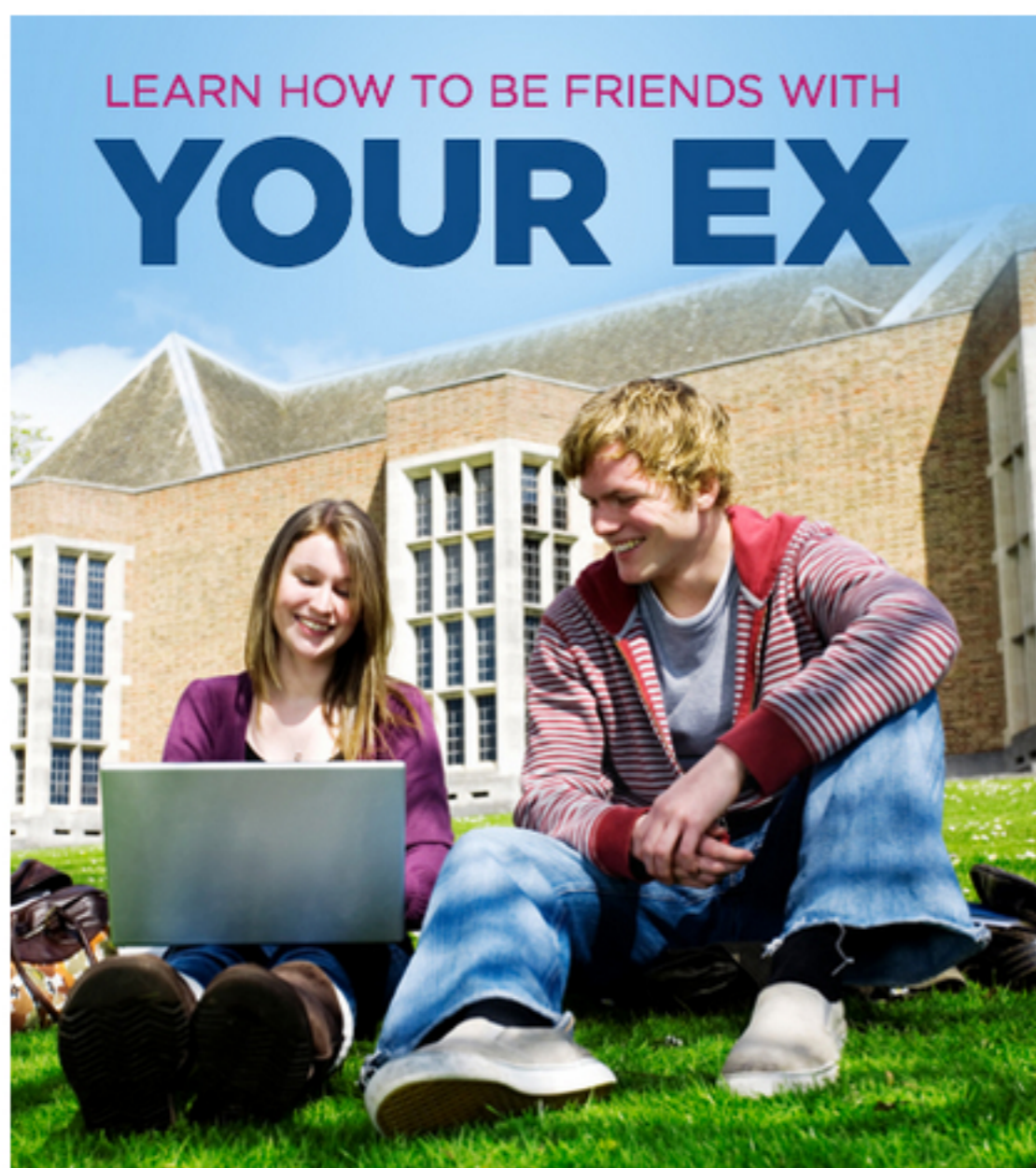


## Lifestyle

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## The Eternal Debate: Can You Really Be Friends With An Ex?

