

# How Taking a Break in Your Relationship Can Actually Make It Stronger

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Therapists share three tips for any couple considering a pause.

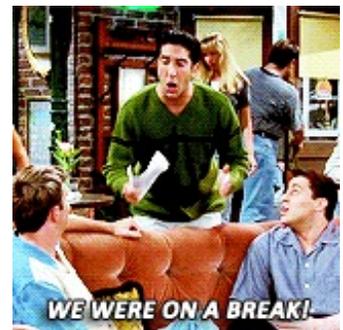
By [Anthea Levi](#)

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Any *Friends* fan knows that taking a break from a relationship can get tricky: Remember when [Ross and Rachel hit pause](#) and Ross ran into "the hot girl from the Xerox place with the belly button ring"?

Yeah, that didn't end well. And perhaps unsurprisingly, taking a break IRL can get complicated too. But in some cases, time apart can actually help strengthen a couple's bond, according to therapists.

"Of course if one person initiates a break because they've really just identified someone else they want to hook up with, that's not the best plan," says Holly Richmond, PhD, a sex therapist in Los Angeles. For a break to be helpful rather than hurtful, the partners need to share the same expectations for their time off, she says.



Rachel Needle, PsyD, a psychologist at the Center for Marital and Sexual Health of South Florida, agrees: "If you decide you don't want to end the relationship, but that you cannot continue on the road you're on, taking a break with a plan in mind— either attending therapy together or working on specific issues within yourself—can lead to a healthier relationship."

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Here, experts share a few tips for couples considering a breather:

## **Determine the purpose of the break together**

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Do you need space to clear your head? Or maybe you and your partner both want some time to reconnect with yourselves. Establishing an end goal will help give your break meaning.

It may also help you figure out the best way to approach it, says Alexandra Katehakis, PhD, a sex therapist in Santa Monica, California. "If the aim of the break is to decide whether you want to be in the relationship or not, then no communication for a

designated time allows you to make some decisions." But if an issue like infidelity or sex addiction is at play, it may make sense to do what's called a "therapeutic separation," she says, and meet weekly with a therapist.

## **Be clear about boundaries**

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Discuss how long the break will last, how often you'll communicate or see each other (if at all), and whether you'll still follow one another on social media. "You wouldn't believe how triggering social media can be for couples who have decided to take a break," says Richmond.

And make sure you talk about whether or not it's okay to hook up with other people during your time off, says Katehakis. "If one person decides to have sex outside the relationship and the other assumes monogamy, the break can do more harm than good."

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## **Use the time wisely**

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When you are away from your partner, be mindful of how you feel. It's not uncommon for people to say they've "lost themselves" in a relationship, says Richmond; if you feel more like yourself when you're *without* your partner, that might be a sign that the relationship isn't the best fit. But if the time apart makes you and your S.O. appreciate each other in new ways, you may come back to couplehood even closer than you were before.