

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?by Anonymous on Fri 17 Aug 2007 12:42 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

How do you work on yourself visibly when the other person doesn't answer phone calls, emails, etc. from you, his parents, etc?

[Reply](#)**Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?**by [Al Turtle](#) on Fri 17 Aug 2007 10:07 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Great question, easy answer. Obviously if someone does not look, they cannot see. To "work obviously," you need to work on yourself in such a way that when they do "take a peek" they get a glimpse that you have been doing a bunch of self work. Sadly, depending on how intensely he left you (and them), it may take him a while to get over feeling overloaded or pursued - days, weeks, months. Good luck in the meantime.

[Reply](#)**Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?**by Kathie on Sun 26 Aug 2007 09:35 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

My husband of 32 years announced, on Thursday, that he "didn't want to be married", had really never been on his own (we were married at just 19), and "wanted to see what was out there". We have had a dreadful year, the 3 year old flower girl for our oldest son's wedding died at Easter, his Dad's terrible illness and death in June, our dear neighbor lady expired in August (after 31 years of friendship), one of his best friends (42 years old) is expected to die at any time of a brain tumor.

I, too, have had to deal with all this turmoil and now my soul is battered and my heart is in pieces as I haven't seen nor spoken to this wonderful, funny man in days. I'm between deeply sad and vindictive. I want to say "GROW UP"!!! But truly that is not up to me. What shall I say when he does call?

[Reply](#)**Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?**by [Al Turtle](#) on Fri 31 Aug 2007 12:58 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Kathie,

I read your piece carefully and hear your surprise, pain and anger. You have a right to all that. My first suggestion is to breathe and take time to gather yourself. That almost always seems the best thing to do when surprise happens, and this seems a huge surprise.

Next I would not take what he says as he leaves verbatim. It usually has only little to do with the actual reasons that have lead to his behavior. But what he says are clues.

Deeply sad and vindictive - sounds about right. Want to say, "Grow Up!" I like that. But right away I want to remind you (and myself too) that the important growing up is yours (or mine) not his. Sure he has to "grow up" in lots of ways. You can see that.

But yelling at him won't make him do it. My experience is that being vindictive, acting angry, may slow down his "growing up." Or much worse, it may push him to do his "growing up" with someone else.

I think it much harder to get aware of the "growing up" you have to do, especially when the surprise and hurt are right "in your face." So take a breath. Express your surprise, pain and anger to a friend or a counselor - not to him. Then start to work with them (not him yet) to identify what "growing up" you need to do. And get to work on it. That, seems to me to be the best way to prepare for any contact with him.

I [wrote an article for you](#) (and others) with some ideas. There are lots of great ideas out there on the web and in books, but I suggest you work with someone.

Good luck.

[Reply](#)**Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?**by Kathie on Mon 03 Sep 2007 10:06 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al- Thank you so much for your kind words and valuable advise. As the days have passed I have identified some key areas on which I would like to work.
 For me to have a healthy relationship with anyone I must make it ok not to be "in charge" of everyone and everything. It doesn't work and that burden is too heavy anyway. I've been working on control issues.
 Can you refer me to someone that can help me with this? I live in the Everett, WA area. Thank you for your help. Kathie

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Mon 03 Sep 2007 03:03 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Good for you. Keep a goin'. I suggest you look at both [Passivity](#) and look at [Control](#). That control thing is all about finding ways to relax and feel safe.

I do know some good people that could help, but not many. In your area the only one I know well is Mary C: Clare Garden, Plaza Building, 345 Knechtel Way, Suite 208, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110 Ph: 206-842-0119

Or at 2401 1/2 10th Ave, East Seattle, WA 98102 Ph: 206-842-0119

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Kathie on Wed 05 Sep 2007 10:13 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Al: Husband still missing in action. He's been gone 14 days and I've only seen him once, for a brief meeting to discuss financial matters. We worked out an arrangement (to which he has not lived up to yet) to pay our monthly bills.

When asked how he was, "Great" was the reply.

He didn't discuss his living arrangement, but talked freely about work. I guess that's private vs public. I didn't ask about either.

I have made an appointment with my physician for Friday as I'm not sleeping well, haven't been motivated at work and am a bit distracted and short tempered.

I have also made and appointment with Mary for next week. She detected some anxiety when we spoke on the phone.

I have returned to exercising and have been trying to eat better (it's hard to eat well when you have a boulder on your chest and a knot in your stomach).

I've been having dinner with a friend (female) on Friday evenings. She knows and loves both of us.

What else?

This has made me wonder if I'm ok as a person. I feel dreadful that the person that I cherish most felt that he had to run away from me.

Thanks again,

Kathie

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Anonymous on Tue 04 Sep 2007 08:15 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Hi Al - Why do you suggest staying away from the opposite sex? Or the same sex, if your sexual preference is the same, I assume.

Isn't it good to experience other potential mates, isn't that healthy, even if my instinct is to not socialize and wait desparately for my "true (although often verbally abusive) love" to call?

And does the jealousy effect help "if you want them back" ? Maybe not so far as jealousy but realizing that there is more value to me?

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by jeff stahl on Tue 25 Sep 2007 07:22 AM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

As a counselor I work with many people on relationship issues. The situation you describe is intensely painful

for many. I so agree with your advise on not pursuing and also working on one's self. Dependency and separation anxiety will lead many to do whatever it takes to get their partner back, often acting illogical with no plan for the future. If the other person returns, nothing will be resolved and another separation is inevitable. One must sit with their anxiety and learn to reduce it. Viewing the separation as a chance to heal an old wound can be helpful.

I do disagree with your statement that "The chances are one of the reasons they are leaving you is because they believe you will never change." for two reasons. I will concede that there is some truth to that statement but the person leaving has also helped create the relationship dynamic and needs to take responsibility. Hopefully given the space and being removed from the dynamic, they will be able to do some soul searching. Also I feel suggesting that anyone should change or do personal growth work in hopes of winning someone back is a dangerous motivator. I always coach my clients to make changes with themselves as the main benefactor and caution them on expecting a reward from their wayward partner for their actions. Very much enjoy your perspectives. Thanks.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Wed 26 Sep 2007 07:50 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Jeff, thanks for dropping by and sharing your thoughts. I imagine you to be one of those who works hard to help people lead happier lives together and I salute you. It is great work!

You bring up two great questions and go a bit deeper into them than I do in this article. I like your points and enjoy what you call disagreement. I am not sure we disagree much.

In the first, you look further into the responsibilities of the leaving partner. I am up with you on this but I find talking with much intensity to the "left partner" about their partner's responsibilities really seems to lead so often to more finger pointing that, I find, doesn't work worth a damn. See my short article [Guilt](#). Tis good to be aware of this from the counselor's point of view. This article is, however, for that "abandoned" person.

Your second point, about "personal growth to get your partner back being a dangerous motivator" is an interesting one. I am completely with you about the danger of setting false [expectations](#), but I see a danger in not pointing toward the responsibility of the painfully "abandoned" person to start "getting their act together." The whole situation seems dangerous, so I take the tack of being brave and facing it all. The article was written as a handout to people who came to my office in this situation and when I hand it to them, I happily remind them that there are no guarantees in life. But I believe that working on yourself has no down sides.

Thanks again for being there.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [jeff](#) on Tue 02 Oct 2007 07:21 AM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Al

Thanks for responding and am very much enjoying the dialogue. I think you have an amazing site and kudos for all the work you have put into it. I have already directed clients to your articles and printed out a few of your posters. And, I hope you don't mind, I have added a link on my own website; <http://1ststepisawareness.blogspot.com/>.

I have to admit that my perspective may be a bit jaded since I spent two years working at a domestic violence shelter in New Mexico. I saw the extremes of dependency where the left partner obsessed about the leaving partner. Most thought patterns were based on if they changed they would win back their partner. They would appear to have changed until the partner returned. Then when they would revert back and blame their partner usually in an abusive manner. Now I realize those were extreme cases. I currently work as an EAP counselor where the majority of my counseling takes place over the phone. I still encounter these patterns.

I, like you, believe there are no downsides to working on one's self. That's why we do what we do. It's interesting how many people are so resistant and afraid of going inward. But that's a whole other discussion. Be well and keep up the good work. Jeff

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [David](#) on Sat 02 Feb 2008 01:44 PM PST | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

My wife and I were separated for 6 months last year, and I went out to sea in Oct. (I'm in the navy) The reason for our separation essentially boiled down to all of the romantic feelings that she had for me disappearing soon after we had our son. While I was out to sea, I received an email that said that she was in love with me, sorry for taking me for granted, and really wanted to make our relationship work. Two days after I returned home, it was obvious that she didn't still have those feelings for me. She again left, and I feel like I am having to deal with our separation all over again, from the start. She, on the other hand, moved on immediately and started seeing a man that she had developed an inappropriate friendship with while I was away. I don't think that she was necessarily romantically involved with him at the time, but now she is. I have so much anger, despair, depression, and rage at this whole situation that I can't eat, I can't sleep, and it's all I can do to put one foot in front of the other. I have to be strong and do my best to carry on for the sake of my son. The problem that I am having is that she wants to keep on being best friends and have a relationship with me other than being parents to our child. I don't feel like I can do that with this guy still in her life. I can't talk to her, see her, or be around her while she is seeing a man that I think was doing nothing other than fostering a relationship with a woman that was having marital problems while the husband was out to sea. She swears that it started as a friendship and doesn't seem to understand that a man that is 17 years older, in general, doesn't have friendship in mind with a 27 year old mother whose husband is out to sea. I feel so lost, and so abandoned, and I just want my wife back. I know that I can't have that, and I would even be happier with her dating someone entirely different. Just not this guy. Help please.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Sat 02 Feb 2008 04:22 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

The situation you describes really stinks. Sorry that you are in it. I was in the Navy 64-66 and something very similar actually happened to me. And, of course, this is not exactly what your kid would like you two to be doing right now.

On the other hand it sounds extremely normal and common. Navy separations, even Navy training, is, I believe, not very helpful in the process of making and maintaining families. Some of the stuff I learned in my "military" training was absolutely the opposite of what I needed to learn to be a good husband and father. Oh, well.

My suggestion is that you connect yourself to others who are going through the same thing and who are working on solutions. I fear that "hanging out there alone" in such a situation can lead to lots of more trouble. There are several online groups where people talk about this sort of thing with each other. Those would be a good idea to check into. They refer to the stuff on my website all the time. I spend my time collecting "what works" and sharing it, rather than on individual contact with people - which I think you surely need. Don't be alone!

Try [MarriageBuilders](#) or [MidlifeCrisisForum](#) or [Love Shack](#) and good luck.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [EyesOnThePrize](#) on Thu 14 Feb 2008 08:20 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

This all makes great sense to me. And I can say that my ex has definitely noticed that I am making a real effort to change myself. I am reading (she knows it, and I haven't shown her the books) and I am seeing a psychologist (I have told her about it, and haven't given her very many details). I also agree that she left because she was convinced that I would never give up my negative behaviors.

Here's where it gets tricky. We still spend a LOT of time together. We have been sharing the master bedroom since the split (about 2 months ago), we do things together, shopping, lunch, dinner, just talking, etc. She's moving into a different room in the house next week (we had a housemate who had to move into another room first). She has a fit every time I mention that maybe she should get her own place. I don't know if its the comfort of the current house, the fact that I'm around, that she might be afraid of being on her own or, most likely, some combination of all three.

