

The
conscious
uncoupling

*5 Step Process
to Living Happy Even After*



By Katherine Woodward Thomas, M.A., MFT

A Better Way to Break Up

A bad breakup can feel like the end of the world. As if your sense of well-being and happiness in life will forever be compromised, and you'll never again experience true love or real joy.

You may feel shaken to the core, and deeply disconnected from everyone and everything you used to care about.

You may find yourself going through the motions without much motivation to do even the simplest of tasks, like take a shower or prepare a meal.

If your breakup happened a while ago, you may notice that you feel worn down by the unresolved resentment you're carrying, the hurt feelings you're still wrestling with, and the anger left dangling between you and your former love.

Even though they care about you, your family and friends may not want to hear any more about it, anxious for you to get on with your life. In response, you may put on a smile, yet secretly feel like the walking wounded, just going through the motions to get through one more day.

Yet it doesn't have to be this way.

It is absolutely possible for you to move through the painful end of a relationship with kindness, generosity and goodwill, and where no one is left shattered or destroyed by the experience – yourself included.

**The Conscious Uncoupling 5-Step process
makes it possible to overcome breakup grief
and use it to transform and enrich your entire life.**

The loss of an intimate relationship is a crossroads, and many of us will go on to live lesser lives in the aftermath of heartbreak--untrusting of others, ourselves and of love moving forward.

You know when you come across one of those empty shell people and where you think, what the hell happened to you? Well, there came a time in each one of those lives where they were standing at a crossroads. Some place where they had to turn left or right. This is no time to be a chicken shit.

~ Sandra Oh in Under the Tuscan Sun

Yet, your breakup is also a rare, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a whole-hearted awakening that may be bigger than any you've ever known. And if well navigated, it can actually liberate you forever from any painful, toxic patterns you've struggled with in love, and catalyze a whole new level of happiness in life and love moving forward.

**Contrary to popular belief, time does not heal all wounds.
We do.**

You want to treat your broken heart with the same amount of care that you might offer your broken leg. For broken hearts, like broken legs, need a lot of tending to in order to properly heal. Unless, of course, you don't mind if your heart heals a little too crooked, a little bit closed, a whole lot defensive, and way too easily-bruised moving forward. Because that's the heart's equivalent of walking with a limp for the rest of your life.

The stakes are high. Which is why I've created the powerful Conscious Uncoupling 5-step process to help your heart "break open" so that you are left whole, healthy, healed and free on the other side of heartbreak.

The 5-Steps of Conscious Uncoupling

Whether you're going through a breakup now, or still suffering from unresolved grief from a breakup in your past, the 5-steps of Conscious Uncoupling can help you find emotional freedom, reclaim your power and recreate your life more beautiful than it was before.

The following are excerpts offered from the New York Times Bestseller,
Conscious Uncoupling: 5 Steps to Living Happily Even After.

Step One: Find Emotional Freedom

*New life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground,
a baby in the womb or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark.*

~ Barbara Brown Taylor

Something has been broken and it's more than just your heart. It may be your feeling of being safe in the world, your ability to make sense of your life, or even your very faith in life and love.

Whether you were the one who made the difficult decision to leave, or you are in the devastating position of having been left, the losses you are facing are most likely many, deep and dimensional.

The heart connection you called home. The shared rituals and routines that shaped your daily life. The "you" you were in your relationship. Your standing in the community. The certainty of your life together. And the future you were striving and saving for—all of these and more things may now be gone.

And in their place are a plethora of raw, wildly painful and unpredictable emotions, all tempting to you behave in desperate or even hostile ways outside of who you've always known yourself to be.

During a breakup internal alarm bells go off, and we become flooded with fight-or-flight hormones that can render us unable to gauge consequences clearly. Because of this, we're apt to act in impulsive ways, sometimes without conscience and in ways that could end up doing even more damage to ourselves and to others.

We want to have our emotions but we don't want our emotions to have us!

It's important to remember that you (and your children if you have them) will be living with the consequences of every action you take and every choice you make during this tender transition, often for many years to come. Therefore, it's critical you find a way to harness the energies of the wildly dark and difficult emotions you may be experiencing such as rage, hatred, fear and despair and transform them from destructive impulses to hurt yourself and others, into the constructive drivers of positive change.

