

# The SexEducator

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A MAGAZINE FOR INTERVENERS AND EDUCATORS  
WHO ARE OFFERING SEX-EDUCATION ACTIVITIES  
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OF SECONDARY-SCHOOL AGE

A production of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec  
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## BREAKING UP DURING ADOLESCENCE: HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE COPE BETTER

BY JOËLLE MORIN

'TIS BETTER TO HAVE LOVED AND LOST,  
THAN NEVER TO HAVE LOVED AT ALL.  
Alfred Lord Tennyson



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Québec 



Last week my girlfriend left me. We'd been together for nine months. The problem is that I don't understand why she suddenly stopped loving me. It's been a week and there's already another guy hanging around her. And yet, she told me she needed to be alone. All I want is to have her back. I'm not sleeping. I cry really often, and I hardly eat anymore. What can I do? 15-year-old boy (Tel-jeunes, 2007)

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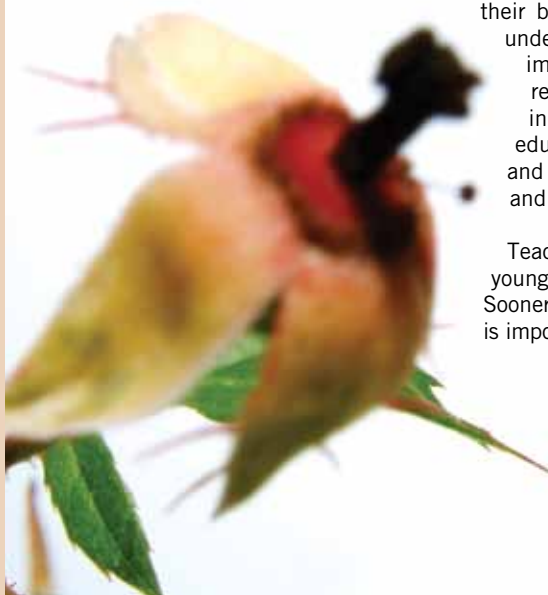
Breaking up has made this adolescent very sad and maybe even caused real upheaval in his life. As teachers or professionals, have you ever been approached by a distraught youth who had just learnt that his or her relationship was over? What did you do to help? Realistically, what can you do? The goal of this publication is to assist you in your efforts to explore with teens the theme of breaking up during adolescence. Young people who go through a breakup turn to various people for help and support. Friends are very often the main source of support. This is not surprising since, to young people, friends are often more important than family (Delagrave, 1999).

However, other sources of support should not be underestimated. According to Dolto (in Trottier and Bélanger, 2000), "mopping up" after a young person's pain is one of the roles and responsibilities of adults. Young people need the presence of significant adults—parents, teachers or other professionals.

## SUPPORTING AN ADOLESCENT GOING THROUGH A BREAKUP: ROLE OF THE TEACHER AND OF OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Although teachers do not necessarily have a mandate to provide individual support to teens, they already do so (Hargreaves, 2001) with regard to students' cognitive and social development (Tatar, 1998, in Domagala-Zysk, 2006). It is important to meet with a young person who is going through or has gone through a breakup since this event can have repercussions at school (on results and attitudes, for example). For young people, a very short relationship is nonetheless a relationship on which they had pinned much hope. Adolescents appreciate a teacher or other professional who can make them laugh, understand them and be available to talk when a more significant problem arises (Comeau, Goupil and Lavigne, 1983). Therefore teachers and other professionals can act as resources and role models by helping young people find their bearings. Teens expect adults to listen to them, comfort them, understand and guide them (Trottier and Bélanger 2000). Young people implicitly ask adults to "be present without being heavy, and to represent discrete hope in the face of their despair, and strength in the face of their helplessness" (Delagrave, 1999). Complementary educational services staff at school (psychologists, social workers and nurses) are also there to respond to the needs of young people and help teachers support these youth.

Teachers and educational professionals have to understand how young people feel if they want to help them get through breakups. Sooner or later, most youth will experience a breakup; consequently, it is important to offer them time to think about the subject and discuss it.



# BREAKING UP DURING ADOLESCENCE

To better intervene with young people dealing with a breakup, it is important to understand what the instigator of the breakup and the person who is subjected to it are going through.

## REASONS FOR BREAKING UP

Reasons for breaking up frequently mentioned by young people include a desire to be independent, not having enough in common, the other person's lack of support and openness, the little time—quantity and quality—spent together, and a lack of romance (Baxter, 1986, Battaglia et al., 1998). Put more simply, people break up because one person no longer loves the other, no longer feels loved, or loves someone else. Sometimes a breakup is linked to sexual, dating or verbal violence (Stroshine and Robinson, 2003) or to discovering one's homosexuality after experimenting with heterosexual relationships.

