



### Understanding Self Destructive Relationships

Some of us find that we keep being attracted to those who are unavailable. This might be because the person we want lives abroad, or is married, or devoted to their career or an addiction and not their love life. Even when we are aware of this repeating problem, we find we can't break out of the pattern. We certainly don't choose to break our hearts deliberately.

Sex addicts often choose partners who are emotionally unavailable. The addict doesn't want the intimacy, as a disconnected relationship supports leading a double life where the addictive behaviour can continue.

Love addicts are different – because they choose relationships with unavailable people, which will enable the love addict to live the relationship obsessively in their heads, in fantasy. I nearly used the word 'object' here, because the person chosen as a lover is unavailable, and hence not present fully in reality. This kind of relationship might well be supported with email and internet contact, and texting. The end of the road is likely to happen if the two lovers actually spend real time together.

Yet the love addict desperately wants a relationship and is not deliberately creating their self-defeating pattern. The underlying roots of this kind of problem are not unique to sex and love addicts – they belong in the experience of early infancy and parenting. The person would have experienced an unreliable or difficult parent/caregiver, with the result that they have grown up with a confused sense of what comprises an intimate bond.

The simplicity of how this happens is stark: we repeat in adulthood whatever we did to get love as a child. Because he/she is totally dependent upon the caregiver from birth, the child learns to adapt or comply to get the parent's love. And if the parent is emotionally damaged themselves, unable to connect or to love in a healthy way, the child will try to adapt to emotional abandonment as the norm. This might mean the child being abused in some way to feel loved, or being compliant and suppressing their natural self in order to please.

Abusive or warped relationships are often the tragic inheritance of adults who have had this kind of trauma in childhood. Although it is painful and difficult it is nevertheless familiar, and hence

somehow safe because it is known territory. This kind of person will be irresistibly attracted to repeating dysfunctional relationships again and again. Of course they are seeking the one ideal person who will love them: perhaps someone who is powerful or charismatic who can provide validation and love. Sometimes the attraction is an attempt to repair what was wrong in their childhood, to prove the possibility of a different result. Yet again and again they will fail.

If someone has experienced painful abandonment or deprivation in very early relationships they may feel threatened by closeness. Their psyche will feel so afraid of experiencing that pain of abandonment again that they will avoid intimacy at any cost. This will play out in adulthood by the person choosing partners who will make intimacy impossible, who will reject or abandon them. Despite the pain of it, this kind of relationship nevertheless feels safe because it is familiar, and also evades the risks associated with real intimacy.

Tackling these problems is not easy, but change can happen. By exploring old fears and experiences of relationships with a counsellor or psychotherapist, it is possible to shift old patterns. The therapeutic relationship plays a vital role in this process, as the person opens themselves to exploring the pain and fears of their early life, and letting it go. Healthy relationship patterns, trust and a readiness for intimacy are just waiting for permission to emerge.