

When the Relationship's Over

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You're hurt, disbelieving, and angry. At first, you loved the way your borderline and/or narcissistic partner hung on your every word, looked at you with admiring eyes and filled that empty void within you. Their insecurity and neediness inspired your determination to be that one special person who was going to fix them for good. You felt exceptional, heroic, and valuable.

Now you feel tortured and empty.

As this person's savior, you tolerated behavior beyond what is acceptable. You were certain that your partner depended on you and they would never leave. However challenging, you were committed to seeing this relationship through. But now you just can't. Or maybe your partner left you. Or who knows, because you've broken up and gotten back together more times than you can count.

Now, you feel trapped by your determination to get back what you've lost and the haunting suspicion that what you had wasn't even real. Even so, you're obsessed about what your partner is doing or feeling--or especially, who they might be seeing. Maybe you've sworn them off, but fear that if they contact you you'll get involved again for sure.

Let's face the facts: this is no way to live.

At this point, blame is useless. The urge to understand what happened, learn more about HIGH MAINTENANCE, and vent to others about what you've gone through isn't helping you recover from a relationship that turned toxic for the both of you. You can't do any more for that person, no matter how much you loved each other. It's time to move beyond blame and start healing yourself.

Ten Beliefs That Can Get You Stuck

1) The belief that this person holds the key to your happiness

You may think your ex is the master of your joy and the keeper of your sorrow. This is not true. You have imbued this person with special powers they don't really have. You had a special bond because you were each meeting unconscious needs in the other that most likely originated in childhood (see the books of Harville Hendrix). You were probably very receptive to your partner's heightened attention for reasons that may involve your self- image, family background, and unconscious needs.

2) The belief that you caused all the problems in the relationship, so you can fix them

You did your best to be what your partner wanted you to be and do what your partner wanted you to do. But that was impossible because their needs and opinions changes from day to day. But neither you

nor your behaviors were ever the real issue. Your partner unconsciously projected their own self-hate and feelings of worthlessness onto you. The longer the relationship lasted, the more you started to own those feelings. That's one of the reasons you held on so long: who else would have you?

It's going to take some time to regain your self-esteem and sense of self. You put those "unacceptable" parts of yourself on hold for a long time, isolated yourself, and lost track of what you needed or wanted. Your top priority is getting that back.

3) Clinging to the words that were said

You and your ex have made lots of promises and declared your love many times. But people suffering from HIGH MAINTENANCE idealize people and put them on pedestals before they knock them down. They see people in black and white (one reason you've probably broken up and gotten back together so many times). This isn't something you can change or "love away." Only years of effective therapy with a highly motivated client can make a difference.

You must let go of the words. It may break your heart to do so. But the fact is, the actions of the person with HIGH MAINTENANCE speak louder than words. The words "I love you" are meaningless when their actions are unloving.

4) The belief that love can prevail over everything

This relationship opened wounds on your already wounded soul. You invested so much in this person and dreamed you'd spend a lifetime together. Does giving up on them mean giving up on love?

Our society--TV, movies, songs--tell us that love is all you need. The truth, however, is not so simple (in fact, even John Lennon got divorced). Even in relationships in which neither person is HIGH MAINTENANCE, there is a complex array of issues that make two people compatible or incompatible, and make relationships healthy or not so healthy.

Also, sometimes it's hard to separate healthy love from relationship addiction or romance addiction. Romance addicts are looking for those highs; that buzz provided by new relationships. Relationship addicts:

- * Quickly dive into relationships based on intuition rather than real shared interests, values, or goals. They do this because they want a relationship, yet fear truly revealing themselves because of their "flaws."

- * Hang on when things are obviously bad because they don't feel they could survive without the other person.

- * Believe they can "make relationships happen by sheer force of will; they believe they can make others love them through sheer tenacity.

- * Lie to themselves and others about the sacrifices they make (including value judgments) and even put their children's well-being below their need for a relationship.

* Feel that love and suffering go together that coffee and cream. They romanticize the suffering and martyrdom that people do for love that is so popularized in our culture.

5) The belief that things will return to "the way they used to be"

The idealization stages of a relationship with a HIGH MAINTENANCE partner can be intoxicating and wonderful. But, as in any relationship, the "honeymoon" stage passes.

The idealization stage that one or both of you would like to return to isn't sustainable. It never was. The loss of this dream (or the inability to transition in to a healthy next phase of love) may be what triggered the demise of the relationship.

HIGH MAINTENANCE mood swings and cycles may have you conditioned to think that, even after a bad period, you can return to the "idealization phase." Your HIGH MAINTENANCE partner may believe this too. A more realistic representation of your relationship is the one you have recently experienced.

6) The belief that if you say it louder, you will be heard

You might think that if you explain your point better, put it in writing, or find the right words, a light bulb will come over your ex-partner's head. You may want to write letters, send a long email, pick up the phone, or have one last meeting.