Adolescents who decide to break up do not necessarily assign responsibility to their partners for the relationship's failure. They consider, without blaming the partner, that the romantic relationship is no longer pleasant or beneficial, and they break up with a perspective of experiencing the best relationship possible. In some cases however, a partner may have acted in a reprehensible manner that has pushed the other person to terminate the unsatisfying situation. In this regard, relationships tinted with violence should be considered unsatisfactory and unacceptable.

In the past, boys more often instigated a breakup; today, girls do not hesitate any more than their male partners to end a relationship that is no longer satisfying (Gellman and Gellman-Barroux, 2001).

## METHODS YOUNG PEOPLE USE TO BREAK UP

Although most boys and girls go about breaking up in similar ways, a 2000 study by Trottier and Bélanger provides interesting data on the various methods young people use to end relationships. Among study participants, 23% of heterosexual boys, 10% of heterosexual girls, and 10% of homosexual boys and girls were told of the breakup by a third party. Friends or other people can be the channel used to end a relationship. Other methods include breaking off with someone face to face, in front of friends, at home or the other person's house, at school, at the movie theatre or the corner restaurant, or while at a party, breaking off over the phone, on email or by text message, or informing a partner about the breakup by showing indifference, being distant or being seen with someone else. Anything is possible, but are all methods equal? The ambiguity and coldness that characterise a breakup not done face-to-face adds to the suffering of the person being left. On the other hand, some young people may be unable to proceed otherwise, for instance, if they are extremely shy or are afraid of the other person's reaction. Breaking up "at a distance" could then be considered to be appropriate, as long as the other person clearly knows where he or she stands and feels respected. In this case, showing respect largely means providing an explanation which, generally speaking, the person being left has a right to get and which could help him or her through the process of accepting the breakup. Chances are good that a breakup done respectfully will be less painful.

TABLE 1 STAGES PRECEDING A BREAKUP

Lack of communication:	Partners talk less together or their conversations are only superficial.
Development of a physical distance:	There is less time for them to see each other and spend time together.
Occurrence of conflicts or fights:	All topics and circumstances can be used as reasons to disagree.
Attempts to try to fix the relationship:	Partners believe that everything will work out.

Source: Battaglia et al., 1998.

## STAGES THAT PRECEDE A BREAKUP

According to Sprecher (1994), a mutual desire to break up only occurs in a minority of cases. Before the breakup, both partners go through different stages, either consciously or unconsciously. A study of youth by Battaglia et al. (1998) demonstrated the existence of a sequence, with more or less time allotted to each stage, depending on the individuals involved. The sequence is as follows: 1) lack of communication; 2) development of a physical distance; 3) occurrence of conflicts or fights; and 4) attempts to fix the relationship. At that moment, feelings for the other person can be very contradictory to those felt early on in the relationship; what seemed pleasant at first is now repulsive. For instance, what was a seductive sense of humour can now become annoying, or the way the partner talks and how he or she acts becomes irritating. Finally, the breakup occurs.





## STAGES OF A BREAKUP: SIMILAR TO THE STAGES OF GRIEF

A breakup is not unlike bereavement: it is a sort of mourning of a relationship in which one had placed a lot of hope (Barrette, 2007). And like mourning, people go through different stages.

### 1. Shock

It is absolutely normal not to understand what is happening to you, even if you were aware that things had not been going that well. Part of the shock is becoming aware that you are powerless in the face of the situation and that you cannot go back in time (Barrette, 2007).

### 2. Denial

Denial is the period in which you do not really believe that what is happening is real or you believe the other person has made a mistake and will come back. You persuade yourself that the romantic relationship can turn into a friendship. During this stage, feelings are very strong and contradictory. You may want to make the other person jealous, take revenge or seek out pity, or you can feel angry or guilty (Barrette, 2007).

### 3. Depression

During this stage, you think you will never feel love again or that no one else will ever love you. You also feel abandoned. During this period of depression, grades may drop and young people may turn to drugs and alcohol more regularly (Barrette, 2007). Sadness is often the most prominent feeling and you do not feel like doing anything (Tel-jeunes, 2007).

### 4. Acceptance

Hope, confidence and dreams return (Tel-jeunes, 2007). Young people realise they must recover their own identity and that there can be a bright side to solitude. They acknowledge that the romantic relationship had flaws they had not wanted to see (Barrette, 2007).



