

# Facing Love Addiction, Braving True Intimacy

- Part I -

Imagine being lost at sea ... without a raft or even a piece of driftwood to hold onto. No land is in sight. Neither is the luxury liner that left you behind. It is just you, treading in the dark ocean waters that threaten to drown you. You are going nowhere fast. Rocking in the vastness of nothingness. Adrift. Vulnerable. Terrified.

Such a daunting scene depicts the internal world of the *love addict*. Even if unconscious, there is nothing fun about being so panicked. Feeling tenuous as one goes through life. Searching for one sure thing that will provide stability. In this three-part article, we delve into all things love addiction. What exactly is it? How did this happen? And lastly, what we can do to heal our hearts toward healthy intimacy?

## The What

We begin with the "what." What exactly does it mean to be a love addict?

A *love addict* seeks to enmesh, to blend into a person, a relationship or an experience. Love addicts search for something outside of themselves to provide them with the emotional and life stability they lack internally. In other words, love addicts use intensely stimulating romantic experiences to (temporarily) fix themselves and feel emotionally stable.

As we will discuss soon enough, the reason for this behavior

is born out of anxiety. Underneath love addiction lies both a fear of abandonment *and* a fear of healthy intimacy. I need enough of you to survive but not so much that I am in over my head. This narrow window makes life and relationships enormously troublesome.

## **Common Characteristics of Love Addicts:**

**1. Love Addicts are Desperate for Connection.** Without you, there is no me. Therefore, I need you for survival. Because I cannot tolerate being alone or rejected, I find it unbearable to not be in relationship. I am constantly craving a romantic attachment and spend a disproportionate amount of time and attention searching for one.

As a love addict, once I am in a relationship, it becomes more important than the relationship I have with myself. I obsessively think about, want to be with, touch, talk to, and listen to my partner. I rate this person as superior to me, or having more power.

Connection is a priority over protection of myself because being in a relationship with you is the only way I know to safeguard me. Such emotional need and desperation means that I will do anything to keep the relationship. I will go against what I want and who I am to "keep" the relationship. I will participate in activities that don't interest me or go against my personal values to please my partner. I will give up important interests, beliefs and friendships to maximize time in the relationship.

In sum, rarely knowing this is happening, love addicts neglect themselves to overvalue their partner.

**2. Love Addicts are Cold-Blooded.** By this, I don't mean that they are cold people. Quite the contrary ... they can be too nice! Love addicts are not able to hold kindness towards themselves. They are cold-blooded as a reptile. In order to maintain an internal state of warmth, they have to sit on a rock in the sun. They depend on external forces to keep them sustained. They look outside themselves for emotional food and supplies.

Similarly, another suiting metaphor for a love addict is a bathtub with an open drain. One has to keep filling the tub because the water flows out the bottom. Nothing sticks. The love addict is in constant search for emotional goodies outside themselves to make them feel whole. For example, if you tell me that I am wonderful, it goes in and then goes out. I get momentary pleasure but then it vanishes and I need you tell me again. And again. And again. Exhausting. For both parties.

**3. Love Addicts Lose/Lose** because they can't tolerate being alone *and* they can't tolerate being close. This conundrum sets him or her up for serial, dysfunctional relationships. Love addicts desire and thus, search for a perfect relationship. One that will give them that continual feeling of new love, that endorphin "high" of idealized connection. They use sex, seduction, and manipulation (guilt/shame) to "hook" a partner they imagine will live up to his/her fantasy.

But here is the problem with that - love addicts mistake intense sexual experiences and new romantic excitement for genuine love. Once the newness fades and the opportunity for real engagement actually begins, the love addict is quickly out of his/her comfort zone. True connection requires we go beyond the superficial to depth and mess. And because love addicts don't do mess, they have the inability

to create and maintain an intimate relationship.

Furthermore, once in a relationship, love addicts present themselves with unrealistic expectations for unconditional positive regard from the other person. Love addicts want to be cared for and treasured to such a degree that they are always disappointed. No one can satisfy their insatiable desires. They will go to great lengths to get partners to fulfill the big fantasy they have been holding in their minds for so long and they get very angry when this fantasy isn't satisfied. They feel detached, unhappy, restless, irritable and discontent.

So, they go back and try someone new. Someone else to give them that sustained rush. But this feat is impossible. A tragic lose/lose.

**4. Love Addicts Don't Do Feelings.** Like all other addicts, love addicts use compulsive behavior to avoid their inner world of emotion. If I am acting out, I can dodge whatever is going on inside me that I choose not to face. If the love addict is not in a current relationship, he or she might use sex and fantasy to fill the loneliness. Or they might use anonymous sex, porn, or compulsive masturbation to avoid "needing" someone, thereby avoiding relationships all together. If the love addict is in a relationship, he or she might use sex or romantic intensity to either tolerate or evade difficult emotions.

**5. Love Addicts Give to Get.** If the tune for the love addict is without you there is no me, then I will do anything to keep you and hold onto the relationship. Thus, I become a caretaker. Or, in a more blunt way, I become manipulative in that I am not giving from a place of generosity with no strings attached. Shit, I got a braided thick rope tied to this baby ... I

am giving to get. I am giving to make sure you are pleased with me. For if I can make you happy, then I can preempt my worst nightmare - your leaving me. And that is intolerable for the love addict.

**6. Love Addicts Progress toward Destruction.** Because love addicts simultaneously need connection while not being able to tolerate it, they tend to choose partners who are emotionally unavailable and/or verbally or physically abusive. Such partners demand a great deal of attention and caretaking but in turn, they don't even try to meet the love addict's emotional needs.

This toxic mix sets the love addict on a downhill progressive path. The love addict finds it difficult to leave an unhealthy relationship despite repeated promises to oneself or others to do so. The love addict develops increasing tolerance of inappropriate behaviors from his/her partner. The love addict becomes more dependent on the partner and surrenders more and more responsibility to him/her. The love addicts decreases his/her self-care. He/she becomes numb to feelings and to reality. "I'm okay, I'm fine" become repeated mantras. The love addict feels trapped and helpless to either fix or end the relationship. As the love addicts sinks more and more into despair, self-value plummets. Disillusionment and depression take root. And often the abused now becomes the abuser as the love addict cannot see his or her own immature irrational offensive behavior.

Like a frog put into cold water with the flame turned high, the gradual decline often goes unrecognized. The love addict stomachs more and more, all the while becoming less and less. A body soon to exist without a soul.