BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

SUPPORT FOR PARTNERS ENDING A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP

100 Reproducible Activity Handouts and Educational Materials for Facilitators of Groups and Individuals

Ester R.A. Leutenberg & Barbara G. Feinberg, LISW-S, IMFT
Dedication

I dedicate this book to my many clients who have shared their stories, fears and struggles with courage, candor and great generosity. I have learned so much from them and have been honored to share their journeys and, ultimately, their victories.

I have also been fortunate to work closely with other professional advisors whose wisdom, compassion and technical skills have been of great value to my clients and to me.

Barbara G. Feinberg

I dedicate this book to my mother,
Ethyl Faye Gottlieb Atkin
who had the courage to divorce my biological father
and become a single mother in 1939 when I was two and a half years old.
Several years later, she gave me the gift of an extremely positive influence,
Meyer Atkin, my adoptive father,
who knew the meaning of family, parenting and unconditional love.

Ester Rivkeh Atkin Leutenberg

Our Thanks and Gratitude

To these professionals for their input . . .

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The Breakup Experience

Couples become separate entities in the break up and must chart their individual ways. Loss of a relationship can mean the end of dreams, routines, stability, emotional and financial security, companionship and family as it existed before the breakup. The resulting trauma is one that impacts on the partners, of course. To varying degrees, children, extended family, friends and colleagues suffer from and grieve the loss as well.

In addition to grieving the loss, those in the midst of ending a committed relationship face a great many practical challenges:

- Children
- Parenting
- Housing
- Finances
- Legalities
- Division of property
- Establishing an independent life

The legal break up of couples through divorce adds significantly to the complexity of working through the emotional and practical issues inherent in the process. Divorce involves legal considerations, binding agreements, and an economic reality that can alter the expectations and security of all family members.

Ending a committed relationship is an extended process with different phases. Educating your clients about this progression is an important part of working through the confusing, challenges and difficult experiences of breaking up.

Phases Clients May Encounter

- Significant relationship distress over time
- Increased distance from each other
- Confrontation(s) with partner and family
- Permanent or temporary separation
- Temporary reconciliation
- Decision to end the relationship permanently
- Selection of legal representation in the case of a divorce
- Negotiations for the financial break up
- Creation of a co-parenting plan
- Day by day co-parenting
- Creating a new, single life

Breaking Up is Hard to Do provides activities associated with all of the above phases and challenges of ending a committed relationship.

(Continued on the next page)
The Breakup Experience (Continued)

About Committed Relationships

*Breaking Up is Hard to Do* addresses issues associated with ending *any* committed arrangement.

A committed relationship in this book is defined as one based on mutually agreed-upon parameters that might involve exclusivity, honesty, openness, loyalty, trust and other implicit and explicit characteristics. Forms of committed relationships can be varied and might be short or long-term. These commitments may be reflected in domestic partnerships, religious and civil unions, single-sex and heterosexual couples living together, "commuter" and other arrangements.

A *divorce* is a legal dissolution of a marriage by a court or other competent body. Many of the same concerns involved in divorce can apply to domestic partners and others in a committed relationship even though resolving legal issues associated with marriage may not be necessary.

Divorce among couples who are married in the eyes of the law is a wide-spread phenomenon in First World countries. Laws governing divorce differ from state to state, and from country to country. Facilitators need to be particularly sensitive to the cultural differences that may have a significant impact on the way in which individuals, families and communities think about and handle divorce.

Format of the Book

*Breaking Up is Hard to Do ~ Support for Partners Ending a Committed Relationship* is organized to help clients and facilitators with both aspects of breaking up - the process and the practical matters.

- **Section I – The Process**
  This section addresses the emotional impact of breaking up for the partners and their children, if applicable. It provides activities and educational materials to help clients evaluate their committed relationship as objectively as possible, expand coping skills to manage their own and their children's stress and emotional turmoil, develop strategies to get through the aftermath of the break up and begin a new life.