## FEELINGS ARE OFTEN CONTRADICTORY

Not all young people experiencing a breakup will necessarily go through all the stages described. However, both the person who initiated the breakup and the other person will go through various feelings. In this regard, other people often consider that only the person being left “deserves” to be taken care of. It is quite possible that the person who initiated the breakup needs more comforting and company than the person who has been left even if, on the face of it, he or she appears to be suffering less. Indeed, the person who makes a decision to leave his or her partner often feels torn and goes through difficult periods (Barrette, 2007).

The person who initiates the breakup sometimes experiences more negative feelings than the person who has been left since he or she feels responsible for the ex-partner’s sadness (Barrette, 2007). Even if a breakup seems to be the best decision for both individuals, the fact of breaking up with someone you have loved leads you to question your capacity to be a good person and can contribute to lower self-esteem. In this case, how other people see you and your impressions of being judged increase the intensity of feelings of depression (Hetherington and Stoppard, 2002).

**TABLE 2 FEELINGS AFTER A BREAKUP**

Person who initiates the breakup	Person subjected to the breakup
Guilt, feeling responsible for the breakup (Barrette, 2007)	Guilt, feeling responsible for the breakup (Barrette, 2007)
Sadness, solitude (Barrette, 2007)	Sadness, solitude, betrayal (Barrette, 2007)
Shame in front of the other person’s friends and family, feeling responsible for the other person’s pain (Hetherington et Stoppard, 2002)	Shame in front of the other person’s friends and family (Hetherington et Stoppard, 2002)
Anger with oneself or the other person (Barrette, 2007)	Anger with oneself or the other person, desire for revenge (Barrette, 2007)
Lack of understanding, being judged (by others) (Hetherington et Stoppard, 2002)	Discouragement, depression, lack of motivation (Hetherington et Stoppard, 2002)
Emptiness, depression (Barrette, 2007)	Emptiness, abandonment, rejection (Barrette, 2007)

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOYS' AND GIRLS' REACTIONS

Until now, we have addressed the elements that apply both to boys and girls. But these elements can differ, depending on the person's gender.

Girls seem to be more inclined than boys to feel distressed and to experience longer and more intense episodes of depression (Monroe et al., 1999). Moreover, girls more often attribute responsibility for the breakup to themselves. According to Sprecher et al. (1998), the person who put more effort into starting the relationship feels greater emotional and psychological distress when the relationship ends. We should also point out that even short-term relationships (less than three months) have the potential to cause hurt and distress (Spenar, 2007).

Boys tend to have two opposite reactions: They either confront their problems or go into denial. Girls tend to have reactions that are more emotional in nature. For example, girls express their feelings more and seek out their social networks. They are more inclined to brood over the breakup and to ask themselves many questions to try to understand why the breakup happened (Barrette, 2007; Tamres, Janicki and Helgeson, 2002). Girls seem to suffer more distress than boys because they tend to find it more difficult and painful to go through a breakup: They cry more than boys, promise to “never fall in love again”, experience more insomnia and think about suicide more often (Monroe et al., 1999; Saffrey and Ehrenberg, 2997). When their hearts are broken, girls consider it essential to share their feelings and emotions, whereas boys count more on time passing and taking action to get through it. They tend to go out more and seek diversions. In this perspective, the saying “Time heals all wounds” means something different for boys than for girls.

According to Jocelyne Robert (1999) having a broken heart can bring many young people, both boys and girls, to despair. It can lead to loss of self-esteem and to destructive and suicidal behaviours. Breakups are one of the most common causes of drug intoxication. Suicidal ideation is generally linked, for boys as well as girls, with an inability to purge or get over the heartbreak, or with a fear of never being loved again. Moreover, suicide attempts often result from humiliating experiences (Health Canada, 1994 in Robert, 1999); hence it is important to respect oneself and the other when breaking up, and to seek help and support from significant adults in one's life.

HOW LONG DOES A BROKEN HEART LAST?

Several factors can be used to estimate the duration of the pain of breaking up. Factors that affect how long a broken heart lasts include how long the relationship lasted, its intensity, and the circumstances and events when the breakup occurred. In a Québec study carried out in 2000, Trottier and Bélanger found that for 38% of the 100 young people surveyed (64 girls, 36 boys) the pain of breaking up lasted less than 1 month. For 26% of the boys and 9% of the girls it lasted less than 1 week. On the other hand, the pain of breaking up lasted more than 3 months for 12% of the boys and 21% of the girls. The person who initiated the breakup felt as much pain as the other person and took as much time to get over it.

