



WHEN RELATIONSHIPS END

Christian Jonathan Haverkampf, M.D.

The end of one relationship is usually the beginning of another relationship. However, the transition can be difficult emotionally. There are also questions of how a relationship could fall apart in which partners had invested and thought they knew each other well. Greater awareness for and working with internal and external communication can help oneself and the partner. It also helps in the transformation of the old relationship and the building of a new relationship. Insight into own needs, values and aspirations helps in the process.

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Introduction

Relationships can end after a week or after forty years. The result may seem very different, but both partners will go through the same stages. They grieve the loss of an expectation to fulfil some needs, values and aspirations in the future. Since the flow of meaningful information in ourselves and with others gives rise to the sense of self (Haverkampf, 2010a, 2017e), the partners feel as if they were losing a part of themselves. A relationship breakup transforms how partners communicate with each other, and, as a result, the mutual exchange and building of meaning with the world. For most people, it represents a significant life change, not just in the present but also with a view to the future. The grief associated with relationship endings is also about this loss of a future and a shared past.

Since the hopes and expectations for the future in both partners are not equal, what the shared world looks like is subjectively not identical for both. The right communication between the two partners can make the world more similar. However, it is also individual, needs, values, primary interests and aspirations which keep the two worlds from being identical.

Change

'Ending a relationship' requires transforming it into something different. While people can cut contact completely, they cannot stop relating with each other in some way. Internal communication, whether thoughts or feelings, continues the external dialogue, and vice versa. The transformation of a relationship means a change in internal and external communication patterns and habits. It requires revisiting and assessing own communication patterns (Haverkampf, 2010b, 2017a, 2019b) and identifying one's needs, values and aspirations (Haverkampf, 2010b, 2018c). Change always comes with an element of uncertainty, which can induce strong emotions that can energise the transformation. The purpose of 'e-motions' is to effect motion or change. If they are prevented from doing so, anxiety and other mental health symptoms are often the consequence.

Partners have to build new worlds when a relationship ends because the communication within the relationship had built a world that ceases to exist. People get used to particular flows of information with a partner, which create a unique 'relationship bubble', that provides a sense of safety and security as well as fulfilment in the world (Haverkampf, 2010a, 2016). We experience the world through interacting and exchanging information with the people in it, and building stable relationships is associated with feelings of comfort and fulfilment. When a relationship requires transformations, there will be less certainty in the world, and fluctuating emotions as a result of it, which leads to readjustments of other relationships.



When a relationship ends, connecting with oneself more can at least temporarily replace some of the information streams that have been lost. Connectedness with oneself and communication with the partner, if possible, can help identify what exactly is ending. Integration in meaningful social networks raises quality, contentment, and satisfaction in life. To communicate with oneself and others in meaningful ways provides greater insight into oneself, which is one reason why one feels as if losing a part of oneself if a relationship ends. However, as the partner may find different communication needs met in a relationship, the sense of loss can be experienced differently by each of them.

Relationships Never End

One cannot stop having a relationship; it can only change. Unless I wipe out every information about the person from my memory, it is impossible to stop being in some connection with that person because the communication with that person will continue to be affected by the information that is present. The transformation of a relationship into a different one is the process that resolves the complex and conflicting emotions that are usually associated with the end of one mode of a relationship. It requires well-working communication patterns and the openness to lead the relationship with the other person through a transition. For two people to do this together would, of course, be the best way if they are on speaking terms with each other. However, if this is not possible, there are different ways of achieving a transition in the relationship. Feeling connected with other people can, for example, readjust the own perspective on relationships and consequentially lead to a transformation of the relationship within oneself. We do not live in isolation, but neither do our partners, and feeling plugged into the web of life through better communication patterns and being in the right places at the right time can put everything, including the old relationship. Into a new perspective. Being connected with oneself, if communicating with the partner is not possible, also helps with the pain and a myriad of emotions, including shame, guilt and anger. Internal and external communication does not end a relationship but, more importantly, brings about a transformation of the relationship.

