Chapter two, cleansing your abandonment wound

“Will I ever I love again?”

People in the throes of a breakup universally express the fear that they will never love again. I was afraid of this myself for a few months after losing my life partner. In the midst of the despair and hopelessness of shattering, we believe that losing our loved one means losing the possibility for love and connection forever. It is this fear, above all, that makes ending a relationship so anguishing. As therapists, we know only too well how hard it is to convince people that their lives are not over. My message in this chapter is that there are steps we can take to ensure a brighter future.

If I’d had a crystal ball during my own abandonment that promised I’d find love again, I could have endured the awful isolation more easily at the time. If I could have foretold the future and known that I was not in permanent hell, but in a transitional period heading toward even greater happiness, this knowledge would have quelled so much of the fear and desolation of the shattering stage.

Almost anything is bearable if we know it is temporary.

Now that my ordeal is behind me, how I wish I had a crystal ball for the many thousands of people who contact me during their own time of shattering to let them see that if they are willing to perform the work of recovery, they will be able to find the love they always sought. That is the hopeful message this chapter brings.

Not everyone needs to find a relationship to be happy, but everyone needs to know they
could succeed at one if they wanted it.

Some people feel chronically shattered because they desperately want someone to care about, but after years of effort, can’t find a relationship. Their future looms ahead of them, a frightening spectacle of loneliness. They have a sense of endless doom and a heightened vulnerability running just below the surface of their everyday lives.

“My biological clock is running out,” says Beverly. “It’s too late for true happiness now. It feels as if my whole mission in life has been aborted.”

Some people going through a breakup feel especially desperate because it’s happened before. They’re caught up in patterns in which they keep getting abandoned over and over again. Once again, they’ve failed to get a relationship to last. They describe the anxiety, wakeful nights, and loss of confidence in themselves.

Am I condemned to loneliness for the rest of my life?

Will I ever love again?

It may seem too early to address these questions even before you’ve come to terms with a recent breakup. But most people need immediate answers to these burning questions, especially during the early throes of heartbreak when hopelessness runs at an all time high.

The answer is that of course you will find connection and love again, even if it means having to discover more about yourself. Even if it means that in the midst of your desolation you have to face your feelings, face yourself, face your reality, and CHANGE.

This chapter allows you to counter the helplessness and despair of the shattering stage with a vision of change. You can have a future filled with vitality and love – if you’re willing to work toward it. This vision will take you beyond the hopelessness of shattering to cleansing, the
next step of healing. You’ll learn to cleanse your abandonment wound of the self-defeating patterns that have caused love to go awry, as well as the virulent messages of rejection and unworthiness you have picked up from previous heartbreaks and losses. You’ll explore your own personal love map to discover why it’s so hard to let go of a former love and connect to a healthy new one.

During the angst of heartbreak, most of you vow you’ll never go through this again but don’t know how to go about breaking your cycles of abandonment. You need to know that tools are available – new information and hands-on exercises to help you make a healthy lasting connection to someone you love.

Some people protest: “Isn’t this jumping the gun? Is it too soon to worry about finding someone else when I’m still grieving the last one?”

I answer: This initial stage of shattering is an ideal time to address the patterns that may sabotage your attempts to find love. When your defenses are shattered, you are most receptive to reconstructing new patterns.

It’s important to point out that not everyone’s heartbreak is part of a destructive pattern.

“I never had a problem with other relationships. They ended amicably when we realized it didn’t work. But this time I’m heartbroken for the first time.”

***

“What patterns? There’s only been one person in my life and now he’s gone.”

Some of you will move from the pain of heartbreak to a period of emotional self-reliance, and, if
you choose, to a successful new relationship, all without a hitch. Others can fall into a pattern of re-abandonment partly owning to the neuro-chemicals triggered by going through the trauma of abandonment, a common problem we’ll be fully exploring throughout this book.

I’m going help you discover some of your personal truth and share new information with which to inoculate yourself against future heartbreak. Once you know how to identify your cycles, you are no longer a victim of heartbreak, but a person with a mission to transform your life. We’ll take an inventory of your old values and your current ideas about love to assess problem areas. Once you know where to place the fulcrum in your life, you can apply your energy where it’s needed and lift your life to your desired goal, moving beyond shattering to connection.

**Lookin’ for Love in all the Wrong Places**

Millions of people are in a chronic form of abandonment grief. They are searching for love and can’t find it. They’re in a state of involuntary aloneness and don’t know how to get out. Operating on hunches, I’ve learned to ask my isolated clients questions that may seem irrelevant to them at the time, like, “Whom do you sit next to at work?” What I’ve learned from my detective work as a psychotherapist is that in many cases, they have found love on numerous occasions but weren’t able to recognize it at the time. They were looking for another feeling and dodged the opportunity for a real relationship.