My psychologist says I should really push her to get her own place, and that scares me, because I'm afraid if she leaves she may never want to have anything to do with me. This is probably an irrational fear, and its there. She also has become close with a guy who lives in another state. She insists he's nothing more than a good friend, and while I know they have exchanged "I love yous", I believe this is no more than an emotional relationship. They do see each other in person on occasion at business trade shows, and there have been no surprise trips to see each other, she doesn't have huge amounts of contact with him, etc. However, because of our communications difficulties, he became her confidante instead of me. I can't call it an "inappropriate friendship" because we are divorced, however the friendship did start before the divorce. I

try not to worry about him too much, because there's not a lot I can do about him. All I can do is work on me.

At any rate, I want us to get back together, and I think she does, too, she just has a VERY low trust level in me right now, and we both have a lot of growing to do. I have no time frame on a reconciliation, and honestly believe it could take a year or more. I'm prepared for that, because she's worth it. However, any guidance I can get for how to proceed would help. I'm driving without a map here, and want to at least stay close to the main road.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Thu 14 Feb 2008 08:25 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

One other quick question. She is out of town for a convention now (the other guy is there, and that just is what it is). I really want to keep in touch with her while she's gone, and is it just better to leave her alone for a few days and let her live her life, so she doesn't feel smothered by me? What do I do if she calls me or sends me text messages?

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Al Turtle on Thu 14 Feb 2008 10:30 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Hello Eyesonthepize, (nice name)

I appreciate you sharing so much and letting others see the real challenges of this situation. I, too, struggled with exactly this situation and it led me to figuring out what to do and into writing [A Map](#) and the two articles on [Reliable Membership](#).

I think the Map of Relationship really frames the situation in its largest and most complete frame while the other articles deal with this specific situation.

Of course, she doesn't trust you. (She makes sense all the time!) So what! Are you better off knowing that or being in the dark about it? To me, if I know about something, I can do something about it. In a relationship, "not knowing" is a disaster. And I also believe "you don't know" until you can [Validate](#) her. If you were to learn how to validate her, I believe it would lead to a lot more clarity for you about what to do next, and what not to do next.

I find that to have a good relationship you need to have lots of space inside the relationship - so people don't think of the temptation to leave the relationship in order to get space. The most powerful form of space is having good [Boundary Skills](#). I think that without those skills, intimacy is magical and temporary.

She emails or calls you? Respond minimally. #4

You want to call her? Don't do anything that she might think is Pushing. #1

Relax and enjoy the learning process. #2, #3. Give my best to your therapist.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Fri 15 Feb 2008 11:12 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al, when you say "I, too, struggled with exactly this situation", what do you mean? Did you get divorced and then back together? Did you have an ex living with you? I'm trying to put this in context. Thank you for the feedback. I will continue doing my work on myself, I keep reminding myself that this relationship is like a baseball season...its a marathon, not a sprint. Things will happen at the pace they happen.

The Validation is a huge issue with her. She commonly would say "You don't get me!" when she has problems. And, she was right...I wasn't "getting" her. Now, I'm much more careful to say "You're right, I'm not getting it. Please explain it to me so I can understand." This frustrates her, because she wants me to "get" it, and its a learning process for me. I think as she sees my efforts are sincere, things will improve, and this is a VERY key area for me to focus.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Fri 15 Feb 2008 01:03 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Sure, sure. I don't think you can really write about this stuff without having gone through it!

I have been a clinger who pursued my partner(s) for years and years. I have tried everthing I knew how to do to make things better - until I realized that nothing I did worked, and had to learn some new things. I found myself in crazy situations - like yours. I became divorced from my first wife after 17 years in a very ugly and painful process for both, and terrible one for my three teenage kids. It was all very clumsy with tragedy all over it. I frantically recall blaming her, blaming me, blaming anyone I could think of, shaking my fist at God. I am not proud of what I did, but I sure see how I was being taught to quit being cocky. Thanks to God.

After 5 years of dating, being a relatively lousy single dad, I remarried and continued being a clinger. "It" started all over. I recall once, banging my forehead on a cement floor in frustration as my partner "drove" away from my isatiable neediness. I learned that things can get bloody when you are passionate and stubborn - like me.

Then I began to learn and figure out what worked, practiced it, and became good at it. I learned that if "it" didn't work for my partner (wife), it wasn't any good. I also learned that if "it" didn't work out for me at the same time, it wasn't any good in the long run.

The two greatest clues that come to mind today, were a) to persevere at "becoming a source of safety to her," and b) to become an "expert" at Validation.

If I had learned these things at the feet of my parents, I believe I would probably be happily married to the mother of my children. I didn't. I guess I had to follow the path that I did follow.

Yup. I've been there.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [EyesOnThePrize](#) on Fri 15 Feb 2008 10:44 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

Again, I appreciate the insights. I find myself tonight really missing her and wanting to call her (although at this minute its too late to call her on the east coast anyway). My mind races with thoughts of what she might be doing with this other guy out there, even though I know I can't control it. Its more the thought of him having quality time with her when I'm not. Any suggestions for how to cope with things like this, other than relax and doing things for myself. Also, I'm sure my fears are at least partially overblown/irrational. Its not like he is the only person she knows there, and and she is working. Still, her not contacting me for a couple of days has me semi depressed. Going a day without speaking to her puts a real void into my life.

Given my situation, that we are already divorced, does it change your thinking at all? I just believe that there is a strong enough bond between us to rebuild, although it is likely to take many months. I feel like if she moves out of the house completely, then I lose the opportunity to "become a source of safety to her" and I also put myself in the same position as her friend. I'm just this guy she has feelings for and who isn't around he a lot. I realize that our 9 years of history carries more weight than their year or two of knowing each other, yet it seems to me that the only way to show her these changes and to become an expert at validation is to be around her a lot. I guess this is my greatest source of confusion right now.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Sat 16 Feb 2008 09:28 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Being divorced from her doesn't change my thoughts. And let me share that I strongly believe in your (and everyone's) "need" for her - or rather for a reliable partner. I do not mock "romantic attraction." I think I understand it and support it.

However, I find it based on dreamy thoughts that a person is entitled to such a

partnership. When we are born, sure we expect it. But for adults I find this dream to be a complete fallacy. You want the lady(partner) to be with you, I say you have to earn it.

I find your thinking both very familiar (I used to do it a lot) and muddled (got a bunch of invalidation of her). I strongly recommend that you study Validation. And if you were to practice it, she would pick it up immediately - in a split second. Probably she anticipates that you will "continue" (in her mind) to invalidate her. So if you were to validate her, it would tend to surprise her. All to the better!

For example, if in any conversation with her she expresses the desire to get away from you, respond with, "Of course you want to get away from me." This is an example of PreValidation and it sticks out like a sore thumb. I've learned the skill of helping people get away from me, to replace my old skills of "hanging on" or "tricking them" to be with me. This works.

Get to work - learning theory and skills through practice. You can Validate anyone. And you can practice it with anyone. I suggest you read my papers on the subject, but even more, use someone(s) in your area to chat with directly about this and learn and practice.

Get that therapist involved.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Sat 16 Feb 2008 10:18 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

Thanks for the quick reply. I'm going to reply myself before I take a shower and then take her car in for an oil change. She has to pay me back for it, though...no free rides anymore. And I think that's what she wants. To be treated like a responsible adult, not to be given everything.

I am doing a lot of reading now, and just read much of TheTallMan's thread on Marriage Builders and how much you aided him. In a number of significant ways, his situation mirrors mine, and I hope I can find the same work here, too. He focuses a lot on what you taught him about validation, and I agree with him (and you) that this will be key. I mentioned a couple of posts above about how I am trying to be a better listener and understand her thought patterns better. Still, I have a lot to learn.

I'm also trying to come to grips that this process will take months, maybe years. And for me, that's okay. She has told me she's afraid of me reading too much into things, and getting romantic ideas. I've replied that I know that romance is the right thing now, that I'm just trying to get to understand her better. A significant thing she has said, at least in my mind, is "You have to be my friend first before we can be anything else." Now, its not like we aren't friends anyway, I just understand that she is talking about the deeper connection. More importantly, it continues to give me the impression that she really does know there is something important between us, and that she's not ready to risk getting hurt again. I don't blame her for that! I am going to keep working on myself every day, even on the tougher days like today, to be this man she needs.

Interestingly, the other day she said something to me about my change in behavior being a "ploy" to get her back. I responded that I was doing this for me, and if this "ploy" was transforming me into the sort of man who would be perfect for her, why would that be so terrible? While I don't regret how I said it, I suspect you'd tell me that to pre-validate it would have been better to say "I understand why it might look that way to you. And the truth is I am doing this for me. I am glad you have noticed the changes, though" or something closer to that.

I did semi break down and text her before. Her bank called the house about an issue with her business checking account. I gave them her cell number. However, she generally won't answer from numbers she doesn't recognize. So, I just texted her that the bank had called, I had given them her number, and that she should expect a call. No "how goes it?", no "I miss you", just the facts. I didn't want to be perceived as pushing.

As for my therapist, I get the impression that he is against the idea of reconciliation, or perhaps going this path. However, I haven't asked him that directly. I will when I see him this week. I want him to understand that this transformation is important to me, and that a secondary focus of it is an effort to rebuild my relationship. I don't want him to be a "yes" man to me, that wouldn't help me, and at the same time, if he's against giving me strategies to help in that direction, I don't think he's the therapist for me. Does that make sense?

Well, so much for a short response. :) I tend to write a lot when I get rolling.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Sun 17 Feb 2008 02:57 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I think I just grew a little bit today. I had sent her a text message about wanting to call her later, I just wanted to talk to her for a few minutes, see how her weekend went, nothing that would be pushing. She texts me back saying "Is everything okay!?" and then promptly calls me. I told her everything was fine, and I just wanted to say hi for a minute. She told me she was waiting on food (hadn't eaten all day) and might be tied up later. She said she would call later tonight or sometime tomorrow since she had the day free. For once, I got what she was really saying in my head. She was saying "I still want today for me, I'll talk to you tomorrow." I'm not going to worry if she doesn't call, not going to feel hurt, not going to take the initiative and call her. I'll let her do it at her pace. I guess its part of letting her determine the position of the Space Wall. Thanks, Al...just a few days here and I can see my path just a little bit more clearly. That's one step on a long journey.

BTW, I do find it interesting that she read "Something must be wrong" into a text message that was literally 5 words long "Can I call you later?" I'm not even going to guess about the psychology behind that reaction.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Al Turtle on Sun 17 Feb 2008 03:56 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Go for it, my friend.

The journey, the learning journey, in the pursuit of knowing (at the gut level) that your partner is doing her best and making sense in everything she does - -- well that is quite a journey. Took me a long time, little bits of growing up, for a long time.

