

## Facing Love Addiction, Braving True Intimacy – Part II

How and why does one become a love addict?

The causes of love addiction are fairly easy to identify. Throughout one's development, there is usually some semblance of abandonment – either in the form of a deficit in nurturing, direct neglect or out and out abuse.

As young children, love addicts did not attach in a healthy way to his/her original caretakers. However, such inadequate bonding was not the fault of the child. He or she was born to be loved and they are powerless to make this happen. But the experience of the child is one of abandonment and the often unspoken implication is “because you are worthless and unlovable, I will not care for you.” As this message of neglect and early loss is internalized, low self-esteem ensues and a hunger from the emotional and relational shortfall is generated. This inadequacy and/or inconsistency in nurturing leaves the child hungry for connection. The child is left in a state of exaggerated longing with immense emotional needs.

Then, the child grows up. At least physically. But there, deep inside, often unknown to the conscious mind, exists a small famished little boy or little girl who craves connection. And this connection is defined and sought after as something he or she should obtain *outside* him/herself. And unfortunately, this idea of going from the outside in (as opposed from the inside out) to satisfy our need for contact is very much reinforced and indoctrinated by our culture. Images of perfect romantic love and happily ever after endings infiltrate our books, movies, small talk and fantasies. I want to feel better and I want you to make that happen. Thus, the love addict begins the endless search for a romantic Object to ease the pain. “Help me feel loved and wanted. Keep me from the buried loss and all the corresponding feelings of not getting what I wanted the first time around.”

And to make matter worse, the love addict often repeats the original crime. Because I can't bear the idea that I am unable and unworthy of connection, I return to the bloody scene, the chalk marks on the sidewalk, in hopes of having a different outcome. So, off I go, attracting an unavailable person that will put me back at the starting point. A clean start. Let's try this thing again. “Love me, love me,” the love addict screams with words and action. “Tell me I am lovable. That I can connect. That I am valuable. That I won't be alone forever.” And once again, the love addict will be dejected by another limited human being who just can't. Or won't. And the idea of my worthlessness is reinforced. Over and over, around and around. With despair that the original message is a correct one and yet relief ... could I even tolerate being loved and cherished? Nah. Better to stick with what I know. At least it is familiar. And keeps me out of the risk of being known, loved, engaged and involved. And, perhaps more importantly, out of the depths of the grief because those that should have loved me in the first place were just not capable. Ouch.

So, like all other addictions, we now see the hamster wheel. The endless spinning. The downward spiral.