In addressing thousands of personal stories you have sent to abandonment.net, I am reminded once again about how widespread this problem is – the tendency to avoid the
opportunity for a real relationship based on false values and ideas. In fact, love might be staring you in the face at this very moment but a potential mate remains emotionally invisible to you. Instead, you are pining away for someone who is unavailable, someone who left you feeling abandoned.

*What happens when love is invisible?*

At the beginning of a breakup, it is usually only your *ex* who remains emotionally visible to you. You really can’t see or feel anyone else. The new suitors fall short because of who they aren’t – they aren’t your ex. They only make you miss your ex more. New potential sources of love and security seem to lack that special appeal. They remain romantically invisible because your ex dominates your attention.

While you’re in acute heartbreak, it might seem irrelevant to consider whether or not at some critical point in the past, you might have overlooked a person with whom you could have developed a loving relationship – a relationship that might have nurtured your self image, confidence, and security. It’s true that we can’t change the past, but at least we can learn from it.

Many of you may be resistant to considering the idea you could have overlooked an available lover.

“*If that were true, I’d have felt some sort of attraction.*”

We belong to a culture immersed in the romantic notion that attraction is destiny. We go around looking for someone who stirs up the right chemistry. Contrary to conventional wisdom, it is possible to develop chemistry toward a person you may not have felt initially attracted to. There are millions of people populating the planet whose successful, loving marriages were arranged by their parents. In these cases, intense love feelings and attachment
develop after the union was formed. There are biological mechanisms in place to see that this happens. Sleeping in proximity to someone promotes bonding, as does skin-to-skin contact, kissing, caressing, hugging, intimate sex, orgasm. So do promises of fidelity, financial interdependency, and steadfast companionship. Caring together for children or pets, working in partnership toward mutual goals, and marking your milestones as a couple with rituals and celebrations – all of these deepen attachment and kindle the love-bond between two people.

To suggest that people reared in Western societies are sometimes unable to recognize love even when it hits them over the head may seem preposterous. Many people think they are specially equipped with radar to detect the right person – if not at first sight, at least by the second date. But a common bind for millions of lonely people is that they are only attracted to emotionally unavailable partners. Their radar hones in on those who are destined to leave them in the end. They’re drawn like moths to abandonment’s flame.

At this point, consider the proposition that your body and mind might contain false notions about love, about what a relationship is supposed to be, and about what kind of partner to chose.

Here is a Q to get you thinking:

LOOKING A LOVE-HORSE IN THE MOUTH

Q Have you suspected any that of your friends are looking for love in all the wrong places?

Name an example

How did it make you feel to watch them push someone away just because he or she didn’t stir up
the right chemistry – when you suspected all along that this person might have been right for
them and brought them security? ________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
How did you feel watching your friends pursue an abandoner? _________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
Do you think there was ever an instance in which love showed up in your own life and you
weren’t able to see it? Describe ________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
Did any of your friends recognize it, even when you couldn’t? _________________________
What potential benefit does considering these insights have in your life? _________________
____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

A common and vexing problem keeping many of you on the outside of love is a condition of the
heart which I call abando-holism. It occurs when abandonment takes on a mind of its own and
becomes a compulsion\textsuperscript{7}. You’ve heard of food-oholism, work-oholism, shop-oholism and, of
course, alcoholism. Well, here comes another addictive pattern – a bando-holism.

Abandoholism is similar to the other ‘oholisms, but instead of being addicted to a
substance, you’re addicted to the emotional drama of heartbreak. So you pursue unavailable
partners to keep the romantic intensity going, and to keep your body’s love-chemicals flowing\textsuperscript{8}.

What makes someone an abandoholic?

Abandoholics are people who’ve been hurt in the past and the abandonment fear they
acquired conditions them to equate insecurity with love. Unless they’re pursuing someone they’re insecure about, they don’t believe they’re in love. When someone comes along who wants to be with them, this suitor seems too easy-to-get to arouse that required level of insecurity they’ve come to associate with love. If they can’t feel those yearning, lovesick sensations, they aren’t feeling anything. So they keep pursuing unavailable partners who bring out craving, pursuing feelings.9

The reason I call this pattern abandoholism is because it’s psychobiologically addictive.10 Many people have a compulsion to be abandoned because they’re addicted to the high stakes drama of an emotional challenging relationship – and the love-chemicals that goes with it.

One of the underpinnings of abandoholism is fear of abandonment. Feeling attracted to someone creates a fear of losing that person. Fear of being abandoned can become so intrusive that it disrupts your ability to maintain your emotional balance while pursuing a new relationship. Try as you might to hide your insecurity, it drains your confidence. You try to put your best foot forward, but your neediness and desperation show through, causing your partners to lose romantic interest. They sense your emotional suction cups aiming straight toward them and get scared away.

Another aspect of abandoholism is fear of engulfment. Fear of engulfment is at the opposite end of the emotional spectrum. It occurs when someone is pursuing you and now it’s YOU pulling back. You feel engulfed by the suitor’s emotional attraction toward you. When fear of engulfment kicks in, you zealously guard your autonomy at all costs and feel threatened lest your suitor take it away.

