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 so-called "rules" about how to behave when entering and exiting a relationship. Hundreds of websites, books, friends, and family all have opinions to share about all the "dos" and "don'ts" when it comes to dealing with an ex. This situation appears in nearly every romantic comedy and TV sitcom. So, the short answer to your question is that there's no one answer that will fit for every person or 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 you're feeling about the breakup, and what feels right for you.

For those pondering the question of "to be or not to be" friends with their ex, a little self-reflection may be in order. Some queries to consider include:

- **How do you feel about the relationship ending?** Sometimes, breakups are mutual: a parting of ways that feels right for both people. Other times, however, one person wishes to remain in the relationship while the other 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? Well, if a person wishes to end a romantic relationship but they still enjoy spending time with their ex, staying friends meets their needs. But for a person wanting more, being a friend usually doesn't cut it. Not only does it not meet their needs, it can serve as a painful reminder to a grieving person that they no longer have the type of relationship that they desire with their former partner.

- **How do you feel when the two of you interact?** For the broken-hearted, contact with an ex can be bittersweet. Sometimes, contact can feel good during the conversation, but might feel painful after the fact. It could leave you wanting more and re-open emotional wounds that have started to heal. Even hearing about your ex or seeing a social media update from
them could 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 them, it may mean that you can be friends.

- **How much do you value their presence in your life?** Sometimes, folks date people that they later realize are not a match for them on many levels: as lovers, as friends, even as acquaintances. Perhaps they mistreated you or have vastly different values from you. Other people may come into your life and you know you always want them there in some capacity. 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 time may be necessary before a healthy friendship can grow out of your breakup. Transitioning from an intimate relationship to a friendship doesn't typically happen overnight, especially if it's been an intimate one 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, text, or call? Pay attention to the thoughts and feelings that come up for you when you don't hear from or see this person. If you’re devastated by a breakup, choosing to eliminate all forms of contact, at least temporarily, can give you some space to heal, to meet new people, and to decide if and when a friendship is possible.

- **How does your ex feel about being friends?** Even if you feel ready to be friends, your former partner may or may not be keen on the idea. Respecting their boundaries is as key during this process as reflecting on your own feelings and wishes.

When it comes to how to handle ex partners, it can help to recognize the fluidity of feelings — both yours and theirs. Having a "no exes as friends" policy across the board may be good in some situations, but it may not make sense in others. Also, know that taking space now doesn’t eliminate the possibility of connection later. If you need help processing your thoughts and feelings, you may want to talk with a friend, family member, or even a mental health professional. Listen to your thoughts and your emotions. They'll tell you more than any website (including this one) can.

Take care,

Alice!

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