

WHY LETTING GO FEELS SO HARD



Letting go sounds simple.

"Move on."

"Just accept it."

"Everything happens for a reason."

But if it were that easy, you would have done it already.

Letting go feels hard because whatever you're holding onto once meant something. It mattered. It shaped you. It protected you. And in some way, it still feels connected to your safety.

You're not stuck because you're weak.

You're stuck because part of you believes holding on is necessary.

Take a relationship that ended. Logically, you may know it's over. But you keep replaying conversations. You reread old messages. You imagine what you would say if you had one more chance. Why? Because letting go doesn't just mean accepting the breakup. It means accepting the loss of the future you pictured. The version of you who was loved in that specific way. The plans that won't happen.

That's not small.

Or maybe it's a career path. You worked for years toward something — a promotion, a business, a qualification — and it didn't work out. Letting go doesn't just mean changing direction. It means facing the fear that you "wasted time." It means updating the identity of being the ambitious one, the successful one, the one who had it figured out.

That identity can feel safer than starting again.

Sometimes it's even subtler. Maybe you were always "the strong one" in your family. The reliable one. The caretaker. Letting go of that role might mean admitting you're tired. It might mean asking for help. And that can feel terrifying because strength became how you earned love or stability.

So you keep carrying more than you need to.

There's a therapeutic approach called Internal Family Systems that explains this in a very human way. It suggests we all have different parts inside us. Some parts carry pain. Some parts manage life to prevent more pain. Some react quickly when old wounds get triggered.

Imagine a part of you that learned, years ago, "If I stay alert and keep replaying what went wrong, I won't be blindsided again." That part doesn't care that you're exhausted. It cares about protection.

Or a part that believes, "If I don't let this go, then it still matters." To that part, releasing the story feels like betrayal. Like saying the hurt wasn't real.

When you try to force yourself to move on, that protective part tightens its grip. That's why positive affirmations sometimes feel fake. One part of you wants peace. Another part thinks peace equals vulnerability.

Letting go feels hard because it asks you to step into uncertainty.

If I'm not the person who was betrayed, who am I?

If I'm not the one who failed, who am I?

If I'm not chasing that old dream, what am I chasing?

The past, even when painful, is familiar. The future is not.

But here's the shift: letting go doesn't mean erasing the past. It means allowing it to be part of your story without letting it run your life.

For example, you can acknowledge, "That relationship mattered deeply," without continuing to check their social media every night. You can say, "I worked hard for that goal," without using its failure as proof that you're incapable. You can admit, "Being strong helped me survive," without refusing support now.

Letting go often looks small.

It looks like not telling the same grievance story for the tenth time at dinner.

It looks like deleting the draft message you don't need to send.

It looks like applying for something new even though part of you says, "Don't risk it."

It looks like allowing yourself to enjoy a good day without feeling guilty for having moved on.

The reason it feels hard is not because you're incapable. It's because something inside you believes holding on equals safety, identity, or loyalty.

If you feel stuck, ask yourself something practical: What do I think will happen if I let this go?

Will I lose my sense of who I am?

Will it mean it didn't matter?

Will I get hurt again?

Will I have to start over?

Those fears are honest. And they deserve acknowledgment.

But staying frozen doesn't prevent pain. It just shrinks your life around it.

You don't have to drop everything overnight. You don't have to become a different person tomorrow.

Letting go can start with loosening your grip by five percent. Just enough to breathe. Just enough to consider something new.

Your life is happening now, not in the replay of what was.

Letting go feels hard because it asks you to trust that you can survive without clinging to the old version of the story.

And you can.

Not by force.

Not by pretending it didn't hurt.

But by choosing, slowly and repeatedly, to live forward instead of backward.

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