To help you begin, I offer a powerful practice taken from my New York Times Bestselling book, ***Conscious Uncoupling: 5 Steps to Living Happily Even After***. This practice will help de-escalate the intensity of your painful emotions, support you to hold and contain your own inner experience when you're feeling overwhelmed, and help you to get back into driver's seat of your life so you can make wise and life-affirming choices for the benefit of all involved, including yourself!

For an audio version of this practice, go here:
www.ConsciousUncoupling.com/StepOnePractice

Step One Practice: Creating an Inner Sanctuary of Safety

In this version of the practice, I've added a component from the ancient Tibetan Buddhist exercise of Tonglen, which is incredibly useful when the emotions you're experiencing feel as though they are more than you can bear.

1. **Become Still.** Find a quiet space to sit for a few minutes. If it is safe to do so, close your eyes and take a deep breath, as though you could breathe all the way down into your hips. Moving into a place of deep listening and receptivity, become aware of the feelings and sensations in your body and release any tension you might be holding.
2. **Step Back From Your Feelings.** Imagine being able to step back from your many thoughts and feelings, and notice there's a part of you able to simply witness yourself having these emotions with a deep sense of care, compassion, and curiosity. Notice that this witness within has access to wisdom and maturity and is able to see what's happening in your life from a larger and more well-informed perspective.
3. **Connect With a Deeper, Wider Center Within.** Keep breathing. As you do, become aware that there is a center within you that is deeper and wider than the feelings you're having, where you can know and experience, if only for a brief moment, that you're OK in spite of all you are going through.
4. **Extend Love to the Part of You Suffering.** From this deeper, mature and wise center within, extend love to the part of you that is feeling overwhelmed with negative emotions. Give this hurting part of you your full attention while staying identified with your mature and wise

witness self. Notice where in your body you are holding these difficult emotions, and offer this suffering part of you support and compassion.

5. **Welcome In and Mirror Your Feelings.** With deep kindness and compassion, ask yourself the following question:

“What are you feeling, sweetheart?”

Listen closely for the response and then lovingly mirror it back by saying to yourself:

“I can see that you’re feeling _____ (sad, enraged, hopeless, used, etc.)”

Note: Try broadening your emotional vocabulary by stretching to name the specific feeling you’re having. For example, rather than just saying “depressed,” look to find a word that more accurately names your experience such as “despondent,” “desperate,” or “hopeless.” (See list below to help you with this).

6. **Breathe Out a Blessing.** For each feeling you identify, on your next in-breath, breathe that feeling straight into the center of your heart, fully welcoming it, and on the out-breath, breathe out a prayer and blessing for yourself and all beings throughout the world who are suffering with this exact same feeling in this very moment.
7. **Name and Mirror Your Needs.** Now, with deep kindness and compassion, ask yourself the following question:

“What do you need, sweetheart?”

Listen closely for the response and then lovingly mirror it back by saying to yourself:

“I can see that you need _____ (love, closure, an apology, justice, safety, support, comfort, to be seen, to be heard, etc.)”

Note: While it may be tempting to jump into action to try to fulfill your needs, please remember that the simple act of attending to yourself is what’s most important. Not every need can be met immediately, but all can be counted as valid and worthy of your attention. This is particularly vital if the person you loved was incapable or unwilling to tend to your needs or take them seriously.

Step Two: Reclaim Your Power and Your Life

Out with the old, in with the true.
~ Jeff Brown

You may find yourself going over your breakup story again and again, laboriously trying to piece together a narrative that weaves the fragmented, jagged and ill-fitting bits of memory and information into one cohesive whole.

Ruminating upon the subtle clues missed conversations ill-timed and fatal mistakes only now clear in hindsight, you will try to craft a story you can live with and that will go on to become the legacy of this love affair.

Most likely your tale will be centered upon the multiple ways you were misunderstood, mistreated, devalued and wrong. The victimized, blaming and shaming story of your love will go round and round in your mind building momentum and gaining traction as you struggle to figure out what went wrong, who is to blame and why.