My connection to Sandra now includes regularly understanding and maintaining her need for space in my presence, while at the same time taking care of all my needs for connection. We now both work on it and cooperate. That way she doesn't need to back away - much or often, and neither of us gets panicky. Tis worth it.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Sun 17 Feb 2008 05:10 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

We like to spend Sundays together. During the marriage, it was mostly the one day we reserved for each other. Next week, we may be spending a big chunk of Saturday together, too (I'm not sure, things are kind of nebulous right now). I've realized that if we want to spend time on Sunday, I have to let her control the duration and not feel bad that its less than I might like. There's a swap meet (flea market) we like to visit on Sundays, and in the past there are times when she was ready to go, and I'd just say "Oh, lets go down a couple more aisles." No, I can hear that statement differently.

Even now, we spend a lot of time together. Frankly, for people who are

divorced, its kind of odd how much time we spend together. We have dinner together most nights, watch TV together, sit and talk together, and up until sometime in the coming week, have still been sharing a bed. However, I'm rapidly becoming more sensitive to her needs when she says "I'm going upstairs to sew, please don't disturb me." I remember once, a few months ago, when she did this, and then later our housemate went in to talk to her and I blew a gasket as to "You tell me that you want to be alone, and then you go talk to him!?!?!? How do you think that makes me feel?" Our housemate is gay, so it wasn't that I considered him a threat from a "he's trying to take her from me" standpoint, it was from a "Why aren't you opening up to me?" standpoint. Now, when she says it, I know it means she's hit her limit and needs her space. So, she gets her space. I'm looking for more things to do to fill my time. I e-mailed the local United Way today to set up some times to do volunteer work. I am currently reading the relationship map lecture, and I am definitely in your position, while she is in Sandra's. So, I am looking for more places to get the love units, so I don't put so much pressure on her.

You know, its funny, one of the things that clued me in to the guy in the other state (and, to be 100% honest, I still have no idea the true level of their relationship) was a text message from him to her that said "I love you sooo much!" As I look at that today, it strikes me "Yeah, he's a clinger." I know it, because that's what I'd say, and I'd say it just so she'd be extra convinced and want to get closer to me. And, it makes sense for her. With her abandonment issues, she'd run to someone who envelops her for a sense of safety, and that means a clinger. That will cause problems quickly. And, much as I hate to see her go through more pain, from a purely selfish standpoint I hope to see her figure that out quickly. She may have already figured it out, and maybe that's why she's adamant about not getting into another relationship. I dunno, that's outside of me, so I can't control it, and can only speculate, and speculating is clingy, so I won't worry about it.

I'm still pretty terrified that she's going to move out of state for school, however that's still a few months down the road, and I have no idea where our relationship will be at that point. If its really improving, I will probably ask for advice on how to proceed. Asking her to stay is clingy, letting her go and coming to visit often puts her in this other guy's home territory, and makes it harder to keep her aware of the progress I'm making. Well, that's the cart before the horse, isn't it?

Al, I want to thank you for reading and responding to my long posts. As I've mentioned, once I start typing, things just flow from my keyboard. However, I also know that if I'm not 100% open and honest with what has happened and what I'm feeling, the chances of you being able to give me very useful advice are greatly lessened.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [EyesOnThePrize](#) on Tue 19 Feb 2008 05:31 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Today was a good test for me. I was talking to my XW and she was railing about how she was pissed at her business partner and how he was disrespecting her, etc., etc. and my brain kept saying "offer suggestions...offer suggestions..." and I had to override it and remember "that's not what she wants, she wants empathy" and I forced myself to shift modes. I'll hope this part gets easier in time.

I downloaded the entire communications chapter last night, and look forward to reading it and applying it. Another appointment with the psychologist tomorrow. Its still a struggle, there are good times and bad. and I feel I'm moving in the right direction. I have no idea how things will turn out, and I'm going to give it my all to regain her trust and rekindle our relationship. I know she sees me changing, and I know she's still doubtful (as you said, its better to know this than not know it) and she's also very confused.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Wed 20 Feb 2008 09:22 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Friend, Go for it!. I will continue to post your comments as they really bear on this problem and may help others sense how real are the troubles and solutions. Cupla of thoughts.

Everything you practice gets easier. I hear there is some number (I forget what: 12 or 21?) of times to do the new behavior before it becomes partially inside. I usually say, "A skill is something you do. The first time it is wicked hard. The 50th time you do it is not too bad. And the 500th time it has become automatic and you don't have to even try."

None of us really knows how anything is going to come out - for sure. But we can learn ways to act that increase or decrease the chances of what we want happening.

Glad you are feeling a sense of "right direction." To me this is two emotions: confidence and hope - confidence that what you are doing will lead to what you hope for.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Wed 20 Feb 2008 04:30 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Things were up and down over the last day, and I'm realizing that this will continue to be a pattern for a while. She was obviously upset about having to move into the guest room. Actually, listening to what she said, what appeared to upset her more was the separate laundry sorters to keep her stuff from mine, and my comment a couple of weeks ago about her not being able to use the master bath (I relented on this, because I had earlier said I wouldn't cut her off from it). She called it "pushing her away" and she still thinks she can't open up to me without me going "all clingy and emo" on her. After that comment, I got out of her hair for the evening (although she then asks me why I was leaving...AARGH!). Earlier, she had also told me to "stop thinking 10 steps ahead and concentrate on being her friend." She's also pretty adamant about moving out of state for school, assuming she can work out the finances. I hope she really is moving mostly for the school, and not for this other guy with whom she has the undefined relationship (close friends, at least) as that relationship isn't likely to endure, and then she'd be alone in another state. Still, she has to stumble and fall on her own, and I have 5-6 months to show her a different side of me.

After all that, this morning she comes crying to me because of problems she's having with her job. I listened very sympathetically, mirrored where I could, and mostly kept my mouth closed, letting her vent to me. Eventually she says "I don't even know how to counter this." Again, I resist the urge to reply. However, after a few minutes of silence, I tentatively ask "Are you asking me for my ideas?" She says "Yes! That's what I just said!" And my thought is..."Uh, no, that's not what you said at all...there was no question in what you said", however I kept that to myself. Doing the "shut up and listen" was easier the 2nd time...only 10 or 19 more times to make it a habit. :) I think the magic number there that I have heard is 21, as I've heard it takes 3 weeks to create new habits.

I had a good session with the therapist today (I mentioned your name, he didn't recognize it, sorry, Al). He also was giving me a version of the "everyone makes sense all the time" statement, which actually put me at ease with him a whole lot more. I cried a lot, vented a lot of frustrations with where I was, and I think we're going to be able to move forward, and I feel better about it. He also was getting on me when I was saying "I feel that people thing XYZ about me if I do ABC." He said "That's not a feeling, its a belief", again echoing some of what I've read here.

In all, I'm tired, didn't sleep great last night, however I'm a bit more at peace with things, and ready for another few steps up the mountain.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Thu 21 Feb 2008 11:22 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

One last long update, because we had a long talk (over an hour) this morning. It was very helpful for me, despite the fact that she felt there were some things that were a few steps backwards. First of all, I basically accused her of having the emotional affair with her friend in Texas before we were divorced. She insists that this wasn't the case (although I don't think she understands exactly what constitutes an emotional affair) and that he is still nothing more than a friend. She says that she has actually been keeping him at bay because she's afraid to start a new relationship. Now, she did say they had a "kick-ass" Valentine's Day. He got her roses and chocolate, and they talked and played video games. Honestly, I know her well enough to believe that this is what happened. She says one of the reasons she hasn't started a relationship with him was she was afraid she "wouldn't be safe." Now, there is ZERO history of violence in our relationship and I would rather die than raise a hand against her, however she

is concerned about me getting overly jealous. So, to her it is a real fear (she makes sense, right?).

She also made it clear that she was going to Texas for school, first and foremost, and that yes, she might date him when she was there. That's why she says she keeps encouraging me to date. I was quite frank and told her I had no interest in dating anyone, including her, at this point. I have too much work I want to do. At any rate, she then says "Texas isn't forever. I don't want to stay in Texas. I don't know where I want to be, I just want time to figure it out."

I asked her why, if I still wasn't "getting her", that she stayed around. She replied it was because she still had faith in me (this is where she said that my accusations had taken several points off the faith, though). She knows I'm working to change, and wants to give me that chance. However, meanwhile she says that her friend in Texas does understand her and that they can talk very freely together. She also was upset that I told her I might end up not keeping all of our cats if she moved, because I'm not sure I'm up to caring for 5 cats and a dog on my own. She got very upset about this, because I had said I would "keep the family together", even though she had originally said she thought we'd have to give the pets away (go figure). I did tell her "The family is already split up" and she kept saying "No, its not. I'm still here!"

I also said that if she moved to Texas, it might be better if we had no contact for a while. She was VERY against this idea.

She is still confused and not understanding some things. She doesn't understand why I just can't be her friend like some of her other close friends. I told her that her other close friends hadn't been in love with her for 9+ years, so it wasn't as easy as flicking a switch. Then, when the conversation was done, I went to head downstairs, and she's upset that I was just leaving without giving her a comforting hug goodbye. Yet another mixed message from her.

The bottom line is that she says that she needs me to be her friend now, without it being conditional on us dating again in the future. She also said that if I couldn't be her friend, then the chances of us dating again were pretty nil. I let her really lay it out on the line for me. And, now, I really do get it more (she's skeptical, and I do). I'm actually much more at ease about where things are, and about what my course will be. My primary focus will be working on myself, and improving my communication and understanding skills, especially with her. I am going to totally pull back from pushing anything that could vaguely be considered a romantic agenda, and concentrate on rebuilding the friendship and trust. It may be that in the next five months she realizes that she can open up to me and be close to me again, or it may be that we never heal this gulf. I will also be doing more to be independent of her in that time, so that when she ultimately moves, it will not be as traumatic for me. In any case, I will come out of it with better communications skills and a better sense of myself, and that's my ultimate goal for myself.

I think steps 1-4 will be a good guide for me. 4 is toughest, because she still wants the contact (for instance, she didn't feel welcome because when she comes home from work, she doesn't get a big enough, friendly enough, greeting from me or our housemate) and because she says that if I neglect the relationship with her, she'll just forget about me (this could be true...I don't think she's given a thought about her first husband in years).

This isn't going to be easy, because I have to push the "in love" part of her away, or at least make it secondary to the "loving her" part. I know "in love" is a chemical reaction, and I can do this. Yes, I want her back, and I don't want her back conditionally. I want her back when we are both healthier and stronger and communicating better. And hopefully she's telling the truth that "Texas isn't forever."

There's a lot in what she said that really points to her confusion. She wants me, but I'm not understanding her. She wants to go to Texas, and I think wants to go out with this other guy, and she's not even sure about him. I know it makes sense to her when she says "she isn't sure if she'd be safe", and I know that below that statement, she knows she's physically safe from me. I believe that she's really more concerned about having another relationship end badly. I also believe that me pressuring her (#1) is increasing the confusion, so that's a key thing to stop.

And yes, I did invalidate her a few times in the conversation. I caught myself doing it, and the words were out. I know...practice, practice, practice.

Well, I'll stop for now. There's a lot going on in my head now, and at least I see a path that is more clear now. It was a tough conversation, and a useful one, and it gives me a lot of direction. I'll keep updating things, however since I don't expect any major overnight changes,

its likely to be less frequent. I'll keep watching for your input, Al, and may request some feedback on specific items, however I know most of this has to come from me, since I'm the one living it day to day.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Sun 24 Feb 2008 12:56 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

Its been a few days since I posted, as I don't think a blow by blow description of my relationship is necessary. However, a few issues have arisen where I'd appreciate some feedback. I'll keep things brief (at least by my standards).