TABLE 3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOYS' AND GIRLS' REACTIONS TO BREAKUP

Girls	Boys
More inclined to feel distressed and experience longer and more intense episodes of depression	Two opposite reactions: Confront their problems or go into denial
More often attribute responsibility for the breakup to themselves	Go out more and seek diversions
Have more emotional reactions	Count on time passing and taking action to get through it
Express their feelings and emotions more	Drugs, alcohol or meds consumption to overcome their sadness
Seek out their social networks more	Tend to be more aggressive and violent, both verbally and physically
Ask themselves many questions about the reasons for the breakup	



### THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OTHER PERSON AFTER BREAKING UP

After the breakup of a relationship, there are certain questions that worry young people. They may wonder whether they should hate their ex or remain friends. If the relationship was a happy one, chances are greater that the former partners can stay friends (Busboom, 2002). Half of all young people remained on friendly terms with their former partners (Sheehan and Dillman, 1998, in Schneider and Kenny, 2000). When the friendship with the ex turns somewhat unsatisfactory, young people tend to progressively cut off contact. Sometimes former partners stay friends because they are part of the same social group or because they were already friends before becoming romantically involved (Sprecher et al., 1998). Though trying to stay friends is commendable, it is by no means obligatory.

### INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR AFTER A BREAKUP

When added to feelings of sadness, rejection and worry that are common among young people, a breakup can lead to thoughts of suicide. The inability to get over the heartbreak or a desire to get back with the other person can lead some people to threaten or attempt suicide. Some young people, most often boys, tend to consume alcohol, drugs or pills to get over their heartbreak; parents and friends may interpret this behaviour as being thwarted attempts at suicide (Robert, 1999). Boys tend to be more aggressive and violent, both verbally and physically, and their violence is more frequently directed at objects (Trottier and Bélanger, 2000). It is important, then, to talk to young people to help them get over the pain and psychological suffering.

Moreover, some adolescents distinguish between sex and love (Batanian, 2006). In this respect, boys have fewer scruples in making a distinction between lust and love (Robert, 2002). This being the case, the fact that two young people end their romantic relationship does not mean that they end intimate or sexual contacts. A young person can have sexual relations with an ex, with another person or even with a number of other partners. Their confused feelings, however, can mean that these young lovers do not take protective measures. As well, young people will accept a range of sexual behaviours a new partner asks for so as not to lose this new partner (Trottier and Bélanger, 2000). However, it would be wrong to believe that young people will quickly get over a broken heart in the arms of new partners. Given, among other things, the young age of these adolescents and the risk of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections, such sexual behaviours are worrisome.

### HOW TO BREAK UP THE RIGHT WAY

"It's rare that people break up well, because if they were getting along well, they would not break up." (Marcel Proust, cited by De la Fayette, 2007). Some people think that it is better to take the initiative in a breakup, to leave before being left, to act before having to endure the act initiated by another. Does breaking up then become a question of dignity, or one of love and respect for the other person? Though there are no magic formulas or steps to follow in a breakup, it is nonetheless possible to have a good separation.

Being told by a third person that your relationship is over is likely to shatter your self-confidence (Robert, 2002). Email is not an ideal way to break up either, though in certain cases it is the only way possible. Generally, email is a medium that allows you to avoid accountability. Moreover, if the message does not clearly state that the relationship is over, there is a risk that the other person will not fully understand this. It is best, therefore, to break up without any wavering, openly and preferably face to face.

TABLE 4 BREAKING UP THE RIGHT WAY

Things to do	Things not to do
Be brave, do not avoid discussion.	Give back the gifts the other person gave you and ask them to give back what you gave them.
Explain things clearly and precisely.	Accuse the other person of doing all the wrong things. It's not anybody's fault.
Be direct but not hurtful.	Spoil your memories. If your love was beautiful, leave it beautiful.
Stick to your decision, no matter how the other person reacts.	Spoil the life of another person. No matter how much pain or anger you feel, revenge won't get you anywhere.





### **THE BREAKUP: A STAGE IN THE PROCESS OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Not all consequences of a breakup are negative. Breaking up allows adolescents to acquire self-confidence and self-esteem, and to become freer and more independent (Tashiro and Frazier, 2003). It helps them become aware that they do not always have to be strong and that, for instance, they have the right to cry. It also helps young people to learn more about what they want from their relationships and, if they learn to verbalize what they are feeling, to acquire better communication skills. Young people need to have experiences that will lead them to introspection, and a breakup is just such an experience. Statistically, most first loves break up: but although the experience is painful, the partners can emerge from it stronger (Tashiro and Frazier, 2003). They can become more tolerant and more self-confident, and they learn to love better.

