



'Maybe We Should See Other People ...'

How to break it off—and save face.

By Tamekia Reece

When Damon W. of Houston wanted to end his long-distance relationship of two years, he did what he had always done to break up with a girlfriend: He ignored her. "I didn't accept her calls or respond to her e-mails, hoping she'd get the message," the 18-year-old says. Bad move. She didn't "get it" and continued calling. When he couldn't dodge her any longer, Damon finally fessed up that the relationship wasn't working. She had a few choice words about the way he'd ended it, but Damon says he didn't mean to hurt her. "I just didn't know how to tell her it was over," he says.

His girlfriend's words hit home, though. Damon realized that his breakup tactics

needed to change. "Now, even if I know breaking up is going to hurt [the girl], I try to be up front about it because I see dragging it out only hurts more," he says.

Breaking up really *is* hard to do. Just look at some public splits: Britney and Kevin, Jessica and Nick, Eminem and Kim. They've all had breakups that spurred rumors, back-and-forth trash talk, and downright nastiness. Ending it with someone, however, doesn't have to be an icky situation. Your approach can mean the difference between a good breakup and an ugly one. If a breakup is handled well, usually neither side has to worry about being bad-mouthed (that's always a good thing); both people get to keep a sense of self-worth; and,

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best of all, the dumper and the dumpee can each move on to the next relationship with no bulky baggage.

Q: How do I know it's time to break off a relationship?

Go with your gut, says April Masini, a relationship expert and the author of *50 First Dates* and *The Next 50 Dates*. "If something feels wrong or bad or off, it may be time to break up," she says. Don't just do it on a whim, though. Evaluate your reasons. If you're thinking of

ditching your significant other for a wacky reason—he wore a shirt that was so last year, or she had an embarrassing slip-n-fall in the cafeteria—then you might want to reconsider (and check your shallowness).

But if you have a good reason—you're interested in someone else, things are moving too fast, there's constant arguing, or you're just not happy—do what you have to do. Charisma G., 14, of Monroe, Mich., had a valid reason. "I broke up with my boyfriend ... because he was abusive," she says. For a while, she wondered, *Should I or shouldn't I?* Then she realized he wasn't good for her, and ended the relationship.

While you're deciding whether it's time to wrap things up, think about your timing. Giving someone the send-off on Valentine's Day (or even the day before) is not very nice. The same goes for the person's birthday, your anniversary, or any other significant date. Would you want someone to do that to you?

Q: I hate dealing with confrontation. Can I break up by e-mail?

Don't hit that Send button! Breaking up with someone through a text message, an instant message, or an e-mail is cowardly, says Gilda Carle, a psychotherapist and the author of *Teen Talk With Dr. Gilda: A Girl's Guide to Dating*. "If you have the guts to go out with somebody, you'd better have the guts to end it in person," she says. If face-to-face is impossible, pick up the phone and talk to him or her. (No answering machine or voice mail messages are allowed!) Don't have a friend (or the school gossip) do your dirty work either. You owe it to anyone you date to do your own breaking up, Carle says.

Q: What if he or she wants to know why?

Your ex will probably want to know why, and the line "It's not you, it's me" won't always fly. Burns H., 16, of Austin, Texas, broke up

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ON HOW TO
DUMP SOMEONE.

1. Make sure you're doing it for a good reason.
2. Avoid breaking up around holidays or other significant days.
3. Talk to your girlfriend or boyfriend in person, if at all possible, or over the phone.
4. Don't cast blame, try to hurt the person, or outright lie.
5. Take a break from him or her for now; you can decide later whether you want to stay friends with your ex.
6. Realize that you'll probably hurt for a while.

Oh No! Are Those Tears?

Once you deliver your breakup news, be prepared for anything: crying, begging, yelling—*anything*. Don't let crying or begging guilt-trip you into changing your mind, but don't be insensitive. "Give the person a hug, sit with them if they cry, and then say good-bye," says relationship expert and author April Masini.

What if your ex threatens to harm you, himself or herself, or others? Don't try to handle it yourself, Masini warns. "Call a counselor, doctor, police officer, or other responsible adult, and ask for advice."



with a girlfriend of two months because he felt she was immature and had problems balancing the relationship with the rest of her life. But he didn't tell her that she was too juvenile; instead, Burns explained that the relationship just wasn't working and that both of them were suffering because of it. That type of explanation gets at the truth while sparing the other person's feelings.

You probably don't want to hurt the person. Even if you do—maybe your soon-to-be ex hurt you, and you want revenge—leaving with grace is the best tactic, Carle says. "You're doing it *for* you, not *to* the other person," she states. So keep the breakup about yourself, and don't point fingers. "You can start by being

friends six months down the line, when there are no emotions involved; but right after the breakup, it's impossible," Carle says. If you had a good reason for nixing the relationship (she's a compulsive liar, or he's super selfish), you probably shouldn't be friends anyway.

Q: I'm the one who did the dumping, so why do I feel bad?

Although their relationships and breakups were very different, Burns, Charisma, and Damon all felt bad. "[My boyfriend and I had] dated for about nine months, so it was hard for me," Charisma says. "I was mad and sad at the same time, and for a long while I stayed in the house, not wanting to do anything."

The 'unofficial' National Breakup Day is

June 2.

general, as in 'I'm not happy in this relationship' or 'I'm ready to move on,'" Masini suggests. Not working? Say you're too young to be so involved with one person, or you don't think the two of you see eye to eye anymore.

Q: Should we stay friends?

Both Burns and his girlfriend had been thinking about breaking up, so the split wasn't nasty, and they were able to remain friends—even sitting next to each other in classes. But sometimes things don't go well, and trying to stay friends can cause confusion. Your ex may still have feelings for you and may take any friendly gesture as a sign of interest. "You might become

Guilt, sadness, and even regret are normal feelings at the conclusion of a relationship, even if *you* ended it. "Any discomfort you feel is because you are an empathetic person and have feelings for other people," Masini explains. If you feel nothing after a breakup, you either didn't care much or are really cold!

It's tough, but you need to know how to break up well. "Life consists of many makeups and breakups—whether it's with people or ... a job or company," Carle says. "Learning graceful leave-taking now will give you the skills to handle it when the stakes are higher." Plus you'll appreciate good breakup habits when you're the one being let down gently! **CH2**