1) I've been reading the paper on safety, and I have no problem being 100% open/honest with her at this point, which will help in the "source of safety" issue, however although I overall feel safe around her, I believe that she holds back some things. Do I just accept this, or encourage her to be more open. One of her key frustrations with me is that she believes (I first put "feels" there, then remembered to change that) she cannot be open with me. I'm confused between wanting to establish safety and not wanting to push.

2) My Ex has a very difficult time asking for things. For instance, she made a comment that she had some heavy things in the car and she hurt her back putting them there because no one would help her with them. Now, I know that in "her way", that's asking for help unloading the car. However, I want her to ask directly not hint at it. This has been a frustration of mine for some time, and she seems to think that if she asks directly, I'm more likely to say no. Any suggestions on how to make her feel more comfortable asking, or at least for me to frame things like it was her idea? I can say "Hey, I know you mentioned hurting your back again because no one helped you load the car, so would you like my help unloading it?" and I'm afraid that comes off as not holding her capable and pushing again.

3) In terms of mirroring/validating, I believe that at this early juncture, asking her to participate in exercises with me would be construed as pushing. I can practice some based on your writings, however its definitely more difficult with one than two. Should I find a partner with whom I can work on these exercises?

For the brief updates, I'm being much more respectful of her space, and seeing my own limits. We spent much of the day together yesterday, in some ways a frustrating day for both of us due to factors out of our control (our interactions were all good). However, we went out for frozen yogurt on the way home, and I was pretty much silent during that. I wasn't particularly unhappy, it was just after 10 hours together, I just wasn't feeling super talkative. In the evening, there was a concert/event I thought she'd like more than me, although I expected to like it, too, and I had gotten free tickets to it (yay for connections). She didn't want to go, she was exhausted after the day, and frankly, I wasn't sure I wanted to go because I was also tired. However, I went partially to show her more independence on my part. As it turned out, it was thoroughly enjoyable. It would likely have been better with her there to share the experience, and it was still nice. And, with the couple hours break between when we got home and the concert, I was recharged enough that I would have enjoyed her company again.

Today she said she was feeling hungry, and also bloated, so she wasn't sure about food. I came up later and said "Hey, I know you said you were feeling bloated, and if you would like some food, I'm making pancakes and would be happy to make some for you." Was that a good use of pre-validation and/or mirroring of her by acknowledging her stated feelings and making it her option? I'm still struggling a bit to grasp the whole concept.

Right now, my Ex is more of a taker than a giver. Especially from me. She actually does a lot of things for friends and, I'll be honest, it stings a bit that she seems to think of them before me. However, that's my internal dialog, and not her problem. Is this likely because of her low trust level at this point? I will say that this morning she sent me a cute internet link, which really meant a lot to me, because it showed she was thinking of me and my interests. However, in the long run, a one-sided friendship does not a relationship make, and I'm curious if, all else being equal, her behavior is likely to change as she feels safer with me.

Okay, this did end up being long. Thanks again for this site and your feedback.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Al Turtle on Sun 24 Feb 2008 02:17 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Eyes on the Prize,

I was getting a kick out of how much you write. It sure reminds me of me. I counted almost 6000 words of yours that I've posted on my blog. I am not complaining. I was just amused at how much. I sure have written a lot more and there it is. :)

Quick answers or responses:

1) Safe or Space: as I read your letters, Not-Pushing is Safety to her. Connecting is Safety to you. I've covered this all under Reliable Membership. My guess is that she experiences you presence, talking, or perhaps even the signs that you are thinking as "overwhelming." And she probably learned this reaction long ago - way before she met you. Go about doing what is necessary to make this person feel safe (i.e. their Lizard relaxed) - and you are on your way.

2) "Can't be direct or ask for things": an almost universal trait of people whom we call "Avoiders" or "Isolators" and whom we "Clingers" and "Pursuers" seem to prefer to marry. (Look these labels up on my blog and enjoy.) I believe they start this as early as age 2 months, when they experience their caretakers as overwhelming. And so, I repeat my advice, don't lose yourself, but change yourself to not come across "overwhelming" to this person. It is quite a project. (Read the Lizard again.)

3) Mirroring if she won't practice with you: First, you can practice (at least the Receiver parts of) mirroring with anyone (heck including animals) that you meet. You need a partner to practice the sender parts of mirroring. For example, a partner will interrupt you if you are talking too fast, and that will give you practice in slowing down, learning patience, and speaking more simply and clearly. Probably, w/o a partner, you will not get much practice in that skill. You can try with anyone, though.

Even I can help. Here's a thought. I will publish any thoughtful comment of yours on my website that is under 200 words. Practice condensing. That is partially the art of respecting one's listeners. Doing this won't really help, because it is about writing not speaking, but I hope you get the point I am trying to make. If you talk anything close to the way you write, you will need some partner to give you practice condensing.

4) "It would likely have been better with her there to share the experience." Now, think again. Would it have been better to have her there and miserable because she didn't want to be there? You didn't have a choice about her mood. Think on that. Sure it would have been better if she had wanted to be there and enjoy it. That wasn't the option. I think you did the "right" thing.

5) PreValidation: I never said it would be easy to learn. Seems simple to me at this point. About pancakes, not too bad a response but not PreValidation. Try this.
"Right now, my Ex is more of a taker than a giver." And it makes sense to her to do those things that makes her come across to me as a "taker." "Especially to me." And of course that makes sense to her, too. I must come across differently than those other people that she seems to be giving to, or something. I wonder what her sense is?

Hey, friend, Good luck.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Sun 24 Feb 2008 06:17 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Okay, 200 words will be a challenge, and I've just used 14 of them. I definitely can talk at length. We have a housemate, who is sympathetic to the situation (he went through something similar with his partner last year) and I think he would be open to helping me with the mirroring/validation.

Just a couple of quick notes. I should have clarified that it would have been better to have her there if she was enjoying it than to drag her there. For once, I used too few words. I agree with your point. I am still reading the communications chapter and the relationship map, I will get to the lizard next.

As for the non-pushing/connecting issue, I am learning to connect in smaller doses, and to get my love units elsewhere. Hers are still the most valuable to me, and I crave those more than ever. We were talking while I was typing this, and it was clear that she had other things to do and wasn't in a big talking mood. I'm learning to not take it personally when she withdraws.

6,000 words? Really? Wow...I do go on. Word says I'm at 195 now, so I'll stop.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Sun 24 Feb 2008 07:59 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Yup. and Keep on going. I think that learning a new skill, like communicating, is 1% hearing about the skill, 2% understanding why to do it, and 97% practice. Mostly, I believe what I do on my website is that little 3%. At home you and I practice!

I think you are on the right track, at least a couple of them.

Good luck, Al

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [EyesOnThePrize](#) on Tue 26 Feb 2008 10:22 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I'm still struggling with the whole pre-validation/mirroring/validation sequence. Thankfully, my housemate has agreed to help me with this. Is a good way to handle it just having conversations about what's going on with him, and have him give me feedback or should he be talking to me about his issues and I give him feedback, or a combination of the two?

Here was a for instance. Last night my ex tells me about a test for which she is studying, and how she expects to do badly because "I'm bad at ancient civilization" (the "I" being her, not me). Pre-validating seems easy enough ("I see what you're saying") and mirroring it back to her is more confusing. Then, how do I validate? I confirm that she thinks she's bad at ancient civilization? I know that's her sense, and I am not sure how helping her confirm a negative belief about herself helps things.

I've started to withdraw a bit, setting some boundaries. Dealing with the situation is stressful to me, and I'm finding a greater need for space from her. I guess I'm moving into #4. I'm glad I see the therapist tomorrow.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Wed 27 Feb 2008 07:33 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Friend,

Struggle away. I did. Even your example of Prevalidating doesn't sound right to me. Took me quite a time and that is why I've written up my notes, to me, and published them here for you. I'm glad you have a friend to practice with.

If you have trouble with Mirroring and Validating, and my articles don't help, then I think the best thing is to find a "therapist" or "trainer" who is good at it and who can "show" you and guide you. Most any Imago Therapist is trained in Mirroring. My version of Validation is "advanced" for some. You could have an appointment with me. I do phone consults.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [EyesOnThePrize](#) on Wed 27 Feb 2008 04:09 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I am amazed at how #4 works in practice. The last 3 nights, I have decided that I was not going to go down and say good night to her, I was just going to give her space. Each of the last 3 nights, she's come up to my room to say goodnight and talk for a few minutes. This morning I was planning on leaving the house without disturbing her, however she got up and wondered where I was, and I said "I'm on my way out the door in a minute", and suddenly she wanted to come down and say goodbye and we ended up speaking for a while. I truly believed that she would basically instantly forget about me if I wasn't "in her face" all the time, and what I'm finding is that our contact appears to be very important to her. And without the pressure/pushing from me, it has been much more relaxed, happy contact.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [EyesOnThePrize](#) on Wed 27 Feb 2008 10:21 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

A rough night tonight. We had a long (2 hour) talk on the phone. As a result, we're going to redo the divorce agreement so that I give her more money now to help with the taxes and school, but the term of the alimony will be reduced by about a year and a half. She also let me

know she could be moving as early as the end of May. She's looking for apartments near where she expects to be going to school. She says she may want the extra couple of months before school to acclimate to a new region. I thought I had 5 months with her, now its 3. Its become very clear that school, not relationships, are her top priority now. And that's okay, I'd wait for her, and I expect her to emerge from school as a much more complete person. She was upset that I seemed so down over it. I told her that she was someone I loved seeing every day, and that now I was going to see her once a month if I was lucky. Her response was "Don't you think this is hard on me, too?"

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Bob](#) on Wed 27 Feb 2008 04:36 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Eyesontheprize,

I want to encourage you to keep working on this, and let me second what Al has said. It took me a lot of trial and error to get close to doing it in a way that got good results. For the first few months mostly what I got was confusion or even anger on my partner's part. Practice, practice, this is a skill like any other and it can be learned, which to me was really encouraging.

In your example I might have said 'well of course you feel like you're not going to do well, that is really difficult stuff. (Pre-validation) Would you share with me why you feel the way you do?'

Hope this helps,

- The Tall Man

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [EyesOnThePrize](#) on Thu 28 Feb 2008 06:36 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Tall Man,

Thanks for the response. There is a lot of confusion now in this trial and error stage. The announcement about her leaving town in 90 days is a killer right now. I'm really not sure how to handle the distance issue. I know you and your wife were living in separate households, however I don't know if you were still in close physical proximity. Did you have much face to face contact before you started dating again, or did you find that the distance was actually a boon to you? I don't think she's walking away from me, she's just going to where the schools she believes are best for her are located and that 1,500 miles looks like an immense distance to me.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Thu 28 Feb 2008 12:30 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I think you are doing fine. I have one thought to add about [Rule #2: Survive](#). Most often a person who is withdrawing or backing up has already subjected themselves to both "healthy" and "foolish" guilt about "your distress or pain" many times. So if you put your distress out in front of them, they will often feel pushed, get upset, and move away further and faster. Not good!