By getting over the difficulty of a breakup, young people are likely to become aware of the importance of taking stock of themselves (experiencing pain, stepping back from a lost love) before entering into a new relationship (Tashiro and Frazier, 2003). Moreover, with time, the breakup helps them get to know themselves better. Over time, it helps young people acquire maturity and learn what they want in the way of love.

### **ROLES OF THE TEACHER AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS**

Teachers and other professionals should be on the lookout for the distress that breakups can cause. A sudden drop in marks can be a symptom of distress. Teachers and other professionals have a responsibility to act to help the young people they think are more fragile. When trust has been established, young people will confide in these professionals, who should not hesitate to recommend that young people see a psychologist if necessary. Young people can see such a recommendation not as a sign of abandonment but as a desire to help them more effectively. It is important that the professional be accessible to a young person who needs to be heard. Just being listened to may be enough to reassure the young person (Trottier and Bélanger, 2000).

### **CONCLUSION**

Though most young people get over breakups without any real problems, some experience great suffering that lasts for a long time. It is interesting to get young people to think about breakups, and especially to look on them as ways of learning important lessons about emotions and relationships. Though breaking up is painful, it does have positive aspects and young people need adults to point out these aspects to them.

# Learning activities

Now that you are aware of various issues involved in an adolescent breakup, you can bring up this theme in group activities. The goal of the following learning activities is to make adolescents aware of the breakup experience. These activities are designed for 14- to 15-year-olds in Secondary 3.

The suggested activities aim to help young people form different ideas about adolescent breakups. These activities are designed not only for schools but also for use in other contexts and organizations, such as youth centres. Content elements to consult are indicated at the beginning of each activity. For additional information, we suggest an article by Claudine Ratelle entitled “Peine d’amour à l’adolescence: la fin d’un conte de fées” published in *Le petit Magazine de la formation personnelle et sociale*, Autumn 1998 and available online at [http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss/Documentation/Pour\\_les\\_professionnels\\_de\\_l'education/Le\\_Magazine\\_Ca\\_sexprime](http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss/Documentation/Pour_les_professionnels_de_l'education/Le_Magazine_Ca_sexprime). Before beginning the activities it could also be useful to read pages 39 and 40 of the

document *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform*, available online at <http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca>. These two pages contain the section entitled “Ten Ground Rules for Providing Sex Education.” You can also invite young people to consult the school psychologist or CLSC nurse or social worker. Complementary educational services have been set up to help young people find solutions to the difficulties they experience and are available either as part of a particular program or as a specific intervention. These professionals are valuable allies and it is important that they be kept informed of your in-class activities.

The table below shows how the proposed activities can be integrated with the Quebec Education Program and with complementary educational services programs. The descriptions given for how to carry out the various activities are intended only as guidelines. Professionals in schools can draw inspiration from these guides or reorganize them to integrate the activities into other more general learning contexts.

## Possible associations with the Quebec Education Program<sup>1</sup>

<p><b>AIMS OF THE EDUCATION PROGRAM</b>  <b>Construction of identity</b>  <b>Construction of a world view</b>  <b>Empowerment</b></p> <p><b>SUBJECT AREAS AND SUBJECT-SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES</b>  <b>Languages</b>                      In Secondary English Language Arts the theme of breaking up can be approached by means of texts on the subject, reflections on realistic scenarios and small group or class discussions. Two subject-specific competencies lend themselves particularly well to exploring this theme: “Reads and understands various texts,” and “Communicates orally in various ways.”</p> <p>Activities 1 and 3, and a variant of activity 2 can be carried out entirely in French in the Français, langue seconde course. The competencies “Reinvests understanding of texts” and “Interacts orally” will also be employed.</p> <p><b>BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING</b>  <b>Health and well-being</b>                      To make students aware of their responsibility for adopting good living habits with respect to health, safety, and sexuality.</p>	<p><b>Focus of development</b>  <b>Self-awareness and awareness of his/her basic needs</b>                      Need for acceptance and growth, need for recognition and fulfillment, and need for expression of their feelings.</p> <p><b>CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES</b>  <b>Exercise critical judgment</b>                      Form an opinion, express and qualify personal judgment.</p> <p><b>Achieve his/her potential</b>                      Recognize one’s own personal characteristics, take one’s place among others, and make good use of personal resources</p> <p><b>Communicate appropriately</b>                      Manage the communication process, become familiar with various modes of communication, and use various modes of communication</p> <p><b>Cooperate with others</b>                      Contribute to team efforts, interact with an open mind, and assess his/her participation in teamwork</p> <p><b>CONTEXT OF INTERVENTION</b>                      See the instructions at the beginning of each activity.</p>
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## Associations with complementary educational services programs<sup>2</sup>

<p><b>PROGRAM OF PROMOTION AND PREVENTION SERVICES</b>                      Provide students with an environment conducive to the development of a healthy lifestyle and of skills that are beneficial to their health and well-being.</p>	<p><b>PROGRAM OF ASSISTANCE SERVICES</b>                      Help students with any difficulties they encounter.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *Programme de formation de l’école québécoise, Enseignement secondaire, deuxième cycle*, Québec, ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ministère de l’Éducation du Québec, *Les services éducatifs complémentaires : essentiels à la réussite*, ministère de l’Éducation du Québec, 2002.