Fear of engulfment can erupt in mini anxiety attacks. The panic is about the fear of
losing yourself in becoming emotionally obligated to that person. Their needs and expectations might engulf you, causing you to abandon yourself.

Whether fear of engulfment sets in gradually or all at once, it effectively shuts you down emotionally and sexually. You want out of this relationship because you feel burdened by taking on the emotional responsibility of an available partner.

Fear of engulfment is one of the most common causes for the demise of new relationships, but it is carefully disguised in excuses like:

1. Q. Check those that seem familiar
   
   ___ “He just doesn’t turn me on.”
   ___ “I don’t feel any chemistry.”
   ___ “She’s too nice to hold my interest.”
   ___ “I need more of a challenge.”
   ___ “I feel nauseous whenever she tries to get closer.”

Abandoholics tend to swing back and forth between these emotional poles. Your pendulum swings between fear of abandonment and fear of engulfment. You’re either pursuing hard-to-get-lovers driven by a desperate urge to bond with, or you’re feeling turned off because someone is genuinely interested in you. You’re always at opposite ends of the emotional spectrum, never on mutual ground, never secure, never at peace.

Some people are so afraid of rejection that they avoid relationships altogether. This is called abandophobia\textsuperscript{11}.

Abandophobics are closely related to abandoholics; in fact, they’re just another variety of
the same difficulty. Abandophobics act out their fear of abandonment by remaining socially isolated, or by appearing to search for someone, when in fact they are pursuing people who are unattainable, all to avoid the risk of getting attached to a real prospect – someone who might abandon them sooner or later.

There’s a little abandophobism in most abandoholics.

Many of you describe getting hooked on someone who dangles the possibility of a relationship in front of you, but never emotionally follows through. What better way to avoid a real relationship than to pursue an eternally unavailable partner. To help you interact with these insights, here is a snap quiz.

I.Q. Check off all that might possibly be true for you.

__ You choose unavailable partners who keep you insecure.

__ Insecurity is your favorite aphrodisiac

__ You are afraid to risk the closeness of a real relationship.

__ You only feel attracted when you’re in pursuit.

__ You need hot, fresh, new love to keep you always on the move for the next relationship.

__ You feel engulfed when someone wants you.

__ You have unrealistic expectations of your partners.

__ You think you haven’t found the right person.

__ You wouldn’t join any club who would have you as a member.

__ You need an emotional challenge to sustain your interest.
How do these patterns set in?

For both abandoholics and abandophobics, a negative attraction tends to be more compelling than a positive one\textsuperscript{12}.

The syndrome of self-sabotage underlying this was most likely cast in childhood. You may have formed an insecure attachment to one of your parents. You struggled to get more attention from them, to get them to favor you, accept you, treat you nicely, but they failed to provide what you craved most – unconditional love and attention. The insecurity, yearning, and neediness you felt toward your parents caused you to doubt your self-worth and put them on pedestals. Over time, you internalized this need for approval and you idealized others at your own expense. It became a pattern.

Now as an adult, you recreate this scenario by giving your love-partners too much power. By elevating them above yourself, you recreate that old familiar yearning you grew accustomed to as a child. Feeling emotionally deprived and less-than is what you’ve come to expect. It’s the only scenario you can “feel.” You’ve come to associate these needy, lovesick, insecure feelings with being in love.

Not all people who have an abandonment compulsion came from insecure attachments\textsuperscript{13}. Some of you had loving, caring parents, but felt insecure in your relationships with peers. You felt attracted to heartthrobs in high school, but didn’t feel strong enough about yourself to negotiate mutual relationships with them. Adolescent relationships are notoriously fickle\textsuperscript{14} to begin with, their emotional dynamics painfully unstable and scarring. Many of you internalized self-doubt during this volatile time and inculcated fears that continue to haunt the future.

\textit{Why does the insecurity linger?}
Rejection from your past and present heartbreaks is harbored deep within the self, conditioning your amygdala (discussed in Chapter One) to fear that what happened in the past will happen again. Recent scientific research shows that rather than dissipate, fear tends to incubate. It gains intensity over time. The internal worry, “Am I worthy?” grows louder each time you go through another rejection. The mounting uncertainty compels you to look to others for something you’ve become too powerless to give yourself: esteem. When you seek acceptance from a withholding partner, you place yourself in a one-down position, recreating the unequal dynamics you had with your parents or peers. You choreograph this scenario over and over, playing out a fantasy where you try to win love and acceptance from a hard-to-get lover and remain enslaved by your own need for approval.

People develop these patterns after years of emotional conditioning. Your losses, heartbreaks, and disappointments have a cumulative affect, causing you to respond most keenly to those who treat you ‘less than’ and stir up the old familiar feelings of want, need, and desperation. Conversely, you