

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I have been exclusively dating Kelly for almost a year, and we've talked about getting married. But we talked about a lot of things. Just by chance I met someone else, and now I need to break up with Kelly. She can become very emotional, and I'm sure she'll cry and scream at me. Do you think it would be okay to tell her what I want to do in a letter or an email?

-- Dennis

Dear Dennis,

Let me give you a short answer: No.

A "Dear John" letter, or (worse yet) an email, ending a relationship is a cowardly, and thoroughly wimpy way to break up. I think it would be inappropriate in any circumstance, but completely so given that you and Kelly have been dating for almost a year. Think about how angry and hurt you would be if you were to find, amidst the spam for low-rate mortgages, male enlargement products, and get-rich-quick-schemes, an email from Kelly saying, "bye-bye." Breaking up by email is only slightly less shallow than breaking up by posting this news to your website, and sending a link to your soon-to-be-ex. Tacky, tacky, tacky.

Still, you are not alone in thinking that an email kiss-off might be acceptable in our high-tech world. In April 2003, match.com conducted a survey of more than 4,000 singles, and discovered that 14% had broken up by email, 20% had been broken up with by email, and 14% had experienced both. Thirty-seven percent responded that an email break-up is acceptable at least under some circumstances. Yikes! What's happened to polite manners, much less heart and soul? I can see firing off a "we're through" email if you discover that you've been dating a serial killer, or a reality show contestant, but short of that, I think you're going to have to buck up, laddie, and do it right.

Kelly has a right to be angry and sad. It hurts to lose a relationship, especially one that has lasted for almost a year. Being "dumped" does not usually do wonders for our sense of self-esteem. And we lose not only the comfort of a relationship, but all the hopes and dreams for a future life together, as well.

That being said, you should accept that Kelly is allowed to cry and express her anger toward you, so long as she does this in a non-violent and respectful way. You do not have to endure a loud tirade of recriminations, or a blaring litany of all the ways you are a loathsome louse. Take responsibility for your decision to end this relationship. Don't blame her, or go into all the ways she has disappointed you. Simply say that this relationship no longer works for you, and that it is time for a change. Wish her the best (and mean it). By the way, why were you looking around for another woman when you were exclusively dating Kelly and talking about marriage? You might want to reflect on that a bit.

Note to Kelly: Don't spend a whole lot of time moping around in your pajamas accompanied by endless cartons of Ben & Jerry's. The fact that Dennis wants to break up with you just because he's met someone else suggests that he found your relationship to be a lot more casual than you may have. And it may be that he is looking for a casual

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relationship to stay casual, and feels threatened as time passes, and a future together is considered. Let yourself grieve fully, and then get back out into life. Consider the joy of a new relationship; next time with a man who would *never* ask a newspaper coach if it's okay to breakup via email.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.