



Chapter Fifteen: Is there a better way to break-up?

Is there a way to end a poly relationship without such pain and acrimony? Does a poly break-up really need to be so horrible? The short and oversimplified answer is: “Sometimes.”

As with monogamous relationships that come to an

end, there are some factors that will significantly increase the likelihood that the suffering can be minimized. Key to a civilized break-up is that both parties to the break-up have demonstrated reasonable levels of honesty and kindness throughout the relationship, and have behaved pretty well during the break up. Another important variable is whether both people made efforts to solve the problems in the relationship, before making the decision to end it. Another factor for a low-drama and less painful break-up is that both people are able to see that there are specific areas of incompatibility create conflict in the relationship. And it’s much easier if both people have gotten past the “honeymoon period” and are able to see each other and the relationship realistically. If one person is still in the grip of passion and romance, and believes this partner is the perfect love of their life, they are going to fight like hell against any move to end it.

Many couples have reported that being in a polyamorous relationship gave them insight into their problems and helped them transition into happier and healthier relationships. Drew explains, “Some poly relationships SHOULD end. That’s one of the great things about open relationships. You can get involved with people who are really great people and have fantastic love affairs with them. But they don’t have to be totally compatible with you, because you aren’t expecting them to meet all your needs, and you aren’t marrying them.”

And Jane said, “No matter how painful the break-up is, if you’re poly, you are not as dependent on that one person for all the love in your life, so you may be able to more graciously let go of them as a lover. You have a better chance of keeping them as a friend, since you probably have another partner to provide love, affection, sex, and the other things you no longer have with them, and you are not feeling as hurt and resentful over that.”

Dr. Elisabeth Shef’s research indicates that polyamorous relationships may be more resilient than monogamous relationships because they allow more options for sustaining an enduring connection and ongoing friendship, even if the sex and romance is no longer part of that relationship. She says, “Poly relationships may not last in the traditional sense of permanently retaining the same form,” but rather through “polyaffectivity,” which she defines as “intimacy among non-sexual participants linked by poly relationships.” This allows relationships to shift from lovers to friends without anyone being at fault, and relieves the pressure on couples to stay together in exactly the same way at all costs. Or as a participant in her study said: “Don’t drag it out until the bitter end, disemboweling each other along the way. Split up while you can still be friends, before anybody does something they will regret later.

