

# Coping with Negative Thinking After a Breakup

## Objective

To reduce negative thinking by using several coping strategies.

## What to Know

Perhaps you cannot stop the flow of negative thoughts since your breakup. In addition, you might be experiencing grief, uncertainty, anger, and many other emotions. Coping strategies that worked in the past might not be up to the task this time. Here are some strategies you can use if you are struggling with any of these common negative thoughts.

**1. “I’m not good enough.”** The end of a relationship often brings with it a sense of failure. This thought is particularly common when the other person cheated on or abandoned you. If you are struggling with feeling like you are not enough, try the following actions.

- Collect old letters, cards, emails, texts, and so forth from people who love and care about you. Create a “smile file” (either physical or digital) and spend a few minutes each day reviewing it to remind yourself how others see you.
- Build your physical strength or endurance. When you feel strong and capable, you will begin to believe in yourself.
- If you cannot stop thinking about all the negative things your ex said about you, write down the statements and refute each one. This exercise helps remove the power their words have over you.
- Spend time volunteering or giving back to others. You will benefit from seeing the positive impact you have on those who are less fortunate.
- Limit your time using social media if you find it upsetting.

**2. “I wish things could be different.”** Maybe you wish you could go back to the way things were, or you imagine your ex acted or responded differently. If you are focusing on the past or ways you could change the situation, do the following.

- Start a daily gratitude practice. Use a journal, app, or even an audio or video recorder. Keep it brief and simple and do it consistently to remind yourself that even though you are experiencing a challenging time, there is still good in your life.
- Divide a piece of paper into two sections and label them *Things I CAN Change*, and *Things I CAN’T Change*. Then write down at least 5-6 items under each column. Spend your time and energy on the items in the first column.
- If you tend to reach out to your ex when you shouldn’t, make it more difficult to contact them. Delete their number from your phone or block them.

**3. “I can’t move on without closure.”** Do you feel stuck because you believe you require closure? Perhaps you tell yourself you need answers before you can let go and move on. If this is a problem for you, try some of the following actions.

- Use a journal to write about the questions that still haunt you. Explore likely explanations and keep writing until you come up with what might be the truth. Come to terms with the idea that you might never have all the answers.
- Create a closure ceremony by burning old letters or photographs, or repurposing jewelry from your ex. Bury something that had meaning in your old life.
- On a piece of paper, complete this sentence: “Because this happened, I have learned...” Once you identify what you have learned from an experience, you can move forward.

**4. “I’ll never be happy again.”** It is easy to recall “the good old days” and assume you will never find happiness again. If you are mourning the loss of the relationship and feel hopeless, do the following activities.

- Spending time in nature will remind you that death and renewal are natural cycles.
- See a live comedy show or rewatch favorite funny movies.
- Each week put one small thing on your calendar that you look forward to. Every 1-3 months, schedule something bigger that you enjoy.
- Have a conversation with an elderly person who has a positive outlook. Ask about their experiences. You will probably find they experienced things in their life they worried they would not recover from.
- Write down the expectations you had for your life and analyze them. How many are actually outside the realm of possibility now?

**5. “Why did this happen to me?”** Maybe you are wondering what you did to deserve these circumstances. Life might feel unfair. If you are feeling victimized or consumed by self-pity, do the following.

- Read a book that features people overcoming obstacles. It will remind you that bad stuff happens to good people, and people overcome great obstacles.
- What can you do to create a sense of purpose from your pain? Maybe you can reach out and help others or apply your knowledge and skills to assist people that are also coping with the end of a relationship.
- Write down some traits that make you capable of handling your circumstances. You might be a great problem-solver or networker. Whatever your strengths, focus on how they can help you now.
- Apply structure to your days and limit down time. Include activities that keep you busy.

**6. “Life is too overwhelming.”** Moving on after a breakup and rebuilding a new life is a big deal! If you feel paralyzed by the challenges in front of you, take the following actions.

- Identify a small step you can take right now – and act on it.
- Find ways to tap into your determination.
- Create accountability in your life. Set reminders on your phone to tackle one small task each day or make a list and cross off one thing every day.
- Do a required task while doing something you want to do. For example, make important phone calls while you are enjoying a cup of tea.

- Create a doable but challenging goal for yourself.

**What to Do**

First, answer the following questions.

Write down some of the negative thoughts you have about your breakup.

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What are some of the coping strategies you have used in the past that are not working for you now? Why aren't they working?

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Who can support you during this difficult time? Write down the names and phone numbers of at least four people.

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Write down some ways you can practice self-care. Be specific.

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What specifically triggers your negative thinking?

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What can you do to be of service to others?

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Next, examine what you have written down and review the suggestions above. Write down all the actions you can take to cope. Brainstorm ideas – you do not necessarily have to do everything in this list.

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Next, for two weeks use the following chart to record what you do to cope with negative thinking. Any time a negative thought enters your mind, note the date, the action you take, what happened, and how you felt afterwards. Write down if you were successful in reducing negative thinking.

Date	Action or activity	What happened?	How did you feel after?	Were you successful? Y/N

## Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you while completing this activity? Explain.

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What was the biggest obstacle you encountered when completing this exercise? Describe.

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Were you successful at reducing negative thinking? \_\_\_\_\_

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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