



# How To End An Unhealthy Relationship

**Joy Smith Ed.D.**  
**Licensed Professional Counselor**

Ending an unhealthy relationship is often a very difficult thing to do, especially if you and your partner have been together a long time. Of course, the separation process is easier when it's a mutual decision than when only one person wants to remain in the relationship. Listed below are some tips for leaving a relationship while maintaining your personal power and self-esteem.

## **Constructive Ways to Disengage Yourself**

- Allow yourself to focus on what was unhealthy about the relationship. Avoid having a selective memory where you focus only on the good times. On a piece of paper, make a list of what was unhealthy in the relationship. Post it on your refrigerator or mirror where you'll see it frequently or keep it in your purse or wallet for easy reference. If you begin to have relationship withdrawal symptoms, read your list.
- Detach yourself from the problems in the relationship that weren't yours. Don't confuse your partner's issues with yours. In spite of what your partner may say, you're not responsible for everything that went wrong. If you have trouble understanding and separating your issues from those of your partner, talk to someone more objective who can help you sort this out.
- Join a support group which can help build your self-esteem and offer emotional support. You'll discover that others have had experiences similar to yours.
- Get a sponsor who can talk you through the rough times. If you were addicted to the relationship, you may need support as you go through emotional and physical withdrawal of detachment and separation. If you were in an abusive relationship, a sponsor can be a sounding board for important decisions associated with separating under such difficult circumstances. A sponsor can provide emotional support when you need it most.
- Cultivate and focus on other healthy friendships and relationships. Use this as an opportunity to engage in activities where you can meet new people and establish new friendships.
- Pamper and nurture yourself! Do things you enjoy and have fun. Be self-focused and look after your own interests and needs so you will have the strength to end the relationship. Take care of yourself emotionally, spiritually and physically.
- Don't convince yourself that you can just be friends after ending a romantic relationship. Trying to be friends after ending an unhealthy relationship doesn't work. It's too easy to get hooked and forget why you decided to leave. Continuing to engage in casual sex doesn't work either. It's too confusing and gives mixed messages about what you really want.
- If the relationship is physically abusive, you may need someone to help you develop an exit plan that won't compromise your safety. Contact a counselor or your local domestic violence center for advice.

## **Constructive Ways to Disengage Your Partner**

- Tell your partner that you're uncomfortable with the relationship and want to end it. Try not to become overly emotional in front of your partner, but describe what you're feeling. State the

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reasons why you believe the relationship isn't working. It may be helpful to write out an outline in advance so you can organize your thoughts. Rehearse with a friend if you need to practice what you'll say. If it's not possible to have a discussion with your partner in person, write a letter or make a tape explaining your feelings and mail it. If it's not physically safe to end the relationship, call your local crisis hotline, domestic violence shelter, or your therapist for advice.

- Don't be manipulated into continuing the relationship if you know the relationship is unhealthy and there's little hope for change. Recognize that your partner may not be ready to pull out and may make promises that things will be different.
- Make sure your nonverbal messages match what you're saying to your partner. Don't smile, touch or stand close while you're telling him or her that you want the relationship to end. Avoid sharing intimate details of your personal life while saying goodbye. This may give your partner the wrong message. Avoid giving your partner false hope by continuing contact with him or her to make sure he or she is OK. This sends the message that you really don't want the relationship to end. Verbalize with firmness and confidence that the relationship is over and act accordingly.
- Make yourself less available. If pursuit by your partner becomes a problem, use an answering machine to screen calls and don't answer the door if he or she comes over. Don't return your partner's calls. If you're harassed at work, make it clear that you don't want to be contacted and end the conversation. If your ex-partner tries to threaten or intimidate you, call your local domestic violence center for protection and advice.