## ACTIVITY 1

# Feelings that follow a breakup

**DURATION**  
75 minutes

### PEDAGOGICAL GOALS

Help young people become aware that it is normal to experience a wide range of feelings about breaking up

- Recognize descriptions in songs of what breaking up can feel like.
- Distinguish between what girls feel and what boys feel.
- Identify feelings related to oneself and feelings about the other person.
- Identify feelings of the person who initiates a breakup and those of the person who undergoes it.

### CONTENT

- Stages of a breakup: Similar to the stages of grief (p. 4).
- Feelings are often contradictory (p. 4 of the article).
- Table 2: Feelings after a breakup (p. 4)
- Differences between boys' and girls' reactions (p. 5)

### SUBJECT AREAS

Secondary English  
Language Arts and  
Français, langue seconde

The material used may be either in English or in French, depending on the preferences of the person leading the activity.

1

Students are asked to find a song about breaking up. They will bring a CD or MP3 file of the song to class along with a copy of the lyrics (usually available on the Internet). They must also identify the names of the performer and of the songwriter.

2

They give the songs and lyrics to the teacher or activity leader.

3

The teacher or activity leader selects five or six songs and makes photocopies of the lyrics to hand out to the teams that will be formed in the next class or at the next meeting. The leader may translate lyrics that are in French.

4

In the next class, the leader will play the selected songs to the whole group.

5

Students are invited to form teams of four or five people. The songs are distributed randomly, one to each team.

6

The activity leader gives students a copy of Table 2 (p. 4), about the feelings that can be experienced during a breakup. Within their teams, the young people reread the lyrics of their song, write a brief synopsis of the story it tells, and note the feelings it describes about the breakup.

7

Each team is then invited to present its song to the whole group, naming the songwriter and performer, and briefly describing the story in the song. A discussion begins, based on the questions below.

- Which feelings listed in the table are most frequently mentioned in the songs? Which are mentioned least frequently?
- What are the differences between feelings women sing about and those men sing about?
- What are the differences in approach to the breakup, according to the sex of the performer?
- What feelings are referred to in the songs that are (a) about someone being left; and (b) about someone initiating a breakup?

8

The activity leader ends the meeting by giving the young people an assignment to complete individually for the next class. It consists of selecting a song that deals with breaking up, making a copy of its lyrics and answering the questions below.

- What feelings about breaking up are referred to in this song?
- Can you imagine having these feelings yourself? Do the feelings referred to seem realistic to you? Do you think someone breaking up could really feel them?
- What advice would you give to a friend who identifies with this song after a breakup?
- If the performer was of the opposite sex, would the thoughts and behaviour he or she describes in the song be the same or different? Explain your answer.

9

### Concluding statement

The activity leader may refer to the sections about feelings (Table 2, p. 4) and the differences between how boys and girls react (p. 5). Stress the fact that the feelings experienced after a breakup can differ from one person to another. However, it is important to share your feelings with friends, a family member, or a professional to get over your sorrow.

## ACTIVITY 2

# You and I are different!

### DURATION

75 minutes

### PEDAGOGICAL GOAL

Pedagogical goal: To help young people better understand the differences between how girls and boys react to a breakup.

- Identify the characteristic behaviours of girls and of boys involved in a breakup.
- Identify ways of breaking up used by girls and those used by boys.
- Recognize the positive and negative aspects associated with different ways of breaking up.

### CONTENT

- Reasons for breaking up (p. 3 of the article)
- Methods used by young people to break up (p. 3)
- Differences between boys' and girls' reactions (p. 5)
- Inappropriate behaviours after a breakup (p. 6)
- How to break up the right way (p. 6)

### SUBJECT AREA

Secondary English  
Language Arts and  
Français, langue  
seconde

We suggest carrying out this activity by screening the American film *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, about a couple in their twenties who break up after being together for several years.



