

SINGLE? TIME FOR PROJECT YOU!

After the mother of all break-ups, **Nikki Bayley** has decided to take hook-ups with Mr Help-Me-Forget-My-Ex out of the equation. Because when it comes to getting over a bad split, there's only one person who can help you heal...

OK, I'll admit it. Over the past God knows how many break-ups, I've ticked every cliché box going: get drunk and cry with my girlfriends? Tick. Radical new haircut? Tick. Date/snog/shag unsuitable man in desperate attempt to feel better about myself and bag a new bloke? Er, tick, tick and... no more details, it's not *that* kind of feature.

I wrote about the end of my eight-year relationship in GLAMOUR's June issue [*This Is No Ordinary Break Up Feature*]. Lots of you got in touch afterwards, and I can never thank you enough for that. If you didn't read it, in a nutshell, I thought we were crazy in love, then I opened his Facebook page and found out he was sleazing around. I went to pieces – I really believed we were forever. It wasn't just a split for me, it was a total life change. So the thought of repeating that same tired routine was too depressing for words. So ►



◀ this time, I decided to try something different: I would take sex and dating off the menu completely. I vowed to give myself at least six months of breathing space.

As one divorced friend says, "After a bad break-up, you need to fall in love with yourself again before you even try to fall in love with anyone else." I knew she was right; I'd dished out this advice to my mates a hundred times, but never taken it myself. Previously, I would have done anything to avoid facing up to that rejected feeling, examining what I did wrong, or even admitting that I might have made some bad choices. But not this time.

Goodbye sex, hello time-out

I've tried to analyse my previous relationships; two long-term live-in partners (five and eight years), a handful of sweet men it just didn't work with and the odd brief encounter to add to the mix. Oh, and a parade of mummy's boys, liars and BS merchants I dated, having persuaded myself it was better to be with them than alone. In the past, whenever I've had one of those irrational moments of singleton desperation, I've gone for quick fixes, madly papering over the cracks by hurling myself into some guy's arms, instead of trying to do the hard work of fixing the underlying issues.

"When you dive straight into another relationship, you're really not being fair on yourself," says Paula Hall, author of *Improving Your Relationship For Dummies*.

"It takes time to understand why a relationship went wrong and to consider what you need and want to be different next time. That means reflecting not only on the

faults your ex might have had, but also the things you might want to do differently next time. When you can fully understand and accept why a relationship didn't work for you, you can make sure you don't do the same thing again."

HOW TO FEEL BETTER – FASTER

Start the healing *now* with these tips from Avy Joseph, founder of the College of Cognitive Behavioural Hypnotherapy

Recognise 'unhealthy' thoughts. After a break-up, it's natural to feel sad, disappointed and even angry, but if that spirals into thinking bad thoughts about yourself, it can become toxic. There's a difference between feeling unhappy and knowing you'll be OK again, and catastrophising – feeling it's the end of the world, that you're worthless and that you can't take it. Recognise that.

Examine those thoughts for evidence. Write down how you feel and examine it against reality. Are these things true? Is there evidence for this? Are you really worthless just because you are single? No. Your worth is not dependent on anything or anyone else. Replace those negative thoughts with more honest and positive ones; gradually, your feelings will change, too. You'll need to practise this.

You may not need therapy, but if you're caught in an unhealthy repetitive pattern, you do need to reflect on yourself, and your thoughts and actions, to change things. As humans, our emotions are the last thing to change. First we have to learn to think differently, then behave differently in accordance with that. If you repeat, repeat, repeat, then finally your feelings will change. It could take time, you just need to be consistent.

Find the 'me' after 'we'

When I think of my ex, I think about pasta. It's all he ever wanted to eat. So I've declared my flat a pasta-free zone for a while, and rediscovered my love for couscous, which made him gassy, so we never had it. Boring Bruce Springsteen tunes and endless moody cop movies are out, and funky old-skool hip-hop and Audrey Hepburn films are in.

In the early days of the break-up, while I was littering her lounge with tear-soaked tissues, my brilliant friend Marcella gave me two pieces of seriously good advice. I'd given up on marriage and babies with this man; he didn't want either, but I loved him and thought it was worth compromising on – I mean, he adored me, right? Marcella said that if I still wanted that, I had more chance now I was single than I ever would have had with him. She also reminded me that in all the other areas of my life, I was independent and able to articulate all I wanted, but when it came to my ex, I compromised myself into a corner. This was a chance for me to make some serious life changes.

"It's inevitable that your sense of self becomes blurred after a break-up," says life coach Fiona Harrold. "You went into that relationship one person, and then years later, you've become someone else. This is a wonderful time to find out who that is. When you are forced to

spend time alone, that is when you'll discover if there are cracks in your relationship with yourself. You can figure out how to spend ►

◀ time by yourself and enjoy it. When you do go out and date again, it will come from a place of choice and freedom, not desperation or a need to fill a gap. By facing those fears everyone has about being alone, you'll become self-contained and self-possessed. As a result, you'll become a fascinating person – maybe you take yoga holidays, or learn a new language or even develop that great business idea you never had time to work on – this is what happens when you raise your self-esteem and self-worth.”

