

Ending a Relationship Through Conscious Uncoupling

Objective

To use the five-step process of conscious uncoupling to end a romantic relationship.

You Should Know

The end of a romantic relationship can be very painful. Research shows that a person going through a difficult divorce or bad breakup shares the same brain chemistry as someone who has lost a loved one. You might believe you will never experience true love or real joy again. You might worry you will never heal from the breakup.

There is a way to end a romantic relationship with honor, respect, generosity and goodwill, navigating through the breakup in a way that fosters “posttraumatic growth” rather than complicated or prolonged grief. This five-step process, called conscious uncoupling, was created by Katherine Woodward Thomas, and it was designed to guide people ending a romantic relationship.

Maybe you are considering ending your relationship, or you have recently experienced a breakup. The process of conscious uncoupling can help you find emotional freedom, reclaim your power, and recreate your life.

What to Do

If you and your partner are working through this process together, make a copy of this worksheet for each of you. After you have both completed it, share your responses without judging or criticizing. You may also complete this worksheet on your own.

After completing each step, move on to the next step when you are ready.

Step 1. Find emotional freedom. The first step involves a meditation. Reflect on your experience when you are finished with this step.

- **Become still.** Find a quiet place, close your eyes, and take a deep breath. Become aware of the feelings and sensations in your body and release any tension you might be holding.
- **Step back from your feelings.** Imagine stepping away from your thoughts and feelings, and simply offer yourself care, compassion, and curiosity. See if you can view what is happening in your life from a larger and well-informed perspective.
- **Connect with a deeper center within.** Keep breathing, and become aware there is a center within you that is deeper and wiser than the feelings you are experiencing. Remind yourself you are OK.
- **Extend love to the part of you suffering.** From this deeper and wiser center, extend love to the part of you that is feeling overwhelmed with painful emotions. Pay attention to the pain while continuing to connect with your wise self. Notice where in your body you are holding these emotions.

- **Welcome in and mirror your feelings.** With kindness and compassion, ask yourself what you are feeling. Listen closely for the response and then mirror it back by saying to yourself, “I can see you’re feeling _____ (sad, enraged, hopeless, used, etc.)”
- **Breathe out a blessing.** For each feeling, on your next in-breath, breathe that feeling into the center of your heart, welcoming it, and on the out-breath, breathe out a blessing for yourself and all beings throughout the world who are suffering with this same feeling in this very moment.
- **Name and mirror your needs.** Now, with kindness and compassion, ask yourself the following question, “What do you need?” Listen closely for the response and then mirror it back by saying to yourself, “I can see that you need _____ (love, closure, an apology, justice, safety, support, comfort, to be seen, to be heard, etc.)”

Write down your experiences as you completed Step 1. What was it like to do this meditation? Did you find it easy or difficult? Explain.

Step 2. Reclaim your power and your life. As long as your attention is focused on how your partner hurt you, you are not going to discover all the ways you contributed to what happened. Even if your ex is mostly at fault for the relationship ending, your focus should be on your part in it. Why? Because until you identify how you show up in romantic relationships, you will be unable to trust yourself and fully open up to another person. Reclaiming your power and your life happens when you are willing to see the ways you gave up power, self-sabotaged, ignored the truth, and damaged your own well-being.

What or who do you resent and for what? Write them down, and avoid censoring yourself, or trying to talk yourself out of your suffering, anguish, or rage.

What can you take responsibility for? Taking responsibility is not admitting it is your fault or condoning bad behavior. Consider the following as you answer this question:

- In what ways did I give my power away?
- Where might I have ignored my own knowing, dismissed my feelings, avoided telling the truth, or asked for clarification?
- How was I trying to get him/her to love, want, or approve of me?
- Why did I avoid doing what I knew I should have done?
- How was I selfish, unkind, or even abusive?

What else has it cost you to give your power away?