### Film *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*

The activity leader suggests that the students watch *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, a romantic comedy made in 2006 by Nicholas Stoller, which can be found in all video stores. For the purposes of the activity, it is only necessary to watch the first 15 minutes of the film; that is, until we see the main protagonist burning everything his girlfriend has left behind after leaving him. If you want to explore breaking up in greater depth with students and if time permits, you can show the whole film. To better guide students as they watch the film, just before showing it the leader distributes the following questions:

- In this clip, how do Peter and Sarah react?
- Do the reactions of Peter and Sarah seem appropriate to you in the context of a breakup?

### Synopsis:

For over five years Peter Bretter, a musician who has been somewhat successful, has had a girlfriend whom he adores, the actress Sarah Marshall. When she tells him that she is leaving him for a singer, Peter is devastated. After trying in vain to forget his ex, Peter decides to take a trip to Hawaii, to get over her in a paradise-like setting. What a nightmare! When he gets to his hotel he finds that Sarah is already staying there with her new lover. Now our hero has to solve a big problem: how to forget Sarah while still being around her.





2

### Debate

After watching the film, students are invited to debate reasons for breaking up and ways to do so, based on whether one is a girl or a boy. Separate the class into two mixed groups to facilitate discussion. To help get a discussion going, use the following questions:

- *Do girls and boys break up for the same reasons?*
- *Do girls and boys use the same ways to break up? Are there characteristic ways that girls use and characteristic ways that boys use?*
- *Do the methods chosen to break up respect the other person despite the pain or anger he or she may feel?*
- *What are the consequences of different ways of breaking up for the person who is being left and for the person who is ending the relationship?*

3

### Concluding statement

The activity leader emphasizes that there can be various reasons for breaking up and various ways to end a relationship. Whether the girl or the boy initiates the breakup, it is no less difficult an experience for the two partners. Even if boys and girls do not react in the same way to heartbreak, boys and girls both need support from those close to them to cope with a broken heart. Emphasize the fact that the media sometimes gives a stereotyped and more or less accurate image of breaking up, and that it is important to distinguish fact from fiction when a breakup occurs.



## ACTIVITY 3

# It is possible to break up with someone respectfully

<b>DURATION</b> 75 minutes	<b>PEDAGOGICAL GOAL</b> Encourage young people to become aware of the importance, for both partners, of breaking up respectfully. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name some reasons that can cause someone to breakup.</li> <li>List some appropriate and inappropriate methods for breaking up.</li> <li>List some advantages and disadvantages of various ways of breaking up.</li> <li>Indicate what kinds of relationships could be possible with an ex after a breakup.</li> </ul>	<b>CONTENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reasons for breaking up (p. 3 of the article)</li> <li>Methods young people use to break up (p. 3)</li> <li>The relationship with the other person after a breakup (p. 6)</li> <li>How to break up the right way (p. 6)</li> </ul>	<b>SUBJECT AREA</b> Secondary English Language Arts and Français, langue seconde
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1

The leader suggests an activity that stresses the idea of respect in a breakup. To establish the context, the leader first asks students what 'breaking up respectfully' means for them (10 minutes). The young people are invited to form teams of four or five persons each. The activity leader distributes to each team one of the following scenarios from the Tel-jeunes Website. Each team should discuss and respond to the question, "What advice would you give him?".

**Scenario 1**

Last week my girlfriend left me. We'd been together for nine months. The problem is that I don't understand why she suddenly stopped loving me. It's been a week and there's already another guy hanging around her. And yet she told me that she needed to be alone. All I want is to have her back. I'm not sleeping, I cry really often and I hardly eat anymore. What can I do?

**Scenario 2**

I'm in love with a guy and last week I told him how I feel. He told me that he loves me too. We started going out together last Thursday evening and at around quarter past ten he emailed me to say that he wasn't really ready for a long-term relationship. So I accepted his decision and the next day, Friday, he said to me: "I don't want to lose the chance I have with you." So then I said, OK, and yesterday he emailed me again to say that he wasn't ready for a long-term relationship. So I asked him if he still loved me and he answered that he did, but that he found that having a girlfriend is very demanding and for now he wasn't ready to have a girl in his life! But he said he still loves me ... What should I do?

**Scenario 3**

I'm in love with a guy. The problem is that he's my best friend! We went out together after a party, because he said that he's loved me since we first met about a year ago, and I don't know why he has decided to end our relationship. I'm still his best female friend, but his best buddy doesn't want him to go out with me! I don't know if it's his friend who's responsible for our breakup. I still love him and without him, I don't know, I just can't forget him ... What can I do? I talked to him about it but he said it wouldn't work. I just want so much for him to love me!! What'll I do?

