

Your Personal Coach

By
Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I was divorced last summer and I'm having a hard time getting over it. In general, I guess I'm doing okay, I go to work and have some good times with my friends but my ex-husband and I were married on Valentine's Day and so this is an especially hard time of year for me. What's worse, my ex- lives nearby and my friends are always telling me what he's up to and who he's dating. I can't stand it. Any suggestions?

-- I wish my exes lived in Texas

Dear Wishful,

As you are so painfully aware, the loss of a relationship is heart-breaking, and it can take a long time to recover. But your letter suggests that you're healing – going out with friends and working. Those are good things – keep them up!

I think that getting over a loss is like standing in the surf at the edge of the ocean. For the most part, the waves slap against your legs but you remain standing. Every once in a while, though, a wave will seem to come out of nowhere and knock you on your... Well, you know what it knocks you on.

We learn through associations and can respond very emotionally to “triggers” – those events and sensations that churn up memories and cause us to recall other times in our lives.

I'm sure you've experienced these triggers: You're cruising along in your life – waiting in line to see a movie with friends, watching TV, or simply driving to work. You're feeling just fine, when you are struck by unexpected and strong emotions that don't appear to make any sense.

Why are you suddenly feeling so sad when you're simply having a fun time with friends, watching television, or headed to your job?

If you carefully observe, you can often identify some trigger – conscious or unconscious – that has prompted your feelings.

Here are some examples: You start to feel suddenly sad and only then do you realize that a stranger in the line is wearing the same cologne your ex-husband wore, or “your song” is wafting quietly in the background of a television commercial, or you've just driven by that little restaurant where he proposed.

These smells, sounds, and sights may be irrelevant to someone else, but they are anything but neutral to you.

All the hearts and flowers in the media at this time of year are most likely acting as triggers for you, particularly since Valentine's Day would be your anniversary. So it's exceptionally important to take good care of yourself now.

The good news is that you will get used to these triggers over time, and they will lose some of their punch. But the initial year after a significant loss is filled with so

many “firsts” – the first Christmas without him, or the first time you go through an anniversary alone. Aargh! You get the picture.

Plan to spend Valentine’s Day doing things that *you* love, try some things that make you happy. Pamper yourself at a spa, get a massage or a manicure, go to dinner with friends who may also be celebrating this little holiday alone.

Nature is a great healer for lots of people. Would you feel better taking a walk on the beach or hiking your favorite trail?

Remember that taking good care of yourself doesn’t mean that you might not have moments of sadness, and that’s to be expected. Let yourself feel your pain. It is okay to cry, or write your feelings in a journal, but don’t let yourself wallow in your grief. Get out with friends or family.

Strive for a *balance* between experiencing your feelings to the fullest, and creating new, spirit-filled ways to enjoy this Valentine’s Day, and the days that follow

I hope you are discovering that you are healing as time passes. If not, this could be a good time to find a counselor who can help you work through the many complex and sad feelings that naturally come with the loss of a significant relationship.

It will also help to tell your friends that you are not ready to hear about your ex-husband’s dating schedule, thank you very much. In a kind and compassionate way (of course!) tell them to put a sock in it and find something else to talk about. What were they thinking?!

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

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