Yet in your attempt to integrate the breakup into your overwhelmed and fragmented psyche, the majority of your attention will likely be drawn toward pining blame, as you carefully craft a grievance story that justifies your indignation.

For good reason too! Your former partner probably was self. She didn't keep her word. He was a cheat. She did let you down. What happened was most likely unfair and immoral.

However, here's what's more true.

**As long as your attention stays fixated on what someone else did or didn't do, you're not looking to discover all of the subtle, covert and toxic ways that you yourself co-created what happened.
Even if the other person is 97% at fault,
you want to be really interested in your 3%.**

Why? Because until you figure out how you show up in ways that make you vulnerable to being disempowered, disappointed, or abused in love, you won't be able to trust yourself to fully open up your heart again to another human being.

Your mission right now is to reclaim your power and your life. And that can only happen when you are willing to see clearly all of the many ways you gave your power away, self-sabotaged, turned away from truth, borrowed against your well-being, and showed up as less than who you are.

The following practice will help you transform your victimization and resentment into the power you'll need to move forward in life fully confident that you will never again make these same mistakes.

**For an audio version of this practice, go here:
www.ConsciousUncoupling.com/StepTwoPractice**

Step Two Practice: Making Amends to Yourself Practice

To help you evolve beyond being a victim, and start making amends to yourself, I invite you to take your journal and reflect upon the following questions:

1. **What do you resent and for what?** Notice the resentments you're holding toward your former partner (and anyone else involved in your breakup) and write them down. Don't censor yourself, or try to talk yourself out of your suffering, anguish, and rage. Write it out as it lives in your body. (For example, "The bastard ruined my life," "The witch destroyed my capacity to ever trust anyone again," "That thief stole my final childbearing years from me." "I hate myself for sabotaging my chance for happiness.")
2. **What can you take responsibility for in each situation?** Now step back and shift your perspective. Recognizing that taking responsibility is not an admission that something is your fault, nor the condoning of bad behavior, look to see how you may have contributed to things happening the way they did.

Ask yourself,

"In what ways did I give my power away to this person?"

"Where might I have skipped over my own knowing, dismissed my feelings, or avoided telling the truth and/or asking for clarification?"

"How was I trying to get someone to love, want or approve of me more than I was attempting to make an authentic connection?"

"Why didn't I do what I knew I should have done that may have averted a bad experience, and what made me hesitate to do it?"

"In what ways was I selfish, unkind, or even abusive that may have caused my former partner to respond in defensive and destructive ways?"

3. **What else has it cost you in your life to give your power away like this?** Become present to the cost of showing up in ways that belie your true worth, power, intelligence, goodness and values. (For example, "Being unwilling to set appropriate boundaries has trained everyone in my life to take advantage of me," "By withholding my truth and staying silent when I should have spoken up, I have modeled being a doormat for my kids," "By giving myself away to men who don't value me, I've deprived myself of being loved," "By only going after men I believe I can control, I leave myself unfulfilled time and time again.")
4. **What amends do you need to make to yourself moving forward?** Commit yourself to the positive growth and development that would allow you to evolve beyond these destructive and self-defeating behaviors. (For example, "I commit to honoring my own feelings and needs as much as I honor the feelings and needs of others," "I will wait until I know someone well before becoming sexually involved," "From now on, I am going to negotiate on my own behalf rather than silently suffer being taken advantage of," "I promise to listen more closely to my

own inner knowing and have the courage to act upon my intuition.”)

Note: The first thing that comes up for many of us when identifying new ways of relating that would liberate us from old patterns is that we don’t know how to interact this way with others. Perhaps healthy ways of relating were never modeled in the home you grew up in, or you were discouraged from learning basic skills that would allow you to assert boundaries, resolve conflict or communicate your needs. Until now, you may have felt powerless in the face of these limitations, as though held hostage by your own missing development. Luckily, we human beings are ever-evolving creatures, and given the remarkable gift of being able to learn new things at birth. With this in mind, I invite you to answer the following question:

5. **What new skills and capacities will you now need to develop to live this way consistently?** To make these amends, you’ll need to develop new skills and capacities. See if you can identify exactly what they are and take on the challenge of learning them. (For example, “I will learn to identify what my feelings and needs are in order to share them with others,” “I will learn to negotiate on my own behalf to stand up for what’s mine,” “I will learn how to set appropriate boundaries to ensure I am not taken advantage of again,” and/or “I will grow my capacity to tolerate disapproval from others in order to stay true to myself.”)

