

## Relationship Addiction

Change is to human life what the metamorphosis is to the caterpillar. It is the inevitable cycle of life. If there is no change, there is no life. *Susan Peabody*

There is a lot in the media about love addiction, but what about Relationship Addicts? How do we differ from Love Addicts? What makes us harder to treat? Why are we more likely to relapse? This is important to me, because I am a recovering Relationship Addict, and I feel the more I understand this disorder the better able I am to get better—to change.

I believe that Relationship Addicts [RA] were the first type of love addict to be recognized. They were first called co-alcoholics and then later co-dependents. As the media moved on to write extensively about the Love Addict, Relationship Addicts have been left in the dust until recently. Now there is a resurgence of interest in the RA.

I diagnosed myself as a co-alcoholic in 1982 when I heard about it at a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. A few years later, when I did not seek recovery, I found myself in a relationship with a drug addict and was told by my sponsor that I was co-dependent. She said I was trying to fix myself by trying to fix my partner, and I was willing to do anything to make this happen. I was dependent on him and he was dependent on drugs.

Thirty two years later, I have come to recognize the following about myself and others in my same situation.

First of all, to be a Relationship Addict we have to be in a relationship. Love Addicts, which I have also been, obsess about unavailable men.

Secondly, there is more than one type of Relationship Addict [RA]. I have been all of the following.

Type One are RA's who no longer love their partner romantically. The honeymoon is over. Still, we cannot let go. Usually, we are so unhappy that the relationship is affecting our health, spirit and emotional well being. Even if our partner batters us, and we are in danger, we cannot let go. We are afraid of being alone. We are lonely without a partner. We are terrified of being single. We are afraid of change. We do not want to hurt or abandon our partners. I describe this as "I hate you don't leave me."

Type Two are RA's who are addicted to a relationship with a parent, child, friend, sibling, or anyone for whom they have never had romantic feelings.

Type Three is the RA who goes from one relationship to another without taking a break in between. Like Type 1, we are terrified of being alone. We feel unloved when we are single. We seek out a new relationship when the one they are in begins to deteriorate. Some RA's of this kind have never lived alone in their entire life. Relationships are our life.

Signs to look out for.

1. We are too dependent on our partners to get our needs met.
2. We do not know where we leave off and they begin.
3. We hang out with them too much.
4. We cannot make decisions without their input.
5. They come first. We always do what they say to do. We give into them. We give them everything they want. We will even sacrifice the needs of our children to make them happy because when they are happy we feel they will not abandon us. We think "If he needs me he will stay with me." Neglecting my children is my deepest regret as a Codependent Relationship Addict in recovery.
6. We doubt our own decisions.
7. Our needs are less important than their needs.
8. When we are not in contact we go into withdrawal.
9. We have an overwhelming compulsion to contact them when we are not together.
10. We always want to make sure they are all right and taken care of.
11. Everyone has told us the relationship is unhealthy but we keep hanging on.
12. We have a high tolerance for pain, suffering, depression, and loneliness, but no tolerance for rejection and perceived abandonment.
13. We see ourselves as generous people when in reality we are controlling.
14. We have to be controlling and manipulative to hold on to these people.
15. We have chosen someone with some kind of addiction, or someone who is unavailable emotionally.
16. We often partner with people who need our financial support.
17. We try to buy love because our self-esteem is so low we don't feel we deserve it.
18. At the later stages of the addiction, we can't stand our partner but we can't let him or her go. We even feel relief initially when they are not around, but then panic sets in and we want to make contact for no explainable reason. This is our morbid fear of abandonment.

19. Treatment for RA's is more complicated because we want to continue trying to "fix" others to feel better about ourselves, but in reality we are avoiding treating ourselves.

Reconvey

It is easy to believe that ending our relationships will solve the problem. Sometimes it does. But for some of us "no contact" does not always work. We have children or we do not believe in divorce.

If this true, I believe that Relationship Addicts need to approach recovery differently. We need to create healthy boundaries which help us stay connected and yet enjoy our own lives.

In my life, I had to learn where my relationship with my husband ended and where mine began. I had to learn what healthy boundaries are and how to enforce them. This process took time but I never gave up. As Robin Norwood explained in her book, *Women Who Love Too Much*, the people you have been addicted to will rebel when you start taking care of yourself, but they will fall in line and actually encourage you if they really care. If they don't care then just live with this.

Finally I had to learn and internalize that I am as important as everyone in my life. Creating my own independence was my first step in establishing healthy relationships with others. When I love and honor myself I have more to offer others. As my sponsor used to say, "You can't give away what you don't have." Today, I offer others not the things they think they want but the gift of a healthy partner which is even more meaningful.

Susan Peabody