- **Section II – Practical Matters**
  This section focuses on the many external factors that clients may be faced with while simultaneously struggling with complex emotions. It provides concrete exercises to raise awareness of, and useful tips on how to handle the many financial and property-related issues that break ups can raise, particularly in the case of a divorce. Topics include finding advisers and other resources, budgeting, dividing personal property, documenting finances, creating co-parenting agreements, managing the mechanics of divorce and choosing alternative ways to negotiate. Because money is often such a highly charged topic, this section also includes activities to raise awareness of the emotional impact of money and explore ways to learn more about finances.

  Facilitators may feel much more comfortable and better equipped to support clients’ emotional experiences. However, both they and their clients may need to become more familiar with the many money and asset-related issues that are also part of ending a committed relationship.

- **Glossary of Terms**
- **Book References**

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Using the Book

*Breaking Up is Hard to Do – Support for Partners Ending a Committed Relationship* is designed to facilitate work by mental health professionals, the clergy and any other professionals who support those considering or those in the midst of ending a committed relationship. The book may also be useful in training facilitators who are new to the field.

**Because there are so many pages from which to choose, facilitators are encouraged to select the most appropriate ones in each section.**

By using the activities in *Breaking Up is Hard to Do*, participants can learn they are not alone and develop important coping strategies. They can find emotional support and practical suggestions, regardless of where they are in this process.

The book’s reproducible activity pages can help stimulate conversation, educate, create awareness of what is happening in the present moment, and what might be happening in the future. The activities provide concrete ways for participants to explore each aspect of ending a committed relationship, as well as the associated legal and financial considerations.

The pages can be used in a group, with individuals, as homework assignments, for brainstorming sessions and training purposes. The spiral binding makes it easy to reproduce copies for distribution to participants and trainees. Alternatively, a master copy of any page can be customized as needed.

Each chapter has a separate table of contents with creative tips for the facilitator on how the handouts might be used.

**Working with groups:**

Helping those going through the possible and actual end of a relationship can be demanding, stimulating, challenging, and ultimately enormously satisfying. Supporting and guiding those dealing with this trauma can make your contribution to the process truly life-changing, both for participants and for you as well.

Groups can be a very dynamic and productive resource for those dealing with the end of a committed relationship. Meeting with others facing the same challenges can be tremendously supportive, educational and reassuring. Knowing that others are dealing with and are surviving the trauma of such a dramatic change in one’s life can reduce the participants’ sense of isolation and uncertainty and thus significantly enhance their capacity to function and even thrive.

*(Continued on the next page)*
How to begin working with groups:

Clarifying how the group will function is recommended as the first step in the group process.

The following guidelines for group participation are important in setting the tone, building and maintaining group cohesion and perhaps most important, making the group a safe place for participants. Distribute the guidelines at the first meeting and keep additional copies available for meetings after that. You and the group may want to add other guidelines as well.

### Group Guidelines

- Respect confidentiality – “What happens stays in the group.”
- Accept what other participants do and say without criticizing.
- Recognize that members may “pass” and not comment on certain issues.
- Resist offering advice unless the participant asks for it.
- Focus and support each others’ strengths.
- Emphasize the positive.
- Speak from your own experience.
- Be patient with yourself and each other.

You’ll notice quotations in the Facilitator Tips for many of the activities. Reading them aloud to participants can be an effective way to begin those activities.

**Before the group begins:**

Think about the following questions regarding the group's structure:

- How long will each session last? In part, the length is determined by the number of participants.
- Is this a group participants may join at any time (i.e. an open group)?
- Is this a group participants may join only at the beginning of the process (i.e., a closed group)?
- Will the group be ongoing or run for a limited number of sessions?
- Are there criteria for participation (age, status of the end of the relationship, gender)?
- Is contact outside of the group by group members encouraged or discouraged?
- Is the group designed to promote discussion or function more like a classroom with the facilitator doing most of the talking?