Step Three: Breaking the Pattern, Healing Your Heart

If you don't like being a doormat, then get off the floor.
~ Al-Anon

You may be feeling disheartened by what appears to be a repeat of old painful childhood hurts, as though you’re somehow cursed when it comes to finding happiness in love.

Yet, the sooner you can see how your life has been happening *through* you rather than just to you—through the lens of your assumptions and beliefs, and the automatic ways you then respond inside of those perspectives, the sooner you’ll be empowered to graduate from your disappointing patterns in love.

For understanding ourselves as the source of our experience means that we have the power to start creating new and different experiences moving forward.

It begins by seeing your “source fracture story” clearly. That’s the story you created when you were too young to know any better about who you are, and what’s possible (or not) for you in love. It was the original break in your heart. And the beliefs you formed about yourself, others and life in response to what was happening in your little world, are what lies at the heart of your disappointments in love.

For a free audio download of this practice, go to:
www.ConsciousUncoupling.com/StepThreePractice.

Step Three Practice: Identifying Your Source Fracture Story Practice

Liberation from your painful patterns in love begins with seeing your source-fracture story clearly. For once you make conscious the underlying beliefs that have been driving you to duplicate your old painful patterns again and again-- wreaking havoc with your love life, and preventing you from realizing your higher potentials in love, you'll then have the power to challenge—and to shift that story; awakening to a deeper truth about your value, your power and your worthiness to love and be loved, as well as the possibilities you hold for happy, healthy love in this lifetime.

1. **Become Still. Find a quiet space to sit for a few minutes uninterrupted.** Close your eyes, take a deep breath as though you could breathe all the way down into your hips, and relax your body to the best of your ability.
2. **Become Aware of Your Feelings Regarding Your Breakup.** Become aware of the all of the feelings you're holding around this breakup. Notice where these emotions are in your body. For example, "The emotions are like a burning in my solar plexus," "They are a heaviness on my heart," "They are a hole between my shoulder blades as though someone stabbed me in the back," or "They are a lump in my throat making it hard for me to swallow."
3. **Welcome in Your Feelings.** Breathe deeply and notice the part of you able to witness these feelings with deep compassion. Extend love to the part of you experiencing these painful feelings, welcoming each one with a sense of kindness and care. Repeat your Step One Practice, by asking yourself what you are feeling, and tenderly reflecting back each of your feelings one at a time. Notice that in doing so, your ability to step back and lovingly observe your feelings, rather than be swallowed up by them, grows stronger.
4. **Notice the Meaning You Are Making of Your Breakup.** Let go of trying to figure anything out from your mind, and drop your awareness down into your body, becoming aware of the emotion center of all your difficult and dark feelings. As though you could let the emotional center of your feelings speak for themselves (not your mind), I invite you to answer the following questions:

"What am I making this breakup mean about me?"

For example, "I'm not loved," "I'm not wanted," "I'm alone," "I'm disposable," "I'm not good enough," "I'm inferior," or "I'm a failure."

"What am I making this breakup mean about my relationship with men/women (whichever gender you're attracted to)?"

For example, "Men always choose other women, not me," "Women don't like me," "No one really cares about my true feelings and needs," "People only love me because of what I can do for them" or "Men only want me for one thing."

"What am I making this breakup mean about the possibilities I hold for happiness in love?"

For example, “Life doesn’t support me to have love,” “I can never have what I want,” “My love life is cursed,” or “It is dangerous to let anyone get too close.”

5. **Identify Your Source Fracture Story.** I now invite you to weave these beliefs together to name your source fracture story.

For example,

“I’m not enough. Men like other women more than they like me. There’s never enough love to go around.”

