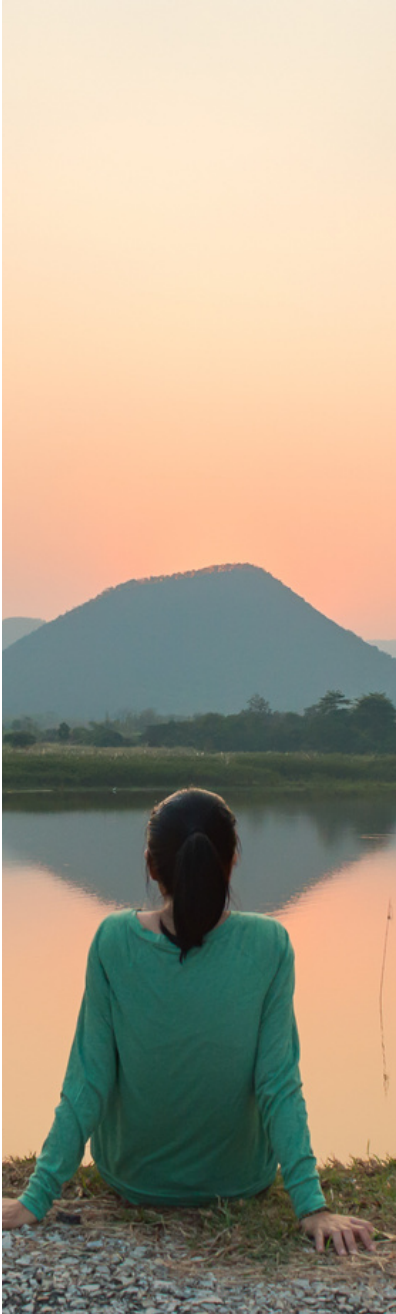
Wonderment of days gone by, fretting over the days to come, questioning yourself and/or your former partner. Our thoughts can feel powerful, **even though not all our thoughts are facts or even true**. How are you dealing with thoughts when they come up? Are you...?

- ✓ *Distracting yourself - with whatever will have you.*
- ✓ *Stuffing them down as quickly as possible (as though you're the world champion of that arcade game where you hit the clown heads).*
- ✓ *Keeping busy - anything to not sit with your thoughts and feelings.*
- ✓ *Being super productive - who knew there were so many tasks that needed your attention?*

Do any of these seem familiar?

Yet - "What We Resist Persists"

~ Carl Jung



We can put so much energy into (*trying*) to hit those thoughts out of the park, yet they often seem to come back. *Have you noticed that?* I invite you to consider relating to your thoughts in a different way - in a **mindful** way.

Our Aim with the Mind:

To increase a sense of mindfulness to inner and outer experiences: to pay attention to the present moment of your experience with less judgment and more acceptance. **Here are my top three why this can be useful during a break-up:**

1. Mindfulness can help us tune into what is going on within us, when it may otherwise resemble the key features of say, a hurricane. With more **self-awareness**, we have harnessed some power to make a **choice** about how we want to respond to ourselves and others, if at all. *Hint: sending that text may not be the best choice; or maybe it is.* Mindfulness can help you react from a greater place of knowing instead of habitually happy fingers.
2. Mindfulness can help ground us in the **present** moment. Although the mind is an excellent time traveler to places deep in the past and far off in the future, that is often not where it is most at ease. That old story has played out; the worry hasn't happened; mindfulness encourages us to check-in with what is happening **now**.
3. Mindfulness can help calm the intensity of emotions, *and couldn't every aching heart could do with some of that?* As Dr. Dan Siegel says, we can "**name it to tame it.**" Pausing and naming our emotions in the moment can help calm the emotional storm.

Interesting Nugget:

When we don't get caught in the "loop" of thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations - emotions can move through the body in about 90 seconds. Mindfulness can help us observe the emotions and stop the loop rather than being swept up in the loop.

HOW CAN WE BE MORE MINDFUL?

First, Let's Reflect. How mindful do you currently feel in your daily life?

→ Can you pin down the content of your thoughts? (or does it feel like a race track in there)?

→ How often are you living in the present? (or are you an excellent time traveler, as so many of us are)

→ Can you name your emotions as they come up? (by saying more than “anxious.”)

→ What do thoughts and emotions physically feel like in your body? (not a trick question)

It's important to remember that no one is perfectly mindful. **Perfection is not our goal.** Our goal is to be a bit more mindful than we are right now and by *noticing what takes us out of a mindful state*, we are practicing mindfulness and on our way!