This problem is one reason for [Rule #2: Survive and Take care of your self](#). I suggest you only very lightly share with them the pain, torment, anguish etc you may be going through. Expressing is good for health and so please do share it all with friends or your counselor, etc.

Oh, by the way, don't share it in a place where it will get back to your partner. I knew a guy who was in lots of pain of loneliness. Therefore, he didn't tell his girlfriend, but he shared it all, over and over, with her parents. He lost both her and her family. Pretty dumb, I think.

My suggestion is to share this extremely lightly with your partner, "Well, yeah, it has been rough..." and that is all you say.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Thu 28 Feb 2008 01:04 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

The friends with whom I've shared things are not mutual acquaintances. I don't want anything getting back to her. I agree with you there.

We had another long talk this morning (over an hour). It was tough for both of us, and there was a lot of invalidation and some pushing, I'm sad to say, and finally we got through to openness and honesty, especially regarding her friend in the other state. And I am much more at peace now. As you say in your paper, I don't have to like what she says, and if she's open and honest, my mind doesn't have to make up worst case scenarios.

She needs some space from me now. I've been too close over the last 18 hours. In fact, I asked her to dinner and then retracted it so she wouldn't feel pushed more. And as tough as the talk was, I feel much better now. If we an stay open and honest, I can become that source of safety to her, and that's my #1 priority. From safety comes closeness, from closeness comes unlimited possibilities.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Sat 01 Mar 2008 07:09 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Today was very tough. I found a very cheap airfare to a destination we've talked about visiting together, and with some coaching from Al, approached her about going with me. She wants to go, says it sounds like fun, and doesn't think she can afford it. When I told her I was going anyway, she was upset that I was dangling the fact that I was going in front of her. It took everything I had not to just buy the ticket for her. That's what I'd have done in the past, and I know that actually holds her back. My heart is breaking right now. I really want to do this trip with her, and I know she wants to go, and I can't keep enabling her. And worse yet, I know that her upset over me dangling it in front of her makes sense to her. Maybe she's more upset with herself for not being able to go than with me for actually going anyway (yes, I bought the ticket, booked a hotel and rental car). Maybe this is the anger to which The Tall Man referred. I hope she changes her mind. There are always solutions.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Tue 04 Mar 2008 12:16 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

The last two days have been miserable. She had a total meltdown last night, and it made me realize that unless/until she's willing to get some help for her issues, I am really not interested in an intimate relationship with her. I'm going to use this time to work on me, and I will daily put it out to the universe that she begins to see what she is doing to herself and gets some help for it. If she does, I'd definitely still be interested in a relationship with her. If she doesn't, then moving on is the best thing possible for me. I'll always love her, and probably be in love with her, and I have to love myself more at this point, and take care of myself.

Al, thank you for all of your valuable feedback and this site. I believe it has helped me with this situation and will continue to help me in the future. I still want to become a source of safety to her, I just don't want to be married to her at this point.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Sat 08 Mar 2008 10:28 AM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

We did a photoshoot this morning, and I did my best to keep controlled. She really started pushing some of my buttons, so I told her I needed a time out. She didn't totally respect it; however she doesn't know the rules, so I don't blame her for that. I did keep from losing my temper, which has happened in the past, and at the same time, I made it clear I wasn't going to put up with her just complaining about everything I did. I validated and mirrored where I can, and while its not easy, it is getting easier. Her mood was also affected by it being that time of the month, and I did my best to be respectful of that. Compared to some experiences in the past, this one went better, and I think there still could have been improvement from both of us. I keep reminding myself that everything she says makes sense to her. I also calmly explained where some of her actions were hurtful to me. She doesn't seem to totally get my sense, and that doesn't surprise me at this point, and it just is what it is.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Wed 12 Mar 2008 10:57 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

I was reviewing this thread today, and suddenly realized that I believe that I have really made significant progress in the roughly 4 weeks since I started posting here. I believe I have gotten much better at pre-validation, mirroring and validation, although all three still seem like more of a conscious effort to me than just reflex. I am working on avoiding Master Talk whenever possible (unless its appropriate) and find myself correcting myself a lot from "The situation is X" to "My view of the situation is X." I have posters of many of your sayings taped to a file cabinet by my desk and to my mirror in the bathroom. My only regret is it is becoming difficult to find space for all of them. I'm also learning that when I stop chasing her lizard, my lizard seems to relax a lot more. I believe I still have a long way to go, and I still believe my ex wife needs to address some of her issues before we can have a healthy relationship, and compared to last month, my sense of self is stronger and more confident and happier. Feedback from others seems to echo this.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Kiwi7070 on Mon 17 Mar 2008 12:31 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

She left a few weeks ago, she called to say she wanted to come by and pick up a few clothes because sg=he did not have enough close at work and people were asking questions whats wrong, its not my problem you left I didnt , now i heard she is resigning from her Job, i now know she has a mental condition, going from house to house , trying to find comfort, its not my problem , but what should I did you left a comfortable home we all have problems in relationships But i am willing to work through them,

Immaturity and pride will destory a relationship and interference by family members as well

your thoughts

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Al Turtle on Tue 18 Mar 2008 10:48 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Kiwi,

Sounds awful - for both of you! I like your last sentence very much. "Immaturity and pride" will destroy everything! And just for the fun of it, as I've often found, people tend to mate up with people with the same level of immaturity (flip that word upside down and it become "need to learn/grow up"). So often means in a relationship that people are facing "one's immaturity times two." Kind of an invitation to learn. :)

I like "pride," as in [self-esteem](#), but that old "foolish pride" seems a waste.

Oh yeah, and I believe that its fair and legal for family members to try to interfere all they want. It is each person's job to block those attempts. (see [my paper on Boundaries](#)).

Thanks for sharing about the stumblings going on. I love the old quote, "If a fool would persist in his folly, he would become wise." I certainly was damn foolish. Probably still am, in ways.

Good luck.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Tue 25 Mar 2008 12:03 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Two months ago I couldn't imagine saying this, and I think I'm now ready for my ex to move out and complete her "leaving" process. She has a new boyfriend (I've mentioned him in earlier posts) and I choose to let that bother me, or at least my lizard, at some levels, and I believe it is interfering with my efforts to work on myself. In fact, while I think I am making progress with steps 1 - 3, step 4 is difficult for me with her living 25 feet from me and sharing common areas of the house. While I am working on becoming a source of safety to her lizard, I do not believe that she is doing the same for mine, and I think I would rather have a calm lizard. While I still believe that I want her back if she is willing to do work on herself, I find myself in a "How can I miss you if you don't even leave" state of mind. I think she needs to fully experience step 4 before it can truly be effective, and I'd like that process to start sooner rather than later.

[Reply](#)**Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?**

by [FostersKittyCat](#) on Wed 26 Mar 2008 12:43 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

So it's been a year and yes there has been contact but usually initiated by me. I was terrible at giving him the space he wanted. I panicked and did all the stupid, silly things you're not supposed to. He really is a good guy and would point blank tell me I'm just pushing him away when I call and email and what not. He told me he's never had the chance to miss me and where is the mystery? Of course in my head I was terribly worried for him as he was without a job for so long and when he got a job it was 70+hours/wk with very little pay. I just wanted to check in and help - I tracked job leads, had family members help, etc. My heart was in the right place but everything probably just came out wrong to him. I pushed to see him, to talk, to spend time. I see how foolish now I was. How much regret I have.

He got a new job in Oct and started dating then too (he didn't go on date for over 8 months after our breakup.) I was happy that he was dating as it meant he was feeling better about himself. Though I still loved him and wanted to reconcile. The longest I have gone without talking to him is 35 days.

Our last contact was extremely friendly. He's finally reading a book I gave to him a year and a half ago and listened to one of two cds I sent him. He knows I'd love to hear his thoughts on these and said to me in an email he'd share input when he has finished (he admits he's a slow reader) with them. Well that was over 3 weeks ago. I haven't contacted him because by all accounts he should be contacting me as he said. I realize this is a clear indication that I am not important - he's had the music cds for over 2 months now and has only listened to one that he has told me.

Is it too late? Did I make too many mistakes early on? We did really love each other - he's the one who chased me down and wanted to get me to commit as I was resistant.

A year later is there any hope for the 4 step program?

Dazed and confused and looking for advice...

: -)

[Reply](#)**Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?**

by [Al Turtle](#) on Wed 26 Mar 2008 04:40 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear FostersKittyCat,

Ah. I feel for you. Gad, and I was thinking of how many other people are going through exactly what you are, though you and I are not in contact with them. Probably, oh, 350,000, I'd guess, in the US alone. I am sure that would not make the pain, confusion and dazzle better for you. But there it is.

I am a guy who really hates not knowing what is going on. While my personal experiences are different than yours, they were really ugly. Out of that I eventually discovered and wrote my [Map of Relationships](#), as a guide to understanding, to stopping the confusion, and to pointing toward what to do. After 8 years, I think it still holds up as an excellent study. I commend it to you. I think more than enough answers to your questions are in it.

And try not to blame yourself too much. Lots of the "foolish" things you may have done were taught to you by a couple of other "foolish," well-meaning people.

God Bless.

Al

[Reply](#)**Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?**

by [Bob](#) on Sat 29 Mar 2008 05:41 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I felt compelled to add my 2 cents to this topic as well. I've been through many break-ups, over the 16 years with my wife. As I recall I can't remember a time when I didn't turn into a crushed, needy person after she told me she wanted out. I never followed rule #4 of being available minimally. I would make up reasons to call, or to contact her. Basically I gave up my self respect.

I recently realized that from my perspective, women in general don't admire or want to be with 'needy' men

and that's exactly what I would become whenever we would break. Women in general (I have found) want to be with a sensitive, CONFIDENT man.

After a break up, it's likely to be very difficult to maintain your confidence and composure, however it might be the single most important thing you can do to get the relationship back.

I've found recently that going into a state of no contact, and basically 'dropping of the face of the earth' in terms of communicating with your partner, is the best way to let them feel the full weight of the decision to split.

If you're still 'there for them' basically you're saying that it's ok that they don't want to be with you, and you'll accept a lesser role and still emotionally support them as they go and date other people. I question if this is a healthy thing to do. I decided not to.

Man or woman, being the 'needy' partner is likely to drive the person farther away, not back to you.

I love how Al says, be available minimally, I would go farther and say don't be 'available' at all and definitely don't contact them. Work on getting your mental state to a place of confidence, and comfort and be comfortable in your own skin for a while.

Calm, confident people are VERY attractive. I don't believe this is easy after a painful breakup, seems better than the alternative.

- B

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Sat 29 Mar 2008 08:51 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Great experiences, and thanks for sharing all that.

Tis fun to think of what "women want in men." And it is also fun to think of how "needy" an awful lot of men are.

Your experience seems about a lot of break-ups with a single wife. I think that as quite different from many break-ups with different partners.

However, the common feature in both seems to me about "waking up" from a state of being unaware (lack of empathic contact) what is going on in your partner. In your case it might seem that you wake up, become needy, somehow reconcile and then go back to sleep. Sounds like a very painful cycle.

Someone recently asked "how do you predict that your partner is gonna leave?" I think that a great question! How does one wake up when asleep and is not aware of being asleep? I may have to write an article on this.