“I am not valuable. Women just use me for what they can get and then dispose of me. I have to work really hard all the time to try to prove my value.”

“I’m not worthy. Men leave me if I don’t constantly try to please them. My life is empty and void of love.”

6. **How Old Is This Part of You/How Big is the Energy Held in Its Center?** See if you can now identify the chronological age of the part of you that is stuck in this story. This answer need not be literal, but more like a felt sense in your body of the age you were when you first came up with this perspective.

Ask yourself,

“How old is this part of me that’s stuck in this story?”

For example, “I’m just a baby,” “I’m about 5 or 6,” or “I’m 12.”

Notice also how big the energy is that is being held in this center.

Ask yourself,

“How big is the energy that I’m holding here?”

For example, “It’s huge, taking up an entire city block,” “It’s extending about 6 inches out from my body,” “It’s a dense, black knot that is wrapped around my entire heart.”

7. **Break State! Open Your Eyes and Shake It Out.** To help you return to your strong, adult self in order to challenge the meaning being made by your younger self, open your eyes and shake your body.

Ask yourself,

“What’s the best thing about being my current age as opposed to being me when I was ____ (the age you discovered you are at the core of that story)?”

For example, “I have a lot more choices than I had back then,” “I can set healthy boundaries to protect myself,” or “I have a lot more resources than I did back then and can get the help I need.”

Step Four: Becoming a Love Alchemist

Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you.
~ Jean-Paul Satre

Steps One, Two and Three have all been about you getting right within yourself, and Step Four is now about you getting with your former partner.

It is a true accomplishment to be at this point of your conscious uncoupling journey, where you're finally ready to clear the air of old hurts and resentments and move forward in life with a clean slate, which is particularly helpful if you are raising children together.

Though it's never easy to admit the negative impact that our choices may have had upon another (intended to not), and take the necessary actions to make amends, to do so is the beginning of true liberation, moving you towards your new life with renewed hope and possibility.

Whether you do this practice in person or as a “soul-soul communication,” where you move into a meditative state and invite the spirit of your former partner to join you for this dialogue, you may be surprised how effective it is to dissolve toxic residue, and set you free to move forward with a light and unburdened heart.

If it's necessary that you and your former partner stay connected and engaged on an on-going basis—whether that be because you share children, are partners in business or members of the same community, you may want to invite him or her to join you in this practice after you've tried it on your own first in the following practice.

For a free audio download of this practice, go to:
www.ConsciousUncoupling.com/StepFourPractice.

Step Four Practice: Clearing the Air Exercise

In order to dissolve the tensions still churning between you, you'll need to be a lot less interested in being understood, and a lot more interested in understanding the impact of your choices and actions. A lot less invested in being right, and a lot more invested in how you might actually *make things right*.

- 1. Understand the Sole Purpose of this Exercise is to Clear the Air.** Recognize the purpose of this exercise is simply to clear the air of any festering hurts and resentments between you and your former partner. As such, I invite you to set aside the goals of getting your needs met, changing your former partner's mind, winning an argument, or resolving your irreconcilable differences.

- 2. Identify the Active Hurts and Disappointments You're Each Still Struggling With.** I invite you each to list the hurts and festering resentments still incomplete for you, even if apologies have already been offered.
- 3. Become Willing to Take Responsibility for the Impact Your Behavior Has Had On Others.**

Decide who will speak, and who will listen, first.

For the Speaker: You're invited to share the hurts you're still struggling with and the impact your former partner's behavior has had on you. (For example, "I'm devastated you lied to me, and I'm not sure I'll ever trust anyone again," "My self-esteem is at an all-time low because of your constant put-downs and complaints," "I've not been able to sleep or eat for weeks because of how traumatized I am by how suddenly you left.")

For the Listener: You're invited to put aside your defenses, and strive to be present and available to hear what your former partner is saying. Regardless of whether you think he or she is telling the story accurately, try seeing the situation from his or her perspective. Recognize that many of the ways we hurt each other are unintended; we unconsciously repeat old patterns, we're distracted, self-absorbed or simply assuming that others are like us. Whether you meant to hurt your former partner is not the point. That he or she was hurt is all that matters. Set aside who's right or wrong (unless you can now see how you may have been wrong), and become willing to take responsibility for the impact of your behavior. Don't negate, minimize, or dismiss what he or she is saying. Instead, be interested in discovering how you may have contributed to and co-created the pain with which your former partner is currently struggling.