How About These Culprits:

→	Lack of practice (<i>because it does take practice</i>)
→	Multi-tasking (<i>life is busy</i>)
→	Distractions (<i>social media, anyone?</i>)
→	Feeling rushed (<i>"I must wash my face as fast as possible!"</i>)
→	Avoidance (<i>I get it, it would be easier to not go through this</i>)
→	Strong emotions (<i>you name it - fear, anger, disappointment</i>).

Practice

I share with you **Still Strength**. This practice is a mindful and values-driven approach to greeting one difficult emotion each day - and then picking up and embracing the goodness of life.

1. Set yourself up in a comfortable space. Bring your attention to the **breath**, noticing the movement in your belly as you inhale and exhale. **Rest your awareness on your breath** as you allow your body time to settle.
2. Begin to gently **check-in with yourself**. You may take note of thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations as they arise. Aim to **observe** your inner world without judgment or trying to make anything any different.
3. After you have curiously observed your inner world, softly ask: **“which emotion needs my attention today?”**
4. **Be with that emotion**. Right now is a dedicated time to give that emotion as much space as it needs. You may consider..

Where in your body do you feel it?
What does it feel like?
Can you describe what it looks like?
How intense or strong is it?
What other bodily sensations come with it?
Do you notice changes over time?
5. As you investigate the emotion, know that **there is no rush** to move along.
6. From a space of self-validation, **is there now a way that your emotion wants to move and be released?** Perhaps...loud sighs, deep exhalations, crying, yelling, or gentle rocking and caressing.
7. Free the emotion. Take several deep breaths and **thank yourself**. It is brave to sit with our emotions.
8. Lastly, but importantly: **pick up and move forward with YOUR day**. Today, what can give your life a moment of joy, happiness, or connection? Perhaps going on a walk, cooking a good meal, or calling a friend. The day is ours for creation - even when our hearts are broken.

We can feel pain and embrace joy & happiness in the same day.

Wake The Body Up!

Exercise is good for us - not earth-shattering news. But how does this help me now during a break-up? Well, research has shown repeatedly that exercise can help with things like **anxiety** and **depression**. And let's be honest, break-ups can make us feel a little anxious, low, worried, etc. - *am I right?* So, who doesn't need a leg up finding a healthy way to cope? Let me hit you with some research that may resonate.

- ✓ We could consider resistance training the break-up trifecta because it can:
 1. **Improve general distress** (*sorrow/pain*)
 2. **Increase tolerance for distress** AND
 3. Help us **tolerate uncertainty better**

Who doesn't need a bit of all three during a break-up??

- ✓ Did you know that exercise can have a “strong **antidepressant** effect?”
- ✓ Physical activity can help us experience **fewer negative reactive emotions** (*like nervousness, worthlessness, and anger*) in response to stressful events (*like arguing with others*).



Bring your body to the party - it might help soothe worry and sadness

Our Aim with the Body:

Consider finding a form of exercise that is right for you. A form of exercise that, over time, helps you embrace your physical and mental power. Here are a few cherries on top that can give you extra bang for your exercise buck during a break-up.

- 1. Go green.** ‘Green exercise’ is movement that is done in an outdoor setting, like near the beach, mountains, or tree-lined areas. Exercising ‘in the green’ can help improve our **self-esteem** and **mood**. It may also encourage us to see things from a different point of view (*breaking free of that ‘tunnel vision’ we can easily get sucked into during a break-up*).
- 2. Buddy up.** Exercising with others can help us feel connected to the other life that is out there - be it exercising with a friend, in a group, or as part of the community. We may use exercise with others as an opportunity to connect with both the vibrant pulsation of life, perhaps giving us hope for the future, *and* to remind ourselves that all humans experience heartache. *You are not alone.*

READY TO LEARN MORE IN THERAPY?

Contact Dr. Samantha Munson for a free 15-minute informational consultation.

HOW CAN WE FIND THE RIGHT EXERCISE?

Let's talk about *values* and *goals*.

Values:

Values are those things in our lives that we truly care about. Values are not ticked off our to-do lists. Instead, we can think of values as a compass that helps us know when we are **living in a way that is meaningful and purposeful**. When our compass says we are heading in the direction of meaning and purpose, our daily behaviors reflect that (*for example, I value vitality so I exercise daily to keep me heading in the right direction*). When our compass says we're veering of course, our daily behaviors can reflect that too (*I value vitality but do nothing on the daily to feel vivacious - damn!*).