Love nil; career 10

I'd always felt I was ambitious, but towards the end of my relationship, I think my career began to suffer, as I lost that drive. About three months after the break-up, when I stopped staggering around in shock and started living again, I began feeling good about my career – and myself, too. I felt creative! I decided to start work on the book idea that had been kicking around at the back of my mind for years. I found that work just flowed.

Up until this point, new men hadn't registered on my radar. Then, one day, about three and a half months in, I suddenly saw a cute man in the street. 'Hmm,' I thought, 'cute guy'. It was nice to feel that shimmy of excitement run through me after months of ignoring that side of my life. And it turns out that the streets are full of hot guys; bars packed with flirty men with all the time in the world to ask you for your number and try to walk you home. But I said no.

Ros Toyne, director of The Career Coach, says, "I've noticed that when my clients work on their career and take action to make it better, that positivity spills into every area of their life. That's really attractive to a potential partner, because you're not looking only to one source, a partner, to fulfil all your



“ You went into the relationship one person, and now you're someone else. This is a great time to find out who that is ”

needs. When you're not needy, that's really attractive.” Paula Hall says that's good advice. “Focusing on our career – or our hobbies, family and friends – helps us realise how rich our lives are, and gives us more we can value about ourselves and, consequently, more we can offer in the next relationship when we're ready.”

Nix the quick fix

After analysing my usual pattern of post-break-up behaviour, I realised that my weak point was feeling like I needed the rush of self-esteem that a rebound relationship gave me. I wanted to discover a way not to rely on the approval of someone

else to feel good about myself. This time, I was totally honest with myself, and acknowledged what I was really feeling, instead of trying to cover it up.

“We love quick fixes to banish negative emotions,” explains Avy Joseph, founder of the College of Cognitive Behavioural Hypnotherapy.

“That could be overeating, drinking too much alcohol, or jumping into bed with someone. The problem is, these ‘unhealthy’ solutions won't help in the long term, it's just putting a temporary sticking plaster over them.” Quick fixes just address the emotions, rather than the cause of those feelings. “Imagine your break-up is like a deep cut. You wouldn't just shout ‘Heal!’ at it. You'd tend it, expect that it would hurt, and wait for it to get better. Our mental pain is the same – give yourself time to grieve and accept what has happened, and it will get better.”

It's not easy facing up to painful thoughts and feelings, but I could see Avy was right. “History has a horrible habit of repeating itself if we don't take the time to learn the lessons,” concurs Paula Hall. “Jumping into bed with someone else can be a great boost to our confidence, but all too often it's short-lived, as we realise it takes more than being desired to make a relationship work. Although I'm a great fan of sex, it's ▶

◀ too easy to use it as a bandage to try to cover wounded pride and confidence.”

Reset your dating clock

Feeling good, five months in, with a new, more positive mindset, I wondered whether it was really possible to avoid the trap of the rebound relationship. I mean, I'd gone this far – could I avoid screwing up completely? Yes, says Ros Toynbee, who thinks time spent focusing on yourself means you're far more likely to have a successful next relationship.

“Most people meet their partner, then identify their goals,” she says. “Often, they then find their partner has different goals, and that they can't stay together. This is especially true if one partner wants to get married and have kids, or wants to work abroad. The better way round is to work on your own goals first, then meet the guy. You're more likely to attract a man who will share your life journey. When your goals are shared, there's opportunity to talk about how they complement each other.”

I've tried hard to think about what I really want. Big-ticket items, like a wedding or

“I now know what I *really* want. That's a big change and makes me feel incredibly free”

babies, I've realised, are person-specific. I don't want a wedding, I want a marriage; and I don't want a baby unless I find the right person to raise him or her with. That's a big, important change for me, and it makes me feel incredibly free. I've torn up my

old must-have list and I'm rewriting it every day. I know that my relationships with friends have got better, and my relationship with myself has gone from strength to strength. I like me now! I'm busy with work, meeting interesting people and having exciting experiences.

I'm not going to pretend there haven't been times when I've wanted to share that with someone else, because of course there have. Equally, there have been times when I've felt painfully aware: It. Has. Been. Ages since I had sex; you sit in a café and stare hungrily at the passing men in suits... in jeans... cute postmen in those shorts. Arrgh! But that is why God invented batteries.

I'm still not going to rush things. I know I don't need to find validation in someone else's arms – for the first time in a while, I'm getting it from myself. And that's definitely something to say yes to. ☺

CELEBS WHO COULDN'T RESIST A REBOUND

Hooking up post-break-up isn't always the answer



Jennifer Aniston – after Brad Pitt came Vince Vaughn. Vince was good for a laugh, but not for keeps.

Christina Aguilera – after Jordan Bratman came Matthew Rutler. The pair partied hard and even got arrested!

Sienna Miller – after Rhys Ifans came Balthazar Getty. She was first spotted with him barely a month after splitting from Rhys.

Cheryl Cole – after Ashley Cole came Derek Hough. He was her rock, until she hooked back up with Ash. Or did she? Who knows with these two...

Photographs: Pamela Hanson, Rex Features, PA Photos, Getty Images. For more information about Paula Hall, visit therelationshipspecialists.com; Fiona Harrold is the creator of the CD *Falling In Love...* With Yourself, £14.50 from fionaharrold.com; thecarecoach.co.uk; cch.org.uk