Divorce, Separation, and Finding Your Footing Again · About 4 minutes

Missing Them Does Not Decide About Contact

Giving longing room while considering the relationship as it actually is

You find a photograph and know exactly who would laugh at it. Your hand goes to the phone before the rest of the story catches up.

Knowing why you separated doesn't necessarily quiet the wish. You may miss the person who understood a reference without explanation. You may want evidence that the good parts of your shared life still matter. At times, what you miss is the response you hoped for and rarely received.

The longing can be taken seriously without immediately acting on it.

In this fictional example, Della sees a photograph of a place she visited with her former partner. She begins drafting a message and tells herself she is passing along useful travel information. Looking again, she recognizes that she wants something more personal: to know that the memory matters to the other person too.

That recognition changes the question. A photograph might open a welcome exchange. It might receive a brief answer, no answer, or a response that leaves her more unsettled. Sending it cannot require the acknowledgment she hopes to receive.

Bowlby's attachment theory helps explain why reaching can persist after separation from an important bond.[1] It does not decide whether contact is advisable. A continued wish can coexist with sound reasons for ending a relationship.

Before pressing send

It may help to ask what you want the exchange to provide. Information? Comfort? Some sign that you are remembered? You can consider Della's example rather than bring up a personal situation. Her wish to have the past acknowledged is understandable. Whether this person is willing and able to offer that remains uncertain.

The present relationship deserves a place in the decision. An affectionate memory does not erase contempt, repeated unreliability, or harm. Remembering those difficulties does not require declaring every good experience false. The history may contain both, along with your own conduct and commitments.

Contact also has limits that feelings cannot settle. A refusal of contact must be respected. Protective restrictions and legal requirements continue to apply. A practical pretext should not be used to bypass another person's boundary.

Some former partners do need to coordinate a shared account, belongings, or an existing obligation. That contact can have a legitimate purpose without signaling a wish to resume the relationship. Keeping its purpose clear may require support.

Della could decide not to send the photograph and remain sad. She might want to show it to a friend, put it away, or spend time doing something ordinary. None of those choices has to replace the former partner perfectly. Company can help with the evening while the particular person is still missed.

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Where communication is unsafe or unwanted, seek appropriate confidential support about boundaries and any essential arrangements. You do not need to enter another harmful exchange to demonstrate that you have understood your longing.

The photograph brings back one real piece of that life and leaves the question of contact in the present.

The photograph can stay with you. If it brings up a wish for the old closeness, give the wish a hearing somewhere you feel safe.

Companion reading · When the Life You Shared Comes Apart

Full pathway companion · included with paid learning
Pathway introduction: Divorce, Separation, and Finding Your Footing Again (public introduction; full modules require access).

Sources and further reading

[1] Bowlby, J. (1977). The making and breaking of affectional bonds: I. Aetiology and psychopathology in the light of attachment theory. The British Journal of Psychiatry, 130(3), 201–210. Source.

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