**Scenario 4**

I don't know what to do any more ... I left my ex, with whom I had been going out for two and a half years, for someone I thought was better. But in the end, this guy isn't better because he slapped me. We're always fighting and he's always driving me to tears. I haven't forgotten my ex and I know he still loves me ... What should I do? Stay with the new guy or go back with my ex (whom my parents don't really like)?

**Scenario 5**

My girlfriend and I often fight about nothing. We're been together for almost seven months. At first we had lots in common, but now I'd say we have nothing in common. I don't feel comfortable in this relationship, and I don't think she likes our fighting all the time either. I think it would be best, for her and for me, to break up but I don't know how to go about it. I really like this girl and I wouldn't want to hurt her too much. What can I do so she understands?

**Scenario 6**

My girlfriend has left me. We'd been together for four months. Our relationship wasn't super great, but it didn't seem all that bad to me. When she left me, she asked me if we could stay friends. I don't know what to do. I still love her so, yes, I want us to stay friends. But at the same time, I'm mad at her because she left me and I never want to speak to her again. What should I do? Stay friends so I can be close to her, or tell her I don't want to be her friend because I want her to be my girlfriend?

In the Français, langue seconde course, the activity leader can use *Ça sexprime*, the original French version of the magazine *The Sex Educator*. This can be found online under Pour les professionnels de l'éducation > Le Magazine Ça sexprime.

2

With the entire group gathered, the activity leader goes over each scenario and gets the discussion going by asking the questions below.

#### Scenario 1

Does this guy have the right to know his girlfriend's reasons for leaving him? Should his ex-girlfriend tell him her reasons for leaving him? What are the advantages and disadvantages of knowing the reasons for a breakup?

#### Scenario 2

What are the advantages and disadvantages of breaking up by email? How does this change things for the person being left?

#### Scenario 3

Can this guy and this girl, who were friends before becoming lovers, re-establish their former friendship? Can the way a breakup occurs and the reasons for it affect their friendship?

#### Scenario 4

Does this girl respect the feelings of her former boyfriend? Is the decision as simple as she seems to think it is?

#### Scenario 5

What should this guy do to break up in a respectful way? What are the advantages of breaking up this way?

#### Scenario 6

Should this guy stay friends with his ex-girlfriend? What would be the positive and negative consequences of doing so for the guy? What could the consequences be if he ends the friendship?

3

#### Concluding statement

Emphasize the importance for both people involved of breaking up respectfully despite the difficulties inherent in any breakup. There are ways to break up without denying the other person's needs or hurting them. Review Table 4, (p. 6) and remind students that a breakup ultimately allows you to develop maturity (p. 7). The activity leader makes it clear that respect for oneself and for the other person should be integral parts of every experience one can have, including the ones that involve suffering and pain, such as breaking up. Similarly, in memory of the good times spent together, the person who initiates the breakup should do so in a way that respects the former relationship.

## OTHER POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES

### English

Present a breakup letter to the students and ask them to respond by writing back to the person who initiated the breakup. You can find various models of such letters online or in books such as *Comment lui dire adieu*, by Cécile Slanka or *Prenez soin de vous*, by Sophie Calle, both published in 2007.

### Drama

Organize improvisations or role playing games using set themes such as ways of telling another person that you want to break up; breakups triggered by the disturbing behaviour of the other person; breaking up by mutual agreement; breaking up with one person to be with another person; and a breakup from the girl's and from boy's points of view.

## RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

There are various resources for young people dealing with breakups. Some of these resources offer a chance to talk; some offer advice on, among other things, helping someone you're close to; and others offer ongoing help when the suffering is too much. The list below can be photocopied and distributed to young people during an activity on breaking up.

### TO WHOM CAN YOU TURN?

Anyone around you whom you trust, whether young or old, is a good person to confide in. Do not forget resources such as school psychologists, nurses and professionals at youth centres, all of whom are there to help you.

There are other resources to help you, depending on your specific situation.

#### Tel-jeunes

1 800 263-2266  
[[www.teljeunes.com](http://www.teljeunes.com)]

#### Suicide-Action Montréal

Montreal: 514 723-4000  
Elsewhere in Quebec: 1-866-APPELLE (277-3553)  
[<http://www.suicideactionmontreal.org/>]

#### Gai-Écoute (homosexuality, bisexuality)

Montreal: 514 866-0103  
Elsewhere in Quebec: 1 800 505-1010  
[<http://www.gai-ecoute.qc.ca>]

#### Drugs: help and information for people with drug or alcohol problems

514 265-2626  
[<http://www.info-reference.qc.ca/drogue.html>]

#### Violence in a relationship

[<http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/violence/violence.html>]







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