Ripple On Effect

A fundamental change in an existing relationship can lead to a chain reaction of adjustments in one's communication patterns and relationships with the world. It is impossible to plan for them, and this may create additional anxiety. However, the connections one can build will make these adjustments more manageable, as the autoregulatory processes that are always present in communication networks take hold. The author has described these autoregulatory processes in greater depth elsewhere (Haverkampf, 2010a, 2018a). In a nutshell, engagement in meaningful communication and openness to the changes it creates through resonance in oneself leads to more adaptive and effective communication patterns with oneself and the world. Often, one has to redesign one's communication life from the ground up to make these changes possible (Haverkampf, 2010b, 2017c, 2019a). Communication-Focused Therapy (CFT) offers many strategies that can be useful to accomplish this (Haverkampf, 2017a).



If the partners communicate with each other in a meaningful and open way, it usually benefits them in the long run. One reason why this is not the norm is that relationship breakups often give rise to fear, anxiety, hurt and other powerful emotions which make interactions with the partner or anyone else about the relationship emotionally tricky. Usually, not communicating out of a perceived need to protect oneself from further hurt increases the pain on both sides. To break this deadlock, both partners need to become aware and identify better-suited communication patterns, which may often require outside help.

The Fit

Fundamental compatibility of the partners' basic parameters (Haverkampf, 2018c), the needs, values, and aspirations one has, is usually essential. They do not have to be the same, but each partner should have the space to grow in the relationship and be faithful to their self at the same time.

The basic parameters do not change much over time. However, if a person does not act in line with their needs and values, they may seem to conflict with each other. In these cases, individual therapy, which brings more clarity about the needs and values, can be helpful. Certain external circumstances may cause the appearance of a discrepancy between needs and values. However, in a good state of internal and external communication needs and values complement each other. Relationship breakups can, therefore, happen even if there is only a seeming but not an actual lack of fit in needs, values, and aspirations. Mutual communication, if it is constructive, can, therefore, avoid a situation in which there is only a seeming but not an actual lack of fit.

The Future

Expectations and hopes of future interactions with another person and the positive feelings to be gained in the future make relationships. On a more technical level, it is the promise of meaningful communication which constitutes relationships. In a world built on information and its exchange, relationships as defined communication structures impart a sense of security and comfort to the individuals in them.

As a communication structure, a relationship adheres to rules. If a partner or both violate these rules, a relationship needs to transform or end. The positive expectations about the future benefits of a relationship can make it challenging to change it. Openness can help in the transformation of a relationship, and using good communication patterns can make flexibility easier in practice. Still, there may be unresolved issues in both partners that make them hold on to a relationship type and communication patterns that no longer work.



The past and the future exist exclusively in the mind. However, other than the future, the past can be shared without communicating about it. The future has to be related so that it can be shared. While a person's past behaviour, messages, and personality can give clues to how he or she thinks and feels about the future, the future exists entirely in one's head and what one is willing to communicate with others.

Everyone wants to be happy, and what makes us happy about a relationship now is how we see it in the future. This commonly shared happiness is not only what holds it together, but it is an essential ingredient in it. Happiness can come from many angles, but foremost is the meaning we see in ourselves and the world that relationships can help generate. Relationships foster the experience of connectedness with oneself and with another at the same time, which adds meaning to life itself. The better the communication patterns used and the more the content resonates with oneself and others, the more pronounced will be the experience of connectedness and meaning.

The existence of a past and a future depend on the communication about them. When communication in a relationship breaks off, there can be the existential fear of losing part of one's past and future. Thus, maintaining contact and transforming the relationship would, in most cases, be the best option for all in the long run, as long as the relationship is not by its nature hurtful or even abusive.