(Continued on the next page)
Using the Book (Continued)

For each group meeting:
- Begin with a one or two sentence check-in so that members can report on how they’re doing and indicate if they need some group time to discuss an issue in more depth.
- Take a moment for everyone to “get present.” For example, take three or four deep easy breaths.
- Leave enough time for the activity and discussion.
- If any member seems unable to join in the activities over time, have a private conversation to assess if some individual counseling is in order.
- Alert the group when ten minutes remain in the session.
- Check in with the group in the last five minutes about what stood out for each participant (the "take away").
- Manage the group process so no one participant takes up all the "air time."
- Encourage participation and brain-storming by the group, rather than offering "the answers" yourself unless you see yourself as an “instructor” rather than a facilitator.

Assessment for group participation:
Speaking with a potential participant, either by phone or face-to-face, can provide an opportunity to describe the goals of, and clarify expectations for the group. Participation in a support group is not always the best resource for individuals dealing with the end of a committed relationship. If the group is not suitable, either see the client privately, or refer that individual to appropriate mental health resources.

Think about the following questions to decide if a group is appropriate for a potential participant:
- Is this individual verbal enough to participate in the give-and-take of a group?
- Does this individual appear to have drug or alcohol use issues that could interfere with appropriate participation?
- Are the individual’s goals for participation consistent with the group’s purpose?
- Is this individual able to function day-to-day, possibly with high levels of stress and upset?
- Can this person adjust his/her schedule to allow for regular attendance?
- Is this individual rational when talking about his/her situation?
- Is the place this person and/or the children live unsafe? In cases of domestic violence, developing a safety plan is crucial. Referral to an agency focused on domestic violence is appropriate.
- Does this person talk about suicide as an option? In this case, referral to a mental health expert is critical.

How to use the book with individuals:
These activity pages can be used in sessions with individuals as well as groups. As clients explore the various issues with which they are dealing, an activity completed during a one-on-one session can educate, focus the conversation, and support clients’ explorations of their feelings and options with the counselor.
Using the Book (Continued)

Homework assignments for individual clients and group members:

The activity sheets in this book are useful as homework. Having carefully thought out materials to review at home can enhance clients decision-making, coping skills and facilitate the efficacy in shaping a new life.

Clients are likely to need to gather information, locate documents, and examine financial information outside of counseling sessions. Some of the materials in Section II - Practical Matters are designed as checklists and guides for budgeting, selecting advisers and other aspects of dividing assets and property.

For the Facilitator

Understanding Yourself: The Meaning of Breaking Up

The end of a committed relationship can stir up a lot of feelings for you, the facilitator. Depending on your beliefs and personal experience with breakups, you may be coping with strong emotions and opinions that interfere with meeting your clients’ needs.

When individuals or couples come for counseling about the decision to separate or stay together, you can be the most helpful if you approach the issue as an open question, even if it appears that one party has definitely decided to leave. Your accepting attitude can give both partners some space to explore the meaning of the end of the committed relationship, recover somewhat from the shock of reaching a crisis point, and begin to see the relationship in a more objective way.

Once the decision to break up is made, you may find yourself reacting emotionally to the many difficult issues your clients face. Your role is to encourage the exploration of the chaotic mixture of feelings and issues swirling around your clients.