I like your thinking, Bob, about "not being available at all for a while." In your circumstance, probably the greatest learning is for you - i.e. how to go about getting your own attention and how to focus it on a) what to do about your "neediness" and on b) "going back to sleep (taking her for granted)." You might want to read books by John Lee, especially [The Flying Boy](#), to get at this.

Mind you, for one to be asleep takes two people, 50% responsibility in each. Your partner's responsibility has to do with being passive when she "sees you asleep." If she were to get good at getting your attention (with a rock for example), the dynamics shifts. Your 50% has more to do with becoming easy to wake up (then, she needs much less than a rock), and taking responsibility to pinch yourself once-a-week or so.

In general, I don't like the idea of a complete break-off or silence as that so often comes across as a punishment. And I think in a relationship, neither has the right to punish the other. Kind of foolish thinking - to punish!

Oh, in my experience women are more often the clingers (maybe 60% of the time), however I experience women as more able to be self-sufficient. This seems particularly true if they have some children to focus on.

Anyway, thanks for sharing, Bob.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Bob on Sun 30 Mar 2008 06:32 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Thanks so your feedback Al.

I just ordered that book you recommended. I love your thoughts about how I 'go to sleep' in my relationship. Not sure how that makes sense for me to do that.

I'm going to work on figuring that out.

Thanks,

- B

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Bob on Sun 30 Mar 2008 06:45 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I am curious why you selected that book, now that I see it's about running from relationships. I don't think I've ever run from my wife, to me it seems like I've fought really hard to stay in, when she's been running away.

I'm very curious what you see here....

- B

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Al Turtle on Sun 30 Mar 2008 08:57 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

My memory of John Lee's work (I think of him as a friend) was that it was helpful in understanding why some men tend to be quite disconnected from the world and needs of their partner, if they have one. I was thinking about how men often come out of childhood w/o empathic skills.

I was reflecting on how a) people want and need a partner and b) easily take their partners for granted. Kind of like having a garden, really wanting a garden, and repeatedly forgetting to tend, nurture, water and weed it. I thought John's writing might provide some understanding on why good people do this.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Mon 31 Mar 2008 01:16 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

Thanks for the suggestion of the John Lee book. I will take a look at it myself. I think that I did often become disconnected from my ex-wife's needs and her world, and often attempted to impose my world on her.

And Bob, thanks for asking a question that led to something that may be useful for me, too. Best of luck to you.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Anonymous on Wed 02 Apr 2008 10:00 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

You have a wonderful website and I have already purchased one of your podcasts. Ironically, several years ago, my significant other (wife for all intents and purposes of thirteen years) had us do Imago through her church. I have to admit that I was very reticent throughout the whole process, and ultimately it was not beneficial. I now blame myself for that and for not "hearing" what she was trying to communicate. I had no idea that we were in trouble and thought it was more of a goof--to see if we could be an even better

relationship than we already were. Yeah, I'm an idiot.

Because:

This past February, she left me. I am now nearly two months into a separation. NOW I HEAR HER LOUD AND CLEAR!!

I am hoping and praying it is not too late. I have fortunately been doing the things you advised -- and am hopeful in that regard.

Here's my question: she said that while there were issues in the relationship (yes, I realize this now), she also left to do "soul searching". She is in her late forties, and is trying to figure herself out. Last ditch desire for child, insecurity about career, etc.

So, this separation seems to be a combination of relationship despair, and mid life crisis (or transition).

This has been eye opening for me, and I'm trying to learn everything I can.
Is there anything additional I can do (or not do) to keep from losing her forever?

I know... a simple question.

Thank you very much for your site, and your advice.

Stefan Avalos
(a newly awakened man)

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Thu 03 Apr 2008 02:33 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Stefan, Congratulations on the newly awaked status. I think it is never too late.

To your question. I think mid-life crisis or waking up or finding yourself or your soul all are really cool. Your role is to help in any way they will let you. Consider them a book-in-progress. Read every new page with excitement and encourage, encourage.

Look out got anything you might do that would slow them down. If you do that job well enough they make think that the difficulties of finding their soul is easier with you around - rather than with you away.

I think you are lucky to have such a partner.

Al

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by stefan on Thu 03 Apr 2008 04:21 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

wow, The spin you put on it is nice. I will try to look at it this way.

Honestly, it's hell on earth for me right now.

We aren't in contact besides very brief and infrequent emails about business related things.

She repeatedly writes that she is "sorry for the pain she is causing". But that isn't helping in anyway at this point.

I'm helplessly stuck on the sidelines right now.

She had also indicated at a meeting we had one month into the separation, that she didn't feel she could return to the relationship. After the meeting, after I told her where I was at, and what changes I was making in myself, she did have doubts about her feelings to leave, and asked for more time.

At this point, I'm simply letting her be. No pushing, etc. I'm certainly not going to "tell" her how much I've changed, etc. I'm following your advice to a T.

Argh, it is a painful and helpless situation I am in.

I am doing my best to envision the "deer analogy" that you made in your mp3. But I am having doubts whether this deer will come out of the woods.

I suppose I'm in the mode of thought that -- the more time that goes by, the less hopeful I am. This is only two months in, so perhaps I'm just too obsessive right now. (not that I'm letting her know or see this)

Stefan

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Thu 03 Apr 2008 06:26 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Well, she leaves next Wednesday. Off to her new life in another state with her new guy. Yet she called me 6 times yesterday, and so far 4 times today. She doesn't leave voice mails. She text messages me, to see how I am doing, and I reply with very short, yet polite responses. I think that as I begin to pull back, she is beginning to see what an important part of her life I represent and how important her contact with me is to her day to day life. I think that I want her to see what life is like without me before she truly appreciates me. It is not easy for me. I want to pick up the phone when she calls, and share my thoughts and hopes and dreams, and to hear hers, too. Yet she made a choice. She chose him over me. I believe that action has consequences. When (if?) she understands what she has left behind and when (if?) she decides she wants that back in her life, then I believe I can increase contact and we can work on new ground rules. I think this is the most difficult thing I have done in my life. Yet to me she is worth the sacrifice. Even if the odds are against reconciliation, to me she is worth that chance. I welcome the break from her to work on myself. I am not yet the man I want to be.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Al Turtle on Fri 04 Apr 2008 08:20 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear EyesOnThePrize,

I am reminded by your piece about how I have seen people grow and what you can expect from her.

First, I recall that she is comparing all she has known about you (your past with her) to this new person. When the newness wears off, and it ALWAYS does (see my Map of Relationships), she will be comparing her memories of who you were to who she is experiencing this new guy to have become. Perhaps she has to go through 3 new guys before she "get's it" that there is no Prince Charming. At that point she would still be comparing her memories of you to who she is finding.

I think it a good idea to continue your growth and to "leak" to her that you are changing, so that she may get curious to check out that "old car" that has been "refurbished." An old boyfriend who is "working on himself" is worth 4 new boyfriends that are not

Tis my thinking.

Al

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Fri 04 Apr 2008 08:55 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

I have some thoughts in that direction. We have a housemate, and he and I both expect my ex to use him as a "spy" to see what I am doing. We've discussed this and how/what information we will leak. In addition, she subscribes to my online journal and I can post updates there, too. Now, I plan to unsubscribe to hers, because I don't know that following her exploits will aid my recovery, however I have a fear that she will then do the same to me and then she wouldn't see my leaks. I suppose I can keep her on my list and just not read her posts. I think that just requires discipline on my part. She is already (at my request) filtering out things about her personal life from me and letting me only see "generic" entries.

I went to the bookstore last night. They had no John Lee books in stock (I was curious as to your opinion of "Healing the Wounded Man"), however I did purchase "Codependent No More" which I plan to read in the near future.

BTW, I think some of the newness is already wearing off with the new guy. She is very up front with

me that he is not perfect and has lots of flaws. And she makes curious comments like "He's not more important than you, he's just important differently." When I hear things like this, it indicates to me that she still has strong feelings for me, whether she chooses to admit it or not.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Fri 04 Apr 2008 03:24 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

I got the book name wrong. "Healing the Wounded Man" is "The Flying Boy." I was curious about what you perceived as the value in "Growing Yourself Back Up", also by John Lee?

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Al Turtle on Sat 05 Apr 2008 09:04 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I've spent some time with John Lee and imagine that I, and perhaps you, would like anything he wrote. With a background of a family that functioned around addictions (anger, et. al.) I think his thoughts are sound and valuable. While women can get a lot from him, I think he speaks most clearly to men.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by stefan on Sun 06 Apr 2008 05:17 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Follow up question to mid-life crisis and wife leaving.

Al,

I wonder... what is the fine line between encourage, encourage and appearing to be pushing?

My fear is that every time I say a "you go, you're the best, I believe in you", it comes off as an attempt to "woo" her back.

Is there an advantage to watching her hit bottom and struggle, while you appear, or in actuality are doing better and disengaging from her?

I hate playing these games, but thus far disengaging, not pushing, seems to be the most advised method, and I'm seeing personally, the most effective.

I look forward to your thoughts.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Al Turtle on Mon 07 Apr 2008 05:39 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Stefan, There is art in all this. Here are some thoughts. Your goal is to "come across" as encouraging and "not come across" as pushing. Your partner is fully in charge of how things come across, but but but you are in charge of what you do. That sentence is the clue.

Over time the goal is to find out what things you can do that make her feel encouraged. Probably right now it is almost more important to figure out what you do that comes across pushy.

The best person to ask is your partner, but..... not in a pushy way!

This is a situation where, I think, friends are quite useful. Find a friend or group where you can talk about pushy and avoiding tactics. Chat with them. Pushy people are sometimes called Clingers and avoiding people are often called Turtles. I hope you can find some great Turtle friends.

Sometimes great advice comes from these others. Sometimes their advice sucks. The bottom line is beginning to figure out what works for your partner - and then practicing it till it becomes more natural.

Perhaps you can connect to an online group (marriagebuilders or midlifecrisis, etc.) and chat this over

with them.

Good luck.

Al

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Wed 09 Apr 2008 08:37 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Well, she's gone. We packed the truck yesterday, they just drove off a few minutes ago. I'm proud of myself for how I handled it, and how I did not instigate any conflicts with the new boyfriend. I looked at him and thought "What a sad, pathetic man you are that you have to chase married women." I know that what he did made sense to him, and I still have no respect for him. She invited me to her going away dinner, I declined.

We had a tearful goodbye. She told me she had to do this for herself and I told her I was proud of her for taking the chance. She told me about how "mean" I had been, and I acknowledged that I hadn't always communicated well. I also said that I thought we both were stubborn and proud and thought the other person would change if only we waited long enough. Somewhat to my surprise, she agreed. We were both in tears for most of the goodbye, and told each other that we loved each other three different times. I told her that I was going to continue working on myself and her response was "I'll believe it when I see it", and I think that's fair, given our track record. She's coming back to town in June and wants to see me then. I told her I couldn't guarantee that I'd be ready to see her yet, although I think I will be...2 1/2 months will give me some time to grow and deal with things. I did tell her that if there was ever a crisis or emergency, that I would be on the next plane to see her.