Pros and cons of friending your ex-boyfriend

APR 18, 2015  
LADYLUX • LIFESTYLE

**F**ace it, there comes a time that most relationships will end. As depressing as that sounds, it's the reality because only one relationship will be the one that goes long-term and lasts until we're old and gray and sitting on our porch sipping lemonade (or wine).

With that in mind, is it truly possible to remain friends with your ex? You've shared so much over the years, but is it reasonable to expect to remain friends even after a breakup? It is if you break up nicely and have genuine feelings of friendship for the other person. Remember, as Elaine Benes on *Seinfeld* said long ago, you can't date a bad breaker-upper because that's one of the most important parts of a relationship.

### Setting boundaries

It is possible to remain friends with your ex, according to Jim Hjort, a psychotherapist and founder of the Right Life Project.

"Set boundaries. Set expectations for your new relationship. Transitioning can be awkward and you'll have to be patient. There are nuances that will have to cease moving forward, like no more pet names, don't expect emotional support when you've had a bad day, or dropping what you're doing to be there to just hang out. You have to be willing to move forward with your own life in order to have a healthy friendship with an ex," Hjort said.

Eliminate any potential for FWB behavior. "Once you've broken up, you have to relinquish the temptation to become friends with benefits. In fact, moving forward, you shouldn't discuss things pertaining to your exes' sex life. Resist the temptation to give or ask for dating advice when you start dating again. Since you have known each other on an intimate level, it is best to eliminate those types of discussions so you both can move forward in your dating life," Hjort said.

And remember, there were problems that led to your breakup. So you will have to work on the relationship even if it's just friendship.

"Issues you had in your dating relationship won't miraculously disappear in your newly born friendship. If you expect to build a lasting friendship, commit to working on issues that have caused conflict between you without the expectation of reconciliation. Keep it in context, since you're no longer dating, you no longer have a say in how your ex lives his life, but you can address the behaviors that stand in the way of being good friends," he said.

Another thing to consider is how you will be able to handle the reality that he will be dating again, said Dr. Deb Castaldo, author of the new book *Relationship Reboot: Tech support for love*.

"If you have children together, then it's very important to be friendly and caring towards one another as parents. This is an important role model for your children, and it will help decrease potential emotional distress. If you do not have children together, I have two simple questions for you to answer:

- Can you accept and support your ex in a new relationship?
- Can you hear stories about his/her dating and support as a friend and not be jealous?

"If the answer to these questions is 'no,' then don't be friends. It may be time to let go and focus on moving on with your own life, new adventures, and new relationships," Dr. Castaldo said.

### Key points to consider

Dr. Jane Greer, marriage and family therapist and Shrink Wrap media commentator, shared her two best tips:

- Make sure you end the relationship on a friendly note. Don't blame your ex - make it a mutual decision with both of you appreciating that, while you still care about each other, your differences are significant enough to interfere with the relationship continuing. Don't put your ex down or attack them emotionally.
- I wouldn't advise hanging out with your ex afterwards, even if you maintain a friendship. Keep each other updated via email, texts, phone, etc. but you need to be able to move on and let go of them. You certainly don't want a new partner to be jealous or wondering if you still have feelings for your ex. Also, you should be honest with your new partner and make it clear you're just friends and no longer have romantic feelings for the other person.

Stef Safran, dating expert and founder of *Stef* and the City dating service in Chicago, said, "I always tell people that it's better to be nice to people that you end relationships with, because you never know if someone else you know might end up dating them."

Safran shared her tips:

1. Don't expect to be friends right away, take time away to mourn the loss of the relationship.
2. If you are the person who is doing the breakup, understand that your now ex might not be ready to change the status of the relationship to 'friends' so respect your exes' decision. The more you respect their needs, the better you have a chance to be friends in the future.
3. Don't talk about who you are dating or flaunt it to them. Stick to subjects that are more neutral and are less likely to cause hurt feelings.
4. Don't constantly text or communicate through social media. You need to hear their tones and know if what they are saying matches up.
5. If there are kids involved, don't put them in the middle of anything.
6. If you have close mutual friends, don't expect them to take sides. Limit how much information you share with people that you both are friends with.