Friends with your ex? [1]

Hello Alice.

I have to ask you a question. I am having a debate with someone as to why your ex can not be your friend. I'm having a little trouble finding the answer. I need help. So my question is.....why is it that you can't be friends with your ex?

Answer

Dear Reader,

There are all kinds of "rules" about how to behave when entering and exiting a relationship. Hundreds of Internet sites, popular psych books, friends, and family all have opinions to share about all the "dos" and "don'ts" when it comes to dealing with an ex. We see them in nearly every romantic comedy and TV sitcom. What is true is that there is no one answer that will fit for every person or every situation. In fact, there are as many reasons to stay friends with an ex as there are to sever all ties. All of it depends on the two of you ? how you feel about each other, how much pain you are feeling from the break up, and what feels right for you. One cannot make an arbitrary case for or against friendship with an ex. Several factors are important to consider.

- **How do you feel about the relationship ending?** Sometimes, break-ups are mutual: a parting of ways that feels right for both people. Often times, however, one person wishes to remain in the relationship while another wishes to exit. Being friends is usually more feasible for someone who is feeling little or no pain about the relationship ending. Why might this be? The answer is simple: For a person wishing to end a relationship, staying friends meets her or his needs. But for a person wanting more, being a friend usually doesn't cut it. Not only does it not meet one's needs, it can serve as a painful reminder to a grieving person that she or he no longer has the type of relationship that they desire with the former partner.

- **How do you feel when the two of you interact?** For the broken-hearted, contact with an ex is often very bittersweet. Sometimes, contact can feel good during the conversation, but can create pain after the fact. It can leave you wanting more; it can re-open wounds that have started to heal. Even hearing about your ex or seeing a facebook update from them can ruin your day. If you notice this happening, it may be time to take some space. If, however, conversations don't leave you feeling worse and you don't feel yourself needing recovery time after you see or hear from her or him, it may mean that friendship is workable for you.
• **How much do you value her or his presence in your life?** Sometimes, we may date people that we later realize are bad for us on many levels: as lovers, as friends, even as acquaintances. Perhaps they mistreat you or have vastly different values from you. Other people may come into your life and you know you want them there always, in some capacity, perhaps because they are kind, caring, or simply a lot of fun. Ask yourself if this is a person worth keeping around. If the answer is yes, ask yourself if being friends right now makes sense, or if taking some space may be necessary before a healthy friendship can grow out of your break-up. Transitioning from an intimate relationship to a friendship may take some time. It can be hard to "re-program" yourselves over night, especially if the two of you have been intimate for a long time.

• **How do you feel when you don’t hear from your ex?** This can give you as much, if not more information, than knowing how you feel when you do interact with your ex. Do you find yourself wishing and waiting to hear from them? How do you react when they don't email or call? Pay attention to the thoughts and the feelings that come up for you when you don't hear from or see this person. Severing the friendship eliminates the waiting factor for someone yearning for a form of contact they cannot have with the ex. If you are devastated by a break-up, choosing to eliminate all forms of contact, at least temporarily, gives you some space to heal, to meet new people, and to decide if and when a friendship is possible.

When it comes to dealing with ex partners, recognize the fluidity of feelings? both yours and theirs. Having a "no exes as friends" policy across the board may be self-defeating in some situations, but it may make sense in others. Also, know that taking space now does not eliminate the possibility of connection later. Listen to your thoughts and your emotions. They'll tell you more than any website (including this one) can.

Take care,

Alice!

Category:
Relationships [2]
Relationship Stuff [3]
Friends or Lovers [4]

Related questions

Getting over divorce pain? [5]
Ex-boyfriend wants me back!? [6]
Why did she break up with me? [7]
Healthy versus unhealthy relationships [8]
How soon can I date after a break-up? [9]

Published date:
Dec 10, 2010
Last reviewed on:
Apr 10, 2014
Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu answered-questions friends-your-ex#comment-0

Links