Resist the urge. It will make things worse and rip off some of the scabs that have started to form-- however painful their formation can be. You may find your ex has moved on and in love with someone else. This will be excruciatingly painful. Or they might be obsessed with you (or vice versa) and you will be right back where you started. You'll have high hopes that things have changed ("She promised things would be different this time") and you'll get right back on that rollercoaster.

This fantasy that the right words will unlock the door to understanding (when it never did before) has, at its roots, the lack of acceptance that your ex-partner has a pervasive disorder--one that you can't cure any more than you can cure cancer with a box of toothpicks and some glue.

The way through this is something called "radical acceptance." The web site www.DBTselfhelp.com defines "radical acceptance" this way:

"Radical" means complete and total. It's when you accept something from the depths of your soul. When you accept it in your mind, in your heart, and even with your body. It's total and complete... It's when you stop fighting reality...

Psychologist Tara Brach, who has written extensively about the subject, says in this interview:

Radical acceptance has two elements: It is an honest acknowledgment of what is going on inside you, and a courageous willingness to be with life in the present moment, just as it is. I sometimes simplify it to "recognizing" and "allowing."

You can accept an experience without liking it. In fact, let's say you are feeling stuck in anxiety and disliking the feeling. Radical acceptance includes accepting both the feelings of anxiety and the aversion to it. In fact, acceptance is not real and not healing unless it honestly includes all aspects of your experience.

There is an increasingly well-known adage that says "What you resist, persists." Your identity gets hitched to whatever you are not accepting. And the more you push something away or run from something, the more your sense of self is linked with that experience.

Your HIGH MAINTENANCE/NPD partner will not be able to validate your feelings or acknowledge your pain. This is one of the most difficult aspects of breaking up--there is no closure in the way you might want it. Radical acceptance will help give you that closure.

Also try writing that letter; just don't send it. For an example of a letter that someone wrote and put online, see www.MyTripToOzAndBack.com. While the writer did send this to her ex, she says she realized it was a futile, meaningless gesture.

7) The belief that absence makes the heart grow fonder

Based on their fear of abandonment, you might think that your HIGH MAINTENANCE partner may see the light if you deprive them of your love. However, people with HIGH MAINTENANCE also have object constancy issues, i.e., "out of sight, out of mind." After two weeks of separation, they may feel same way you would feel after six weeks. In this case, absence makes the heart grow colder.

8) The belief that you need to stay to help them.

You might want to disclose the disorder (bad, BAD idea) and help your ex-partner get into therapy. Maybe you want to help in other ways while still maintaining a "friendship." Not gonna happen.

People with HIGH MAINTENANCE are very much all or nothing. They don't deal well with in-between friendships with former partners. Also, you're no longer their caretaker and support person --no matter how well intentioned you might be.

The fact is that you're a trigger for your HIGH MAINTENANCE partner's unstable feelings and disordered behavior. In addition, they're probably triggering some of your own codependency issues. Sure, you don't deliberately cause these feelings. But that doesn't change things. Its roots emanate from the deep central wounds of the disorder and your own issues.

You can't begin to solve this. You also need to question your own motives and your expectations for wanting to help. Are you still trying to mold your partner into what you think they should be? They didn't do this before. They won't now. It's their choice whether or not they want to address lifelong wounds.

Concentrate on yourself and your own recovery. Let your ex make their own choices, even if they're not the ones you might make for them. If they try to lean on you, it's a greater kindness that you step away. Difficult, no doubt, but more responsible.

9) The belief that they have seen the light

Your partner may suddenly be on their best behavior or appear very needy and try to entice you back into the relationship. You hope they are finally seeing things your way or really need you. You may venture back in or struggle mightily to stay away. **RESIST THE URGE TO RECYCLE THIS RELATIONSHIP. YOU WILL REGRET IT, GUARANTEED.**

Disengaging is a process, not an event. When this process becomes protracted, it becomes toxic. The emotional needs that fueled the relationship bond initially are now fueling a convoluted disengagement as one or both partners struggle against their deep enmeshment and their internal conflicts about the break up. Either partner may go to extremes to reunite - even use the threat of suicide to get attention and evoke sympathies.

Don't be lulled into believing that the relationship is surviving or going through a phase. At this point, there are no rules. There are no clear loyalties. Each successive break-up increases the dysfunction of both the relationship and the partners and opens the door for hurtful things to happen.

10) The belief that your HIGH MAINTENANCE partner thinks and feels the same way that you do

If the falseness of this belief wasn't clear to you before, it should be by now. Your ex's thinking is distorted, and their convictions about you and your relationship can change hour by hour, minute by minute. Spurts of needed to get back together (if they occur) are probably driven by the fear of abandonment, not by any light bulb insight about why the relationship didn't work. You won't ever understand totally what went on in their mind. But that's OK. Time to move on.