There could be countless ways we value exercise. Some examples are:

Mental clarity
Energy
Discipline
Empowerment
Community
Enjoyment
Achievement

Goals:

Goals are ticked off our to-do lists. Goals can encourage us to do new things and feel empowered through achievement. Goals can be helpful during a break-up because they can provide direction in what may feel like a somewhat directionless time in life. When we create goals that support our values, our compass is happy to report that we are heading in the direction of meaning and purpose.

We Want Goals to Be:

1. **Realistic**, *but challenging* - not too easy or impossible.
2. **Concrete** - grit down and make a plan.

Let's Reflect: What Matters to You?

1. Check out that list of values (*above*).
2. Do any of those feel true to you? If not, contemplate some that do.
3. Pick your top three and tuck them in your back pocket for later.

Helpful Tip:

Remembering what we value about movement/exercise (*rather than zoning in on the burning sensation of a squat*) can help keep our values-compass aligned and **motivation up**.

Let's Reflect x2: And Create Meaningful Goals.

1. **Take those top three values and think of past experiences where they came alive.**
2. Tuck those ingredients of goodness in your back pocket for a moment (*like- who you were with, where you were, what you were doing, how you felt*).
3. Now, **how do you like moving your body? How do you NOT like moving your body?** Take that wisdom about yourself and blend it with your ingredients. What types of exercise or movement might be a good fit?
4. If you choose today to move in this way for the next month - **would anything be different in one month's time?** Would the "future you" be experiencing more/less of anything?
5. If you choose today to **NOT** move in this way for the next month - **how does the "future you" feel?**
6. **Can movement or exercise add value to your life today that your future self may say "THANK YOU!"?**

Practice:

It's time to grit down and make that plan.

Gritty Plan Checklist:

- (With) **Who**, if anyone
- What** (will you do)
- When** (in your day/week will you do it)
- Where** (will you do it)
- How** (will you do it)
- And, the cherry on top: **WHY** does it matter
(pull those values out from your back pocket)

Don't forget to check on your progress. Recognize your wins and/or areas for growth. **Recognize your EFFORT.** Encouraging words like, "good job - you're doing it!" can help us reach the finish line for the day.



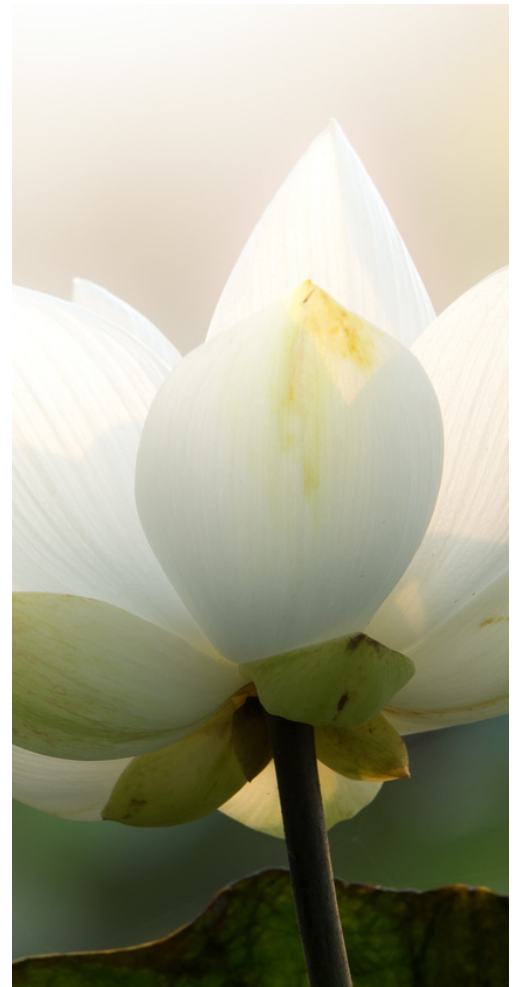
Give yourself a pat on the back, a smile in the mirror, and a nod for a job well done! You're doing it. One step at a time.

Let the Soul Shine.

- How would you describe your **relationship with yourself**?
- How do you crack open your **heart** space and show yourself some love?
- Do you have a place to turn when your spirit needs to **play**?
- Do you have practices that encourage you to connect with your **wisdom**?
- I wonder how you may build a sense of **companionship** from within?

As you contemplate these questions you may consider.

