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**BUMRUNGRAD INTERNATIONAL HOSPITAL: BREAKING UP REALLY IS HARD TO DO**

**INTOUCH** ■ ASST PROF PANSAK SUGKRAROEK, MD

# Breaking up really is hard to do

**N**egotiating the terminal stages of a long-term relationship is rarely an easy process. And it can be especially traumatic for some people when it's the end of their very first adult romance that they're having to face up to.

A very pleasant young woman came to see me recently. Her profile indicated she was a university student in her early 20s with a good family background. She arrived elegantly dressed and was well-mannered despite being in a distressed emotional state. A week earlier, her "special friend" had told her he felt they needed to separate for a while. He said he wanted to do some "exploring" outside

the relationship in order to be sure that being with her long-term was the right choice. She told me her initial reaction was a feeling of complete shock.

**HOW IT ENDED**

She mentioned that they'd met five years earlier in secondary school and had been together ever since. And she thought the relationship had been going well. Each got along well with the other's parents and they had even considered the idea of getting married once they graduated from university.

When he delivered the news the previous week, she'd begged him not to leave her. But he insisted it was the best thing for both of them. He even promised that, once he had spent some time enjoying his freedom, if he wasn't with a new partner he would come back.

**WORDS OF ADVICE**

My first question to her was: What are you going to do? She replied: "I honestly don't know; that's why I came to see you." She had already consulted her close friends about the situation. Her female friends urged her not to give up on a good five-year relationship so easily; they urged her to fight hard to keep him. Male friends recommended doing the opposite; they thought it was useless to try stopping her boyfriend because, once a man makes up his mind about ending a relationship, he doesn't turn back.

Based on what I've learned from counselling men and women on relationship issues over many years, I mentioned that I thought the best course of action would be for her to let him go. I framed this with a reference, as I often do, to my hobby of Tarot reading, specifically pointing out the card that states: "What belongs to you will stay with you. What never belonged to you will go away."

I explained that, if she still loved him, she should consider staying single and focus her energies on getting a good job and savouring her more carefree life. Perhaps one day he would return. I then asked whether, if he did indeed return, she would take him back. To which she replied, "Definitely not."

**POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE**

That prompted me to try to clear her mind of the negative thoughts, so she could look at her situation from a more positive perspective. I suggested she choose not to think of him as a "bad guy" simply because he had left. The way he left was actually better than the typical guy who just starts cheating behind his partner's back rather than having the decency and courage to be honest. If she gave him some time to explore and he eventually chose to return, that would be a pretty strong indication that he knew that she was "the one". I also stressed how important it is for partners in a relationship to have the capacity to forgive each other.

Being angry about being single is a miserable way to live. My philosophy is that people are happier when they approach life with a positive attitude,

while remembering that things happen in cycles — bad things are followed by good things, and vice-versa.

I told her that her partner's departure could turn out to be an opportunity for destiny to bring an even better person into your life.

**FAMILY DYNAMICS**

My last bit of advice was for her to reconnect with her family, to re-establish the emotional bonds that were a source of strength before that "special friend" came into her life. "Love is in your home," I said to her. "When you go home, look into your mother's eyes; then look into your father's eyes. You'll realise that your parents are an anchor in your life. They will always take you back and give you the love and support you need."

As we were wrapping up, she told me she felt ready to begin her life as a single woman. I expressed optimism about her future love prospects; in her case, "love is in the air". A few days later, her father called and thanked me for helping his daughter deal with a difficult situation. "My daughter is back," he said. "She may renew her relationship with her old boyfriend, or maybe she'll find a new one. No matter what happens, she has learned a lot from this relationship."



**Dr Pansak Sugkraroek is a reproductive endocrinologist at Bumrungrad Hospital.**