As you look through the activities in this book, think about the emotions that are triggered for you by the various topics. Becoming more aware of your own reactions is a helpful starting point for the support and guidance you hope to offer.
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The Process
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<td><strong>Stay or Go?</strong></td>
<td>Begin the group asking if they know Kenny Rogers’ hit song “The Gambler.” Then ask if anyone can recite or sing the first two lines of the refrain: “You got to know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em, know when to walk away and know when to run.”</td>
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<td><strong>Being Left</strong></td>
<td>This handout raises awareness about feelings. After participants have completed it, ask them to share their responses to the question at the bottom of the page. What surprised them?</td>
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<td><strong>Quality of Current Relationship</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Our Goals</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Trying to Fix the Relationship</strong></td>
<td>After the handout has been completed, ask participants what they would like to try. Ask group to brainstorm suggestions on how that person might proceed.</td>
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<td><strong>My Wants and Needs</strong></td>
<td>Prior to distributing the handout, read the following quotation by Ceanne Derohan: “When you really listen to yourself, you can heal yourself.” Ask participants what the quote means to them.</td>
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<td><strong>What Do I Want for Myself?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What Will Single Life Be Like?</strong></td>
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<td>Prior to distributing the handout, read the following quotation by Lao-Tzu. “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”</td>
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<td><strong>Clarifying What’s Important</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What is Good and What is Not-So-Good</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Is a Breakup Right for Me?</strong></td>
<td>Write this quotation by Tony Robbins on the board to begin the session. Ask group if they agree with it. “It is in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped.”</td>
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<td><strong>Knowing Myself</strong></td>
<td>After participants have completed the handout, ask them to share some realizations that they came to while completing the handout.</td>
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<td>After participants have completed the handout, ask for volunteers to read their responses to the selected questions.</td>
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<td><strong>Staying Safe</strong></td>
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Stay or Go?

“You got to know when to hold 'em; know when to fold 'em . . .” ~ Kenny Rogers

Ending a committed relationship is a difficult and emotional decision. As you think about staying or leaving, focus on the impact of your decision for yourself, your partner and your family. Instead of thinking only about breaking up as a yes or no, evaluate the quality of the relationship.

Aspects to consider about your present situation:

**Trust** – How safe do you feel emotionally? Explain.

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Trust** – How safe do you feel physically? Explain.

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Safety** – How safe do you feel sexually? Explain.

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Love** – Is your love romantic, platonic, intermittent, evaporating, or other? Explain?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Cooperation** – How do you help each other with day-to-day responsibilities?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

(Continued on the next page)
Stay or Go? (Continued)

**Respect** – What level of respect does your partner have for you?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Respect** – What level of respect do you have for your partner?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Physical intimacy** – How are you and your partner “in sync” about intimacy and sex?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Physical intimacy** – How are you and your partner not “in sync” about intimacy and sex?

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___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Physical intimacy** – How would you describe your sex life? Explain.

___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Communication** – Do you talk to each other about finances? Explain.

___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

(Continued on the next page)
Stay or Go? (Continued)

Communication – Are you only sharing information or are you able to discuss feelings, worries and excitement?
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Values – How much do you agree on ethical and moral issues? How does that influence your relationship?
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Religion and spirituality – Describe how you share a religious and/or spiritual belief system. If you do not, describe how that works in your relationship.
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Raising children – If you have children, describe how you have or have not been able to find common ground regarding discipline, guidance, medical decisions, educational plans and goals.
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Family-of-origin relationships – Do you believe you and/or your partner are more loyal to your own families-of-origin than to each other? Explain.
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

(Continued on the next page)
Stay or Go?  (Continued)

In-Law relationships – How have you or have you not worked out relationships that avoid high levels of conflict with each other’s families?
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

In-Law relationships – Do you have close relationships with your in-laws? Is that likely to continue if your relationship breaks up? Why or why not?
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Finances – Are you both contributing to the family economy, either by working outside the home or inside? How does that work for you?
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Finances – How do you agree or disagree on methods of spending money? Explain.
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Finances – How do you agree or disagree on a budget or saving money? Explain.
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Arguing – Do you and your partner stick to the issue at hand when you argue? Explain.
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

(Continued on the next page)
Stay or Go? (Continued)

Arguing – Do you or your partner bring up wrong-doings of the past when arguing? Explain.
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___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Arguing – Does your fighting ever become physical? Describe.
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Arguing – When you are arguing with your partner, how safe does everyone in your family feel? Explain.
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___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Future – How do you believe your life (and that of your children, if applicable) would be better without this committed relationship? Explain.
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Future – How do you believe your life (and that of your children, if applicable) would be worse without this committed relationship? Explain.
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