

Tips to Consider when Ending a College Relationship

Breaking up with your partner can be hard to do at the best of times, but when both of you still live in the same college, it can be especially difficult. Below are some tips for how to manage the situation in order to minimise future conflict, confusion and hurt feelings.

Get some perspective

It's important that you give yourself plenty of time and space to consider the decision that you're about to make. It's not always an easy decision to reverse, so you need to be sure that this is definitely what you want. When you both live in the same college, it can be difficult to get the distance and clarity that you need. Consider making a short visit home or scheduling some more activities with other friends. This can allow you to see the situation more clearly and to determine the changes that you may need to make.

Pick an appropriate location

When you break up with someone, try to pick somewhere private but not isolated and somewhere that you can both leave from easily and separately. Choosing to break up in the college cafeteria or at a party with all your friends looking on is probably not a good idea. If you think that it may be a good idea to break up with your partner in a location outside of your college for the sake of privacy, then think carefully about where that might be. For instance, choosing to break up at your favourite picnic spot in the country may make for a long and awkward car trip home. Somewhere neutral like a local park or café may be a good solution.

Be clear on what you want

Do you want to break up with your partner or do you want them to improve or act differently? If it's the latter, then consider explaining tactfully what aspects of your relationship you'd like to improve, rather than presenting them with a dramatic ultimatum. UNE has some electronic resources to help improve your relationship, or you may even benefit from some sessions of couples counselling. Your partner may try and convince you to stay with them and you need to be prepared for this. Ask yourself beforehand if there's anything that they can say to change your mind. You need to expect that your partner is likely to be very upset and this may make you feel responsible, and then guilty. Be prepared for this, as it's never a good idea to stay with someone out of guilt - it's not fair on them or you.

End the relationship in a respectful manner

How you choose to break up with your partner is your decision but it is a decision that should be made consciously and conveyed considerately. It is not a good idea to end your relationship when you are intoxicated as this may impair your ability to behave tactfully and you may have regrets in the morning. It is not a good idea to be especially intimate with another person from your college before you have officially ended your current relationship. Avoiding your partner in the corridors and cafeteria in the hope that they will get the message is likewise not a good strategy. In respecting your partner's feelings you should endeavour to break up in a manner that is direct, considerate, straightforward and acknowledges the time you have spent together and the emotions that you have shared.

Limit the involvement of mutual college friends

Breaking up with your partner is something that needs to come from you – it's not a good idea to involve another friend from college to act as a mediator. It may be unkind to tell other individuals in college of your decision first and then have your partner hear it as a rumour before they hear it from you directly. This is likely to make them feel unnecessarily hurt and embarrassed. It's also never a good idea to complain about your partner's shortcomings to mutual friends. You will only make your friends feel awkward around you *both* and risk your partner feeling that it's ok to retaliate in the same manner. When you do break up with your partner, avoid phrasing your grievances as if they are shared by others in college. Although others in college might agree with you or have commented on certain aspects of your partner's behaviour – the decision to end the relationship is yours and yours alone and you should not try to outsource responsibility for this decision to others.

Avoid mixed messages

Mixed messages often occur when we want conflicting things. For instance, when we don't want the hassles and emotional baggage of a relationship, but we do still want the fun aspects of a relationship, such as sexual contact. If you send mixed signals to your ex then you run the risk of creating confusion and undue distress. If you decide to end your relationship then it may be unfair to still initiate or reciprocate sexual contact with your ex. Acting as your ex's confidante may seem like a kind thing to do in the short-term, but you can run the risk of becoming sealed in an artificial intimacy that may make it difficult for you both to move on and meet other people. It's normal to experience feelings of jealousy when an ex begins to date someone else. Having said that, if you choose to communicate your jealousy to your ex then ask yourself what you are actually communicating and what the impact of that communication will be.

Take some time and space

One of the most difficult things about breaking up in college is the amount of daily contact that you continue to have with your ex. Generally, it's very difficult to go from lovers to friends in the space of a couple of days. It may be a good idea to take some time apart. Try hanging out with some new people in college and allow you and your ex the time needed to adjust to the new status of your relationship. It's ideal if you can remain friendly with one another, but generally speaking, you should expect that this may take some time and don't try to rush things or force your ex into being your friend before you're both ready. If someone's broken up with you, then your demands on their time and emotional resources should be commensurate with the new status of your relationship.

**For further support contact UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Services(CAPS)
Phone: 02 6773 2897 or Email: studentcounselling@une.edu.au or via AskUNE**

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