A connection with another can create a modified future that can align with one's needs, values, and aspirations. When a relationship ends, both partners always remain connected in some way. How well they can transform it depends on their willingness to connect with themselves and one another. Improving connectedness is a focus in Communication-Focused Therapy, for example (Haverkampf, 2012, 2017a).

Alignment

Needs, values and aspirations must be met in a relationship to a substantial degree. They do not all have to be similar or complementary. Still, it does mean that the individual constellations need to align in a way that both partners can derive a benefit from the relationship. Beyond mere alignment, however, they need to be able to communicate meaningfully, both internally and externally, to reap the benefits individually and for the relationship as a whole.

Many movies and stories are about the matching of something between people. Alignment not only means that each partner's needs, values and aspirations can be better realised, but also because it assures a particular type of communication in the future, a sharing of meaningful information from which they can derive meaning. The creation of new meaning requires differences in experiences, perspective and knowledge or variations in discovering unique insight internally. These dynamics keep the relationship exciting.



When a relationship ends, identifying where alignment was missing can help to find a better relationship in the future. If it can transform, there is a unique opportunity to gain even more insight into own needs, values and aspirations.

How It Happens

The break itself can come from one side, but this also means that there is not enough of a fit. In the end, it is about the relationship itself. But individual issues or a lack of communication can also play a significant role. Usually, a lack of a match in the basic parameters interferes with the connection between the partners (Haverkampf, 2010c, 2017b, 2018c). A calamity, even an outside affair, need not break a relationship, but it is how people communicate about it, that ultimately decides whether a relationship will last. Individual issues, and mostly fears, can make fruitful and constructive communication impossible.

Maintaining communication can help avoid a break in a relationship. Staying in contact may not always be easy because of the emotions involved, from sadness to anger and guilt. It may require a lot of communication to work with these emotions, especially if personal issues that are not associated with the relationship come to the fore. Unpleasant feelings often stand in the way and block communication between the partners, which could make the ending much more comfortable to bear, if not save the relationship.

Identifying what kind of break one talks about is important because this can define how to end it and how to process the ending, and, maybe even most importantly, whether it needs to be over. If something is not working, some communication is always required to salvage the right parts and initiate a transformation. The exchange of meaningful information facilitates change in all settings, including romantic relationships.

Communication

Communication is what transforms a relationship. A change in communication patterns, both internal and external, changes the dynamics in a relationship. This often requires courage from both partners as they enter new terrain. Personal issues may play a significant role, and it often helps to acknowledge which may not be due to own but the other person's problems. Learning to communicate about them can be helpful to save or end the relationship. Thoughts and feelings from events outside the relationship may make a constructive talk about the relationship difficult because the other person



may not understand the context of the message and the message itself if the information about the context is missing. Thus, one important rule is to realise what is about the relationship and what is not.

The perceived need to protect themselves may be one reason why partners feel the need to reduce or even cut communication completely. However, exceptive for abusive partners, this usually makes the situation worse. Also, if there is hurtful communication, standing one's ground and effectively communicating can affirm boundaries and offer better protection, if this is an option.

Communicating about communication could include speaking about how a message is understood and the emotions it triggers, which allows the other to clarify the message. However, timing does play a role. At certain times, it may be essential to reduce the interactions so that each can focus on their internal communication before they return to mutual dialogue.

Inside and Outside

Information is created and communicated within oneself and between people. It is vital to acknowledge that they are interrelated. For example, a partner's thought patterns externalise and project into the interactions in the relationship, while the communication between partners also affects their inner psychological worlds. We grow in relationships, while relationships grow in us. Identifying and separating internal non-relationship issues with relationship issues is essential in a positive and constructive relationship transformation process.

Information

Meaningful information drives relationship transformation, and it usually arises in the communication with the partner and through internal reflection on one's thoughts and feelings about the relationship. It helps both partners if they explore options that are in sync with one's needs, values and aspirations.