- 4. Let Your Former Partner Know What You Now See About the Impact Your Behavior Has Had Upon Him or Her.**

For the Listener: Do your best to not interrupt the Speaker, unless you are requesting more clarification about what he or she is saying. Allow your heart to genuinely be touched by what your former partner is sharing about their experience. Without explaining why you did what you did, or how the situation may have impacted you, place your attention fully on him or her and extend a sense of authentic care and concern for the impact your choices and actions had upon them.

With deep humility and a willingness to tell the truth, mirror back to your former partner what you can see about how your choices and actions impacted them and/or others.

For the Speaker: Do not move on until you feel that your former partner truly understands the impact their actions and choices have had upon you, and others that you love.

- 5. Offer to Make Amends By Taking Wholesome Right Action.** Past hurts don't go away just because we feel badly about what we've done. Nor does saying "I'm sorry" always restore wellbeing to the relational field. What genuinely clears the air of toxic emotional residue is an amends that clearly intends to restore wholeness to the situation.

For the Listener: Consider the amends you can now make to your former partner. While you can't go back and undo the choices you've made, you can take wholesome right action to try to repair the damage that's been done. For example, offer to pay for what your mistakes cost the

other, take steps to clean up a mess you helped make, or make a promise to never do this again to anyone else in the future.

For the Speaker: Think on what would actually help repair the damage done by your former partner and allow yourself to receive the restitution being offered. While nothing can undo what has happened, an act of genuine contrition and retribution can set you and everyone involved up to heal from this experience and move forward unchained to the mistakes of the past.

Once the Speaker feels complete, switch roles so that you each have an opportunity to clear the air of hostility, hurt, and resentment.

Step Five: Creating Your Happy Even After Life

*It's understandable to fight for a bigger slice of the pie,
But it's admirable to fight for a bigger pie.
~ Glennon Doyle Melton*

In this fifth and final step of Conscious Uncoupling, you are supported to make wise, healthy and life-affirming decisions as you take on the essential task of reinventing your life and setting up vital new structures that will allow you and all involved to thrive in the aftermath of your breakup.

Having been consumed with the many crises brought about by the loss of your relationship, you may not yet be fully aware of the beautiful life that is awaiting you on the other side of grief.

**While your new life may look little like the one you left behind,
your goal is not to try to create a better version of what you once had,
but to expand what's now possible to include fresh new horizons,
friends and interests—and the exploration of
forgotten, yet promising possibilities.**

All leading you and those you love safely home to your happily even after life.

Below, you will find a link to several Conscious Uncoupling Rituals, both in written and audio form, to help mark the end of your relationship in a way that honors the love you once shared, and all of the good that came from your union--whether that be growth gained, lessons learned, children created, projects birthed or happiness to the community contributed.

**To access your downloadable Conscious Uncoupling Rituals, please go to
www.ConsciousUncoupling.com/StepFiveRituals.**

About the Author

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Katherine Woodward Thomas, M.A., MFT, is the author of the *New York Times* Bestseller *Conscious Uncoupling: 5 Steps to Living Happily Even After* and the national bestseller, *Calling in “The One.” 7 Weeks to Attract the Love of Your Life*, a licensed marriage and family therapist, and teacher to hundreds of thousands of people from all corners of the globe in her virtual learning communities.

She is the co-creator of the *Calling in “The One”* and *Feminine Power* online courses, as well as certified coaches trainings, the originator of the Conscious Uncoupling process and creator of the Conscious Uncoupling online course and certified coaches training. To date, Katherine has trained and certified hundreds of coaches in her highly transformative work.

Katherine has appeared on *The Today Show*, the *Mike & Juliet Show* and *Good Day L.A.*, and her work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The London Times*, *Time Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *People* magazine, *Women’s Health* and many other media outlets throughout the world.

For more information, see www.KatherineWoodwardThomas.com