

How to help your teenager through a breakup

Brace yourself. When your child experiences heartbreak, you will too. Psychologist John Gannon gives advice on what you can do to help your teen through a breakup.



It happens to almost every adolescent. At some point or another, we all experienced our first love. In the early stages, it was the greatest feeling we had ever felt. When it ended, it was the largest and most powerful feeling of hurt that we had ever experienced. Each moment felt like 10 years. Days went by and life went on for everyone else. Yet, for us, life stopped and we felt lost and paralyzed.

Your child will not be the exception either. They will feel their feelings the same way we felt ours. Your response to their heart break might offer them comfort. It may also infuriate them. They might claim that you just don't understand. They might sob inconsolably. In practicality, your

life will also suffer! Nothing can take their pain away except the passage of time. I always speak about the scar that occurs from first love. I believe it is a necessary scar, so that we do not become lost without emotional boundaries. The price of the scar though, is the loss of emotional love with another person.

There are things you may want to consider when this occurs for your child. For instance, some teenagers have more than just a traditional break up syndrome. They enter a state of significant sadness or anxiety. It can be difficult to distinguish what is a break up and what is something else. Sometimes, they will try to self medicate with drugs or alcohol. They may be more likely to have poorer judgment than they typically would have. It's good to try and be as emotionally available as they will let you. Don't take it personally if they shut you away.

Fortunately, time does heal most of these feelings. One day, you will see they look brighter. They may start to smile. Luckily, first love happens only once in a lifetime for most of us. (Some people live life with every relationship as a first love.) Keep in touch with your kids during this time. Even if it appears they are being overly dramatic, they are inexperienced when it comes to affairs of the heart. The pain is real for them. First love can teach how to balance love. Sometimes, they may need to have several breakups to figure this out. Most of the time, we ultimately learn how love is kept in perspective and by doing so we do not lose our emotional well-being.

Finally, this is a passage of your child's becoming an adult. Enjoy the ride!

John Gannon, MS, FPPR

Mr. Gannon is a licensed psychologist with nearly 30 years experience as a marriage and family therapist in the

Philadelphia area. His post originally appeared in 2010.

©2014 Two Peds in a Pod®