

COLLECTION

The Essentials of Applied Psychology

Surviving the Breakup

From Heartbreak to Renewal



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From Heartbreak to Renewal — Neuroscience, Attachment, and Recovery Exercises

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To all those weathering the storm of a romantic breakup. You are not alone, and there is light at the end of the tunnel.

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INTRODUCTION — When Love Walks Away

There are forms of pain that are taught nowhere. Not in school, not at university, not in the most advanced professional training programs. The pain of a romantic breakup is one of them. It strikes without warning, or sometimes after months of signals we refused to see. It leaves you standing, yet empty. Functioning on the outside, but devastated within.

If you are holding this book in your hands, it is probably because you are going through this ordeal, or because you are supporting someone who is. In either case, know one essential thing from the outset: what you are feeling is normal. The pain you are experiencing is not a sign of weakness, pathological dependency, or psychological dysfunction. It is proof that you loved, that you invested in a relationship that mattered, and that your brain, your body, and your psyche must now go through a grieving process of an intensity that few people suspect.

The numbers speak for themselves. In France alone, there are approximately 130,000 divorces per year, in addition to hundreds of thousands of separations among unmarried couples. Over a lifetime, the probability of experiencing at least one significant romantic breakup is roughly 85%, making this a near-universal experience of the human condition.

And yet, despite this frequency, we are remarkably unprepared to cope with it. Our culture celebrates romantic love, glorifies the beginnings of relationships, but remains strangely silent about endings. People will tell you to "move on," to "turn the page," to "keep yourself busy." As if a deep wound could be treated with a Band-Aid. As if time alone were enough to heal what has been broken.

This book was born from a simple observation, forged through years of clinical practice in cognitive-behavioral therapy: a romantic breakup is one of the most painful ordeals in life, yet it is also one of the least well supported. The individuals who come to see me after a separation often arrive in a state of profound distress, compounded by their loved ones' lack of understanding and by well-meaning but counterproductive advice. They do not understand why they are suffering so intensely, why they cannot seem to "move forward," why their body seems to betray them as much as their heart.

Scientific research over the past twenty years has, however, shed fascinating light on the mechanisms at play. We now know that romantic breakup activates the same brain regions as physical pain and substance withdrawal. We understand how attachment styles forged in childhood influence how we experience — and survive — a separation. We have scientifically validated protocols for supporting the romantic grieving process and fostering identity reconstruction.

It is precisely this knowledge that I wish to share with you in these pages. Not in the form of an inaccessible academic treatise, but as a companion along the way — rigorous in its scientific foundations, warm in its approach, practical in its proposals.

Each chapter of this book addresses a specific dimension of the breakup experience. We will begin with the five stages of romantic grief, so that you can identify where you are in your own journey. We will then explore the neuroscience of breakups, because understanding what is happening in your brain is already a first step toward healing. We will address the question of no contact, the specific challenges of breakups in the digital age, the influence of your attachment style, the rebuilding of your identity, the pitfalls of the rebound, and finally the opening to new love.

In each chapter, you will find fictional clinical cases inspired by real situations (all first names and identifying details have been changed to ensure confidentiality), practical exercises drawn from cognitive-behavioral therapy, and references to the scientific literature for those who wish to explore further.

An important clarification: this book does not replace professional therapeutic support. If your suffering is too intense, if you are having dark thoughts, if you can no longer function in daily life, I strongly encourage you to consult a mental health professional. This book is a complementary tool, a source of insight and support — but it cannot substitute for individualized care.

Finally, I would like to tell you this, with all the conviction that my years of practice have given me: you will survive a breakup. You will do more than survive, in fact. You will rebuild. You will discover strengths you never knew you had. You will learn to love yourself, perhaps for the first time. And one day, without even realizing it, you will catch yourself smiling at the thought of the future rather than crying over the past.

That day will come. This book is here to help you get there.

Gildas Garrec

Nantes, September 2025