★	Do I show myself the same grace, understanding, and kindness I show others?
★	What does self-love look like for me?
★	How do I know when I am being hard on myself?
★	What brings me joy and happiness?
★	Can I hear my intuition?
★	What helps me pause and connect to myself?



Our Aim with the Soul:

Connection to ourselves, to our hearts, to hope, to faith, to inner wisdom. Befriending ourselves. Loving ourselves. Nurturing and caring for ourselves. **Connection to the soulmate within.**

I want to recognize the potential strength of **spirituality** and/or **religion** as a means of connecting to our soul and spirit. Believing can help us cope during hard times, and *if break-ups weren't hard, we wouldn't be here.* Upholding a sense of spirituality or religion can help us feel more optimistic and **hopeful**, supported, in control, and **secure** - *and* - less lonely, depressed, fearful, and anxious. In my experience, spiritual practice can also be a gateway to the soul; to our *innermost self*. So, it may be helpful to reflect on any spiritual or religious practices you currently have, or would like to adopt, as a way of supporting yourself during this break-up.



HOW CAN WE CONNECT WITH OUR SOUL?

Connection to ourselves is evolving. As life changes, our relationship with ourself often changes. I suggest three tools that may help you connect with yourself and your world in a supportive way: **rituals, gratitude, and self-compassion.**

Practice: Grow Personal Rituals

- 1. Daily affirmations.** Consider creating statements that affirm what feels empowering and needed for you. *You may jot these down and say them aloud before starting the day. Or, you could put post-its on your bathroom mirror.*
- 2. Create a mantra.** Let your wisdom lead the way as you create a mantra. A mantra could be a wordless sound or a few soft words, such as “*right now, all is well*” or “*today I have everything I need.*”
- 3. Use spiritual 'tools' or resources.** Perhaps sage sticks and crystals... angels and the divine... yoga and breathwork... or maybe religious script or ceremony. You could use these tools and methods daily or spontaneously, calling on them when you feel the pull.
- 4. Connect with nature.** Trees, the sky, plants and flowers, water, open air - these can all be means of enhancing both external and internal connection. *How do you feel when you pause and step into a natural environment?*

Practice: Grow Gratitude

When we get in the groove of gratitude, it can feel damn good. An important caveat with gratitude is to remember that we are not aiming to only show gratitude for the big stuff, like holidays or new cars. No, no. **We are aiming to show gratitude for the precious moments of our lives that are all around us; the miracles of being alive.** Consider following these steps to help get the feel-good gratitude juices flowing.

1. Reflect on a time when you **received genuine gratitude** from someone, or when you **expressed** genuine gratitude to someone.
 - How did you give or receive thanks/gratitude?
 - What were you being thanked/thanking them for?
 - How were you thinking, feeling, and being before this exchange?
 - How about after the exchange?
 - Anything else that stands out as you reflect?
2. Call upon the aspects of this experience to build a gratitude practice. Consider feeling into the **whole** experience a few times per week, for several minutes. Allow those yummy gratitude juices to flow!

READY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW GRATITUDE CAN HELP?
Contact Dr. Samantha Munson for a free 15-minute informational consultation.

Practice: Grow Self-Compassion

If I could have one superpower, it may very well be to have a never-ending supply of self-compassion. You may be thinking, *what is self-compassion?* Self-compassion implies that we aim to be mindful of our experiences, show ourselves kindness, and understand that all humans experience pain and make mistakes (*we are not alone in learning about life on the fly*). **Here are a few ways you may practice:**

- Speak to yourself with **kindness** and in a *warm* tone.
- Offer yourself **forgiveness**, for the *big and little things*, both *intentional and unintentional*.
- Complete daily tasks from a place of **self-love**, rather than punishment. “*I want to cook myself dinner because nourishing my body is a gift to myself, not because I ‘should’ eat my broccoli.*”
- Pause** regularly and check-in with yourself. You may warmly ask, “How am I feeling right now?” or “What do I need in this moment... *rest, support, play, food, action?*”
- Breathe** deeply and slowly. Fill your lungs with nourishment from the life that surrounds you. Release stagnation and tension with the exhalation.

Goodbye for Today

This is a moment in time. From a bird's eye view, take a snapshot of you from above, at this very moment. For all that you are. This is you at a time that will be like no other, as we can't go backwards, and we move forward. One step at a time.

For support in your healing process or to learn more about information shared, please **contact** Dr. Samantha Munson for a free 15-minute informational consultation.

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