

When Young Love Ends

Helping your adult child survive a breakup

by: [Alison Bell](#)

Like the song says, breaking up is hard to do. But what if it's not your heart that was damaged, but your child's? Sometimes that can be just as hard, if not harder, to handle. Here, experts give some dos and don'ts on how to nurture your son or daughter through this trying time:

DO: Realize the pain of the break up doesn't necessarily correlate to the duration of the relationship. "The average young boyfriend and girlfriend break up after a few months, but that doesn't mean that those months aren't as powerful as a relationship that lasted years," says Carleton Kendrick, psychotherapist and author of *Take Out Your Nose Ring, Honey, We're Going to Grandma's*. In addition, he notes, many young people today give notice impersonally in texts or a change in Facebook status, which makes the modern-day split even more heart-wrenching.

DO: Take the long view. While you hate to see your child upset, breakups are part of life and teach important life lessons. "I would argue that it's important to have your heart broken at least once to grow as a human being," says Kendrick. Through heartache, young adults learn to forgive others and themselves, and they become "more resilient in the face of life's considerable challenges."

DO: Be there even if your child doesn't want to talk about it. Some kids spill their guts to mom and dad; others hold their feelings inside. If your kid goes stealth about the breakup, continue to let him know you're there should he need a shoulder to cry on, recommends Mary C. Lamia, clinical psychologist and author in Marin County, Calif. Even if your child never opens up, just knowing you are available "makes him not feel so alone," she says.

DO: Help your child lose the guilt. If your child is the one who called off the relationship, the "primary emotion he is feeling is guilt," says Lamia. "Some kids can feel such extreme guilt that they can't move on." To combat this, she recommends telling your son, "You deserve to have a relationship that is best for you, and so does the other person. If you'd stayed in the relationship, you would have been depriving that person of someone who adores her."

DO: Pump up your child's self-esteem. If your son or daughter was the one who was broken up with, Kendrick recommends saying something like, "I can only imagine how hurt and confused you are right now. And you may be feeling like you're not worth very much or that you'll never have another boyfriend or girlfriend. But I can tell you, you are bright, funny and kind. This is the person you were, are and will be the next time you fall in love."

DON'T: Bad mouth the ex. Never tell your son, "She wasn't good enough for you," "We never approved of her anyway" or "You're better off without her," warns Kendrick. While parents say such things to be comforting, these statements wind up compounding the hurt because they make kids feel like you're criticizing their choice in a boyfriend or girlfriend, he says.

DON'T: Get involved. Sometimes parents try to "fix" the relationship behind their child's back or call the boyfriend or girlfriend to give the other person a piece of their mind. This is never a good idea, according to Kendrick, because you'll probably only make the situation worse. In addition, your interference "teaches your young adult that you don't respect them enough to handle the breakup on their own," he says.

DON'T: Let your feelings dominate. If you've grown attached to your child's love interest, you may be personally upset that the relationship ended. While feelings of sadness and disappointment are normal (you already had the wedding planned in your mind!), keep these thoughts to yourself—your son or daughter is already dealing with enough turmoil, advises Lamia. Instead, talk about your feelings with someone else, such as your partner or a trusted friend.

DON'T: Maintain a relationship with the ex without your child's permission. After the initial dust settles, if you want to reach out and connect with your child's ex, it's OK—as long as you ask your son first, says Kendrick. He recommends saying something like, "Your dad and I really like Susie and were wondering if we can maintain a friendly relationships with her?" Just be respectful if your child needs more time or gives a flat-out "no."

DON'T: Feel you have to end the family connection. If you're friends with the ex's parents, it's fine to announce, "John's mom and I are still going to be friends; I hope that doesn't make you uncomfortable," says Lamia. In her experience, most kids won't mind; plus you're sending the positive message that life can go on after a breakup without anger or animosity.