Very helpful is also the ability to take a step back and observe how information flows between the partners, as it reflects the dynamics of the relationship. Since information flows are closely tied to the sense of self and internal and external communication patterns to the personality, having greater awareness for what another says, and how, helps to untangle many communication knots and impairments.



Hurt

Communication helps to overcome hurt because psychological pain is often the result of not having enough information. One needs to feel an emotion to overcome it, but whatever action or interaction one chooses, resolving hurt requires insight. Communication, not necessarily with the partner though, is the route to get there. At first, reconnecting with oneself produces clarity and insight, as long as one can feel the fear and still look inside. Many people run away from themselves when they feel hurt, but it is essential to do just the opposite, to be closer to oneself, to feel, think, and process. Working with a therapist can help on the road towards greater awareness and insight, which is crucial in overcoming the hurt.

When a relationship ends, it feels as if the vision of a future crumbles down. There may appear to be a desert in its place. But as one's needs, values, and aspirations build one's future, it is not lost. However, rebuilding the future requires openness rather than shutting the doors and pulling down the blinds. Once one feels connected with oneself and has access to feelings, sensations and thoughts, and other relevant information, one can also reassess one's needs, values and aspirations.

The point is not to forget and move on. Being aware of and feeling the hurt, identifying it, and sharing it with a partner or others can be quite beneficial. If a couple is stuck and cannot interact with each other in a meaningful and helpful way, a therapist can help them become more aware of their maladaptive communication patterns and techniques of changing them. Consulting a therapist can also be beneficial if the partners intend to terminate the relationship, and there are still emotions and thoughts that they need to communicate about with each other.

Once the hurt can be processed, it is time again to shine a spotlight on the outside world, to connect with it in new ways. One may, for example, try out a course one has never tried before, or join a new group. As the world moves on, it is helpful to make new experiences and widen one's horizon.

Into the Future

Since the world is increasingly interconnected, it becomes increasingly difficult not to communicate. The communication may be indirect through social networks or friends of friends, but all this can help to transform a relationship over time. A good connection with one's own needs, values and aspirations can provide a healthy amount of stability in a changing world with changing connections between people. But important is to find sources of meaningful information through connectedness with oneself and others. Building a new meaningful world with romantic relationships should not be dull and boring, but exciting and full of feeling alive.



The vital instrument is thus communication, both the connection with oneself and the relationship with others. The world becomes more meaningful when there are more meaningful messages in it. Holding someone's hand can send a powerful, meaningful message if both can correctly decode and understand what it may mean in the present moment and what it can mean for the future. The critical skill is to understand, which depends on the communication patterns one uses (Haverkampf, 2010a, 2019c, 2019b).

Over time, we learn and develop specific communication patterns, and structures of communicating, which may need to be reassessed and re-evaluated from time to time. A communication pattern that works in school may no longer work in the world of adult life. Awareness of communication patterns and structures, in general, helps to identify those that do not work as well as another one might. Often, it only takes small adjustments to have a significant effect. When a relationship ends, but preferably before it, reflecting on one's internal and external communication and sharing this vital information can raise everyone's quality of life considerably.

People communicate differently. Some may not find it as easy to take the first step and engage with another person. I have discussed this and some approaches to resolve it in some of my other writings (Haverkampf, 2013, 2017d, 2018b) Important is to have this connectedness with oneself and to use communication patterns that get messages across effectively. Since relationships are in themselves enduring communication structures, using helpful communication patterns can maintain and deepen a relation, and make its transition into a different type of relationship, from romantic to friendship or vice versa, much more natural and emotionally less straining.



Dr Jonathan Haverkampf, M.D. (Vienna) MLA (Harvard) LL.M. (ULaw) trained in medicine, psychiatry and psychotherapy and works in private practice for psychotherapy, counselling and psychiatric medication in Dublin, Ireland. He is the author of several books and over two hundred articles. He can be reached by email at jonathanhaverkampf@gmail.com or on the websites www.jonathanhaverkampf.com and www.jonathanhaverkampf.ie.



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