What amends do you need to make to yourself moving forward? Here are examples:

- I commit to honoring my feelings and needs as much as I honor the feelings and needs of others.
- I am going to negotiate on my own behalf rather than silently suffer.
- I promise to listen to my own inner knowing and have the courage to act.

What new skills or capacities will you need to develop to consistently live this way?

Step 3. Breaking the pattern, healing your heart. You have the power to create new and different experiences moving forward. But first you must uncover your “source fracture story” – the story you created when you were very young about what is possible (or not) for you in love. It refers back to your earliest heartbreak and the beliefs you formed about yourself, others, and life in response to what was happening.

The third step involves a meditation. Reflect on your experience when you are finished with this step.

- **Become still.** Find a quiet place, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and relax your body.
- **Become aware of your feelings regarding the breakup.** Identify all of the feelings you have about the breakup. Notice where these feelings are in your body.
- **Welcome in your feelings.** Breathe deeply and notice these feelings with compassion. Extend love to the painful feelings, welcoming each one with kindness and care. Reflect back each of your feelings one at a time. Notice that in doing so, your ability to step back and observe your feelings grows stronger.
- **Notice the meaning you are making of the breakup.** Let go of trying to figure anything out, and drop your awareness into your body, becoming aware of your difficult and painful feelings. As though your feelings are speaking for themselves, ask yourself the following questions:
 - What am I making this breakup mean about me?
 - What am I making this breakup mean about my relationship with men/women?
 - What am I making this breakup mean about the possibilities for happiness in love?
- **Identify your source fracture story.** Now integrate your beliefs and feelings into your source fracture story. For example, "I'm not smart or attractive enough. Women like other men more than they like me. I'm always forced to settle for less."
- **How old is this part of you? How big is the energy?** See if you can identify the chronological age of the part of you that is stuck in this story. Define the size of this energy. For example, is it the size of a tennis ball? A balloon? The moon?
- **Open your eyes and shake it out.** To return to your adult self to challenge the meaning being made by your younger self, open your eyes and shake your body. Ask yourself, "What's the best thing about being my current age as opposed to being me when I was _____?"

Write down your experiences as you completed Step 3. What was it like to do this meditation? Did you find it easy or difficult? Explain.

Now write down the answers to the questions you asked yourself during the meditation.

What are you making this breakup mean about you?

What are you making this breakup mean about your relationship with men/women?

What are you making this breakup mean about the possibilities you have for happiness in love?

Write down your source fracture story:

How old were you? _____ How big is the energy? _____

What's the best thing about being your current age as opposed to being you when you were _____?

Step 4. Becoming a love alchemist. The first three steps were about you getting right with yourself, and step four is about you getting right with your former partner. Now you are ready to clear the air of old hurts and resentments and move forward with a clean slate. To dissolve any lingering tension, anger, or resentment, you will need to be interested in understanding the impact of your choices and actions and making things right.

Identify the hurt, resentments, and disappointments you are still struggling with. List them.

If possible, sit down with your former partner and discuss. Decide who will speak and who will listen first.

For the speaker: Share the hurts you are still struggling with and the impact your former partner's behavior has had on you.

For the listener: Set aside your defenses and strive to be present and available to hear what your former partner is saying. Regardless of whether you think he or she is telling the story accurately, try seeing the situation from his or her perspective. Take responsibility for the

Step 5. Creating your happy *even after*. In the final step, you begin to consider the healthy and life-affirming choices you can make to reinvent your life. While your new life may not look like the one you left behind, your goal is to imagine what is possible. You might engage in a ritual to mark the end of your relationship, honoring the lessons learned, children created, projects birthed, or growth gained.

What can you do to mark the end of your relationship?

What healthy and life-affirming choices can you make to reinvent your life? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you “consciously uncouple” from your former partner? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Adapted from: Conscious Uncoupling: 5 Steps to Living Happily *Even After* (2015), by Katherine Woodward Thomas, <https://www.consciousuncoupling.com/>