Interestingly, I'm filled with hope after our goodbye. I think even during the goodbye, that she was still saying "Eyes, I want you to be the man I always thought you were. If you can be that, we have a chance." I could be reading into things, and I think that the love that exists between us is still very strong. I also think we both have some healing and growing to do. My housemate's theory is that she is using the boyfriend (probably subconsciously) as much as he is using her. He gives her comfort while she makes this huge move, and he gets her as a notch in his belt. I know they have feelings for each other, and also don't believe they have the sort of intimate connection that she and I share. Of course, I think I'm a bit biased.

I sent her two text messages after she left. The first said "I am so very proud proud of you. I love you and always will. I am never going to stop trying to turn myself into someone you would like to get together with" and the second just said "Goodbye for now but not forever." I am going to take a break from her. I plan on at least 30 days until I contact her. I want the time to heal and work on myself. And, I want to give her some time to miss me and start comparing. When she visits in June, I think I will have made some good progress.

I also believe that, as she put it, this chapter is over. I did say in our goodbye talk that there's nothing that says that we can't write a new chapter where we do things write. And I believe in my heart that our story is far from over.

Its rough right now, I already miss her, and I suspect she already misses me. I thank you for letting me share here, Al, and if anyone gets any value from my story, I am glad to have shared. I think the writing has helped me deal with the situation, and I think its helping me grow into the man I want to be.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Manya on Wed 23 Apr 2008 10:17 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Hi Al,

Thanks for your wonderful and informative website. I've been devouring your articles with great interest and admiration (I'm about to finish my social work degree in three weeks!).

Although I'm in Manhattan, I wanted to find a way to contact you with a question and I'm hoping email will work! My partner ended our relationship recently following many months of neurotic behavior on my part (I'm the Clinger who fears abandonment at every turn) and increasingly psychotic behavior on his part (he's the dissociative Avoider whose dissociations have recently started to include visions of his own death). As I'm sure you've already figured, our relationship styles only exacerbated each of our particular areas of weakness and, when the stress between us grew too intense, he believed he needed to cut things off.

He has stated that he feels he wants us to end up together in the long-term, but that he must view us

as currently separated ("broken up") because, whenever he thinks of fusing with me again, he is overcome with a feeling of "wild danger." (It seems appropriate to mention here that his mother and I can both be quite enveloping women, and that his relationship with his mother was strangely enmeshed and controlling for a very long time.)

I feel, also, that being together at present is an emotional danger to both of us; but, in keeping with the Imago philosophy, I also see the two of us as being uniquely suited to nurture each other, heal past wrongs, and rekindle the intense love and friendship we both still feel between us when we are at our most relaxed.

My question is this: At our upcoming appointment with an Imago therapist (the appointment is in one week and we made it before we broke things off), I am tempted to say that I want to pursue therapy in order to say a respectful goodbye to our relationship. On the one hand, I feel this is true; the relationship we were in was not inhabitable, and I'd like to be free of it. I also think my partner would find this comforting, as he would take it as a signal that I've heard his complaints and am on the same page as he is. On the other hand, I'm not sure if I'm being misleading, as I have hopes for the two of us beginning a new relationship with very different patterns and emotional content than our last one. If I say, therefore, that I want to say goodbye to our relationship in our session, do you feel I'm being unproductively dishonest? I want to make sure to maximize our time and to remain candid.

Thanks for reading! I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,
M.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Fri 25 Apr 2008 11:46 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear M,

I am so glad you are considering your own honesty. My tendency is to think that in a relationship it is always better, in the long run, to be clear about your thoughts and values and goals, and to work hard to avoid being deceptive. That said, I think it important to be kind and gentle and structured when you share "hard truths."

In this situation, I think there is something else going on. I am used to the idea that in my attempting to share my truth, sometimes I can't find the 'right' words, maybe for quite a while. My challenge is a) do I withhold sharing anything until I find the 'right' words, or b) do I share the 'poor quality' words anyway now?

Both Sandra and I like the phrase [I don't know how to say this right. Let me say it wrong first, and then let's clean it up together.](#)

And in this case I think you are trying to say, "I want to get rid of that old relationship. It wasn't working for me and I hear it wasn't working for you. I don't want to get rid of you, just the relationship. I'd like to learn how to be in a great relationship with you. Maybe this Imago Therapist can help us do that."

By the way, while Imago Therapists are human and some are great, some are good, and some maybe foolish, I think the best by far training for couple's work is Imago Training. Toss this therapist my email and yours and it might help, too.

Best of luck and learning.

Al

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [eleanor1967](#) on Sun 27 Apr 2008 02:13 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

have been going out with my girlfriend for 5 months....we got together after she left er ex boyfriend cause all he cared about was having sex with her....we lived really wonderful times and were both in love of each other...last saturday she left me for her ex that she said still loves him....she asked to stay her friend but i just cant be her friend...i just cant pretend that nothing happened between us...i talked to her for the first few days...asked her to think again...she said i know what am doing...so i just sat everything off...now that i do no longer talk to her...whenever she meets (same school)..she comes..tries to talk to...start

hugging and kissing me..try to make some jokes...ask who has been calling on my phone to know if am up with another girl...when i ask her if we cant be again together...says that she still loves her ex..that she loves me too...that she regrets what she did...that she wishes she didnt start meeting him again...but cant be back with me cause she wants to stop playing us and want to put some order in her life...when i tell her that i just cant be her friend cause i wont stand this fact...she just dont like it...and start bagging me to be with her just like we used to be though she is now with another one...means she wants me to be her school boyfriend...when i asked her if she still can sleep with me she said yes.
 i didnt talk to her for 2 days..i saw her in school but just ignored her...she called upon me and asked if everything was alright with me..i said yes and said bye.
 obviously she still love me
 how should i act to ger her back ? to let you know she is with me in the same school..we meet everyday

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Mon 28 Apr 2008 08:54 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Friend,

Thanks for your sharing and your questions. I am tempted to ask for your age so that I can better frame my response. I maybe wrong, but I am assuming what sounds to me (age 66) like youthfulness. :)

I also like thinking back to the gaga-ness of my first introductions to romance and to "falling in love." I had no idea what the heck was going on, nor anyone to ask who knew. I was lost/confused, surrounded by the lost/confused. And yet, looking back, I see I was faced with a life or death issue - deep and pervasive, unconscious yearning for a "perfect partner." I believe we are all biologically designed for this eagerness - a vital need for the [Biological Dream](#).

Of course, the physical sensation of this "dream" becoming active is what so many call "falling in love." I suggest you treasure this dream and work to make it a reality.

Now, what can I say. I guess I want to encourage you to take your time, to learn and practice and to even teach others, and to keep your hope alive. I didn't start learning the real stuff until I was in my forties.

I believe that on my blog you will find lots and lots of the answers you are looking for.

Simply put, to get her back, learn to act as if you were a skilled pratitioner of Biological Dream skills.

My best wishes and blessing,

Al

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [EyesOnThePrize](#) on Mon 05 May 2008 08:20 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Its been several weeks since I posted, because I've been in a no-contact situation with my ex, in order to help me heal and as part of steps 1 and 4. My ex has left me a couple of voice mails for items where I think she could have e-mailed me, and I think its because she wanted to talk to me. There was part of me that wanted to talk with her, too, and I resisted the urge. That changed this morning when she called in tears. After speaking with Al, I made an appointment to speak with her later in the day. She was late for it, but didn't hit the point where I was going to tell her that I needed to reschedule. I did not set a time limit, which was a boundary failure from my standpoint (I'll do better next time) and we talked for over an hour. I did ultimately end the conversation when I think she might have still liked to converse. My ex came across as scared and lonely in her new locale, and her new boyfriend is traveling a lot for business, so she doesn't see him much. She also seems to miss her life here (and, presumably, me) very much. It was a very nice conversation, and surprisingly, my lizard never left safe mode and hers did not appear to do so, either. For the 1st 1/2 of the conversation, I basically listened and pre-validated and validated where I could. In the middle, we did talk about us a lot, and expressed our love for each other. I get the impression that her new boyfriend is a convenience as much as anything else. I don't want to invalidate her feelings for him, and I got the impression that a big reason he's in her life is that she doesn't know anyone there and she's comfortable with him. And, I found that I was okay with this. I think I have a long way to go before I'm ready for a relationship with her again, and having him there means that many of her issues get deflected to him, and don't impede my progress on myself, which is my chief focus here. And if they end up happy together, its okay because I'll come out of it a better man and will attract someone wonderful into my life. And to me, it doesn't make sense to wish any unhappiness on someone I love.

I did let her know that I was still interested, and that I wasn't going to interfere in her current relationship. I started to do more of the talking and was turning the focus of the conversation on me and when I recognized this, turned control of things back over to her. I did not want to be pushing. Eventually, she started asking about what was going on in my life, and I updated her a bit.

Towards the end of the conversation, she said "I'll talk to you soon" and I replied "I'm sure we'll talk again at some point." My goal is to control the pace of our contact (Step 4). I'm not certain when I'll talk to her again. It could be a week or three weeks. I plan to wait until she reaches out to me again, which I expect to happen. We closed the conversation with "I love you"s to one another.

What I took from this was that she is really beginning to regard me as a source of safety to her lizard, and that when things got tough, she came to me for comfort. I believe that she will return again. I think lizards seek safety. I got the impression that her lizard does not feel totally safe in her new locale (there seemed to be a lot of freeze and submit going on) and that may or may not change as she adjusts to life there. I don't have a good read on where things are with her new boyfriend, however I think that if she really regarded him as a source of safety, she would have no need to contact me. I am continuing to work on Steps 1 - 4 as they seem to be working so far. I still expect this to be a long process, lasting at the minimum, months, and that's okay with me. I am enjoying the break from dealing with her (or anyone) day to day and have a lot of work I want to do. Its fun for me to see how this is all playing out. So far, though, I think its playing out more or less how I expected it to.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by tryin2cdalight on Wed 04 Jun 2008 10:48 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Surprisingly my husband left our 10 year marriage in December after saying he was unhappy. He filed for divorce in May. My heart wants to make this right and misses him. But he has said he has no intention on trying to make this work. One reason is because I am aware of his relationship with another woman after he left. He's stated he believes that I would always bring that back up for the rest of his life and he can't deal with that.

I am trying to heal, but he calls and ask how I am doing at least twice a week. He says he is calling for the kids but he calls way after he knows they have gone to bed. This makes it hard for me to heal. I told him to stop calling and asking how I am doing like he is my friend. But he says he has to for the kids. Also his financial support has been so minimal that I may lose my home because of my inability solely support a previously two income household. I have been praying a lot and listening to Christian CD's on divorce but they really don't say what to do when a spouse leaves. I just want to run away and start a new life. What do you recommend I do from here? Can this be fixed? Should I try to hang in and hope this is a phase? I feel so lost.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Thu 05 Jun 2008 12:12 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I am very sorry to hear what is happening for you. Sadly you are probably experiencing things that tens of thousands of other people are going through right now - today. On the one hand, I am sure that doesn't make anything feel better for you. On the other hand, it might just be a reminder that people do survive through all this and you are not alone - even if you feel pretty darn alone. That desire to run away and start all over is a pretty common and very understandable desire. Ah, well.

I am not able to deal personally with all those thousands of people out there. I can, within my limits, do what I can do.

You bring up some great points. It is more expensive to be single, especially with kids, than to live together. Of course it is even more expensive, emotionally, to live together in a relationship that is heading for "splitville" and not fixing the problems. That is what my website and my life is all about - learning what to do to fix troubles in relationships.

