

Relationship Addiction: Using Love As A Drug

Joy Carroll, Ed.D., Psychologist, LifeLine Counseling Center

Relationship addiction and abuse go hand in hand. Love addicts tend to attract and be attracted to persons who are emotionally absent and/or abusive. In love addiction, relationships are used as a drug to escape and medicate the pain of low self-esteem, lack of personal identity and fear of abandonment. Love addicts believe they are incomplete alone and their identity is defined by a relationship with someone else. They romanticize relationships and smother their partners by placing unrealistic demands and expectations on them.

When the love addict acts needy and desperate, their partner may react by withdrawing or becoming abusive. This behavior makes the love addict feel abandoned and panicky. If the partner backs off, the love addict then intensifies efforts to get him or her back at any cost. For more details, see *The Hard To Get Game*, *The Controlling Game* and *The Please Don't Leave Me Game* in the section called *Dating Games* on pages 85-88.

When a relationship ends, the withdrawal process for the love addict can be similar to persons experiencing drug and alcohol addiction. Physical symptoms such as loss of appetite, depression, inability to concentrate, lack of energy, and stomach distress are common in love addiction withdrawal. It is easy to understand why relationship addicts desperately cling to relationships to avoid these symptoms.

How Do I Know If I'm A Relationship Addict?

The following list can help you determine if you have symptoms of relationship addiction. Any one of these items can indicate areas that are a setup for love addiction and toxic relationships. If you are addicted to a relationship, it's important to begin the process of recovery as soon as possible. In order to detoxify and deal with the underlying causes of the addiction, it is often recommended that persons in recovery refrain from romantic involvement until healing takes place. Participation in an ongoing recovery program is important because love addiction, like other addictions, is a pattern that can be easily repeated when one stressed and needy. For more information on recovery programs for love addiction, contact an individual or agency providing counseling services.

Danger Signs of Relationship Addiction:

- Having a compulsive drive for love to the point that a relationship is based on need rather than choice
- Feeling a sense of incompleteness, sadness and emptiness one believes can only be relieved by being in a relationship
- Spending considerable time thinking about another person; giving excessive time and attention to him or her
- Wanting a partner to prove love in unrealistic ways; expecting a partner to fulfill all of one's needs
- Panicking at the possible absence of a partner; clinging frantically if the partner begins to back off or terminate the relationship
- Failing to take care of personal needs while overly focused on a partner's needs
- Doing things contrary to one's own set of values in order to keep the relationship
- Being in love with a partner's potential—what a partner could become rather than the reality of who he or she is

- Feeling devastated when a relationship ends; experiencing emotional and physical withdrawal symptoms; willing to do anything to reestablish the relationship and end the pain
- Not willing to leave a relationship voluntarily unless another one is in place