To get a good relationship with my wife (my second), I had to learn how to do things, and learn really really well, things that my parents didn't even know existed. Certainly they did not prepare me for a safe, intimate, exciting reliable partnership. Not their fault. No one prepared them.

At this point where do you go from here? Great question. I am sorry that other resources don't seem to pay attention to your questions. When I faced divorce from my first wife, I turned to my church, who seemed to turn their back on me. I fear that many churches are better at honoring and encouraging their "product" (i.e. a marriage ceremony) than in producing and supporting vibrant relationships. I don't blame them, either. They just didn't know what to say.

So what a mess! Well, my answers to your question are all over my website. I'm glad you came by.

I was teaching a class a couple of days ago. My wife was in the audience. I was speaking about having to learn good Boundary skills. Someone in the audience asked, "Can you give a good one sentence definition of boundaries?" I stopped for a moment. Said I had written several papers on Boundaries and that the person could check out my website. My wife later said, "I think the best answer is, 'Knowing firmly that you have to put your own oxygen mask on first, before you assist those travelling with you.'"

So for me rule one is take care of your self. If you are not very good at this, if you tend to take care of other people first, stop it. That is item #2 in the essay this comment is attached.

If he is in the "leaving stage," and the phone calls suggest he still is, the follow rule #1 about not coming across as pushing. I believe that sets up your best chance of repairing what you two have made. Actually this is good advice in any circumstances. Just quit any pushing.

Next, as you are taking care of yourself, breathing, eating, exercising, praying, and working, start learning. Learn hard!! All the people I know who got out of the kind of spot you are in (I'm one of them), learned a vast amount. The event of his leaving, I think, should be seen as entering freshman year in a college you didn't even know existed. My website was written for me, when I was recovering from "your situation," and therefore might be useful for you in your situation.

And, this is kind of personal, I find that many churches are working hard in this area. Some, I believe are very helpful - particularly those that are working on mentoring programs. Some are sadly, in my way of thinking, still part of the problem. I think finding a helpful one might be a great idea. Being alone in the situation you are in really stinks.

And don't forget counselors as a resource for your learning program.

Good luck.

Al

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Sarah on Mon 23 Jun 2008 03:32 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Al,

Thank you for sharing your wonderful insights!

For the past year, I have been in a relationship with a man who has some very serious self-esteem, depression, and self-sabotaging problems. I have my share of baggage, and I won't say that I have my own life figured out, but I'm financially stable, have been relatively successful, try to get involved in lots of interesting things, and take good care of my own health. My now-ex is very intelligent and talented, but he barely scrapes by and floats from one job that won't support him to the next, and he eats poorly and is a smoker (which is hard for me, since my father died of lung cancer).

We broke up six months ago because he said he needed to fix himself before he had anything to give another person. I respected his decision even if I didn't like it, and gave him the space he wanted and then some, and three weeks later he was standing there with roses promising very sincerely to meet my needs and to work to build a life with me.

For the past month or so, I've felt him grow distant again. But I'm definitely a clinger, and I now think I made a mistake by verbally asking about what was wrong instead of just backing off. A week later, he has said he's not sure what he wants anymore and he's not ready to improve himself and lead a healthy life.

So my question is: Is it possible to build a relationship in which one person isn't committed or able to pursue his own well-being and happiness? I have every intention of working on myself, on my clinging, on my control issues and my tendency to be judgmental. But is it time to give up on him? I so want him to be happy, that even if I can't have him, I hope for him to find the self-love to live well. I just don't know how to be supportive here, and the control freak in me wants to make sure I'm on course to making things right.

Sarah

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Tue 24 Jun 2008 09:10 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Hi Sarah,

Great question(s). Let me share some thoughts.

Given what I have learned about couples and the selection process ([Map of Relationship](#)) you two sound right for each other. I recall that people always connect with their "worst nightmare" and he sure sound like yours and (reading between the lines) you might be his.

Another thought I hold onto is that people almost always pick a partner who is equally crazy. It is so much easier to see your partner's craziness. Thus when things get painful each partner easily wakes up seeing the other's defects with only a glancing awareness of their own. The great benefit of picking an equally nuts person is that when you get to work each has the same amount to accomplish. You can be buddies in the working. [Guilt/Blame](#)

Sounds like his nutz-o-ness is alot about self-neglect. If I were to hazard a guess, yours might be about over-caretaking. Those traits tend to match up.

I love that bit about the flowers. People are so wonderfully silly.

Now, to your major question. I first heard this from Dr. Pat Love when she was proposing to write a book called "When to hold 'em, When to fold 'em," about the decision to drop a partner. Well, I see it as that old Door #1, #2, #3 decision. (Map of Relationship stuff). I also wrote a paper for individuals who see themselves more 'sane' than their partner. It is called [It takes one to make a marriage](#). I firmly believe this to be true. He is more likely to start taking care of himself in a relationships where his partner is loving, but no longer taking care of him. For me this is the old "lead 'em into Vintage Love with one hand and [kick 'em in the ass when they don't move at all](#)" tactic. It also reminds me of the idea that people come together into a partnership with the unconscious purpose of healing their own damage. So as you learn boundary skills, he learns self-responsibility. Without being in a relationship, neither may learn much.

Of course, I am not on the scene and don't know as much about what is going on as you (and he). Besides, I would never substitute my judgement for yours. Do what you think is right. Sometimes it is quicker to move directly to Door #1 and sometimes the only choice is to split and start the process with another. Tis up to you.

Let me know how it works out.

Al

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Sarah on Wed 25 Jun 2008 10:32 AM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Thank you, Al.

I agree totally with what you said, and I'm committed to putting in the work. I've realized in the past few days that my two biggest internal saboteurs have been my clinging and (this one surprised me) my optimism. I try to spend a lot of time focusing on the good parts of people I care about, and maybe I spend even more time feeling optimistic about their potential, and the possibilities in front of them. But my partner feels bad about himself to begin with, and I'm finally hearing in things he's said to me that all my belief in his future triggered his Lizard to fear that what I wanted was the man he could become, and that the man in front of me isn't good enough. My over-caretaking has led him to doubt that I believe he can help himself, and he has enough doubts of his own that this really hurts him.

It's hard not to be ashamed of myself for not hearing him sooner, but I'm trying to focus now on staying in the moment and giving him the space and quiet, non-meddling support he needs and deserves. I don't know if he'll ever want to be with me again, but my friendship and love can't be conditional if I ever want him to feel safe, and I really hope I can earn his trust back.

Many thanks again for your kind understanding, and for your wonderful site. It is helping me a great deal! I will indeed let you know how it all goes.

Sarah

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by Joey on Thu 03 Jul 2008 04:51 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Hi Al,

All this sounds like it makes good sense! I've been reading through the comments, and it seems like most of the people who comment are still in the throes of the hard times, which also makes sense. I'm just wondering how often these strategies do work. Must be a pretty good method, considering how many couples you've worked with, but reading the comments has me a little discouraged. And I'm sure it all depends on where couples are and how hard they work. Just curious, because in all the comments I don't see anyone who's written back to say "Hey, we're really happy now!" (You've possibly figured out by now that I am one of the many visiting your page in the throes of misery.) :)

Thank you!

Joey

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Fri 04 Jul 2008 12:21 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Joey,

Sorry to hear that you are in hard times. Still I tend to look back on my life and come aware that "hard times" were just "painful learning" times. All the great learnings of mine seem to arise from "throes of misery" - not that that may help you much.

I gather you are looking for evidence that my suggestions work. Seems a good question. And I gather you are wondering about whether people write back about their success. Also a good question.

I rarely get people to write back when all is great. That seems to take some time and a lot of work and I guess people just don't take the time to let me know where my words helped.

I do get people to write about "what next." Their letters sound a bit like this. "Your ideas really work. And now that my partner has stopped leaving and is 'sniffing' around me, what do I do next?" (I love that image of a dog sniffing around someone's leg. Seems to fit.)

I have not written a specific article to address that question, though I have talked with by phone and emailed with many on the subject. Actually the answer is the same for the situation where "you woke up to trouble going on" before the leaving began.

My article of four steps does nothing. I've just found that the only things that work in that situation are those four steps. Remember, the person who is free to leave has all the power. Any "power" tactic won't work. So really, Joey, what I am saying is that you have very little choice, and here are four things that work.

Perhaps your note will inspire others to write. And thanks for the questions.

Al

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by EyesOnThePrize on Fri 04 Jul 2008 12:42 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I'm planning to update my tail in the near future. I saw my ex for the first time last week since she moved away almost 3 months ago. I'll say that the principles I've learned in this article have challenged me, and at the same time I think I've made a lot of progress, and my ex does appear to have stopped moving away and I am seeing signs that may be indicating she wants to return. Most of all, though, following these principles have allowed me to work on me, and I'm mentally in a much better space now.

[Reply](#)

Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by CH on Sun 06 Jul 2008 10:21 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I have a question related to your article and this is really directed to Al, but I wouldn't mind any other inputs as well: I have "convinced" my girlfriend to stay with me several time, only to get back to the old patterns and have the "I am leaving you" hanging by my neck. She left again, I did my part to push her. Now I want to do things right and wait so she is the one who wants to be with me. I love her and she said she loves me too. I have kept the communication to a minimum, and I am actively working on myself. It must be working because I find myself more content with myself. What I want to know is, when is the right time to make that first attempt to talk?

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [Al Turtle](#) on Mon 07 Jul 2008 08:20 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

A couple of thoughts come to mind.

How much is "talking" or "over-talking" part of why she is "leaving?" If your talking or chatting style [drives her away](#) (mine did), then you are probably going to have to come up with a whole new way of talking - called "mostly listening:" perhaps mirroring, pulling, definitely [PreValidating and Validating](#) where you can, basically [empathic](#) interviewing.

Next thought is that you are going to have to give up the idea that there is a solid "right" anything. In this case "right" is probably what works - after you have done it. One way out of this dilemma is to ask her what is right for her. This is all about giving her sovereignty, respect, and autonomy.

My suggestion is that you give it several weeks. Move into action if she reaches out to you. Tell her you are working on better communication skills. That should take ONE sentence. Repeat it if necessary. Invite her to talk, and practice listening skills. Answer her questions in one sentence if you can. Keep it short. Be ready to cut the talk off gently at the first sign that she wants to get away.

If she doesn't reach out to you in two weeks, try a one line note (email, card, etc.). "Missing you." or something like that. If no response, wait another two weeks and try again. If no response, try a one line note in a month. If no response, use the [process in Getting An Answer](#).

Just some thinking.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: What to do when He/She Leaves?

by [CH](#) on Mon 07 Jul 2008 11:05 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Thank you for your answer. I really appreciate it. There's a lot more work i need to do on my own and I would definitely wish I could do it with her. I am afraid of being rejected to be honest. My impulse is to seek her out and "explain" why want to be with her. in other words, to cling. To convince her. On one hand I am sure 100% that I love her and on the other hand my brain tell me that if she is unhappy with me then I need to love her and let her go. I am learning a lot right now, I intent to keep working on myself. I read the process in getting an answer and I think it is good sound advise, but at the same I find it very scary. My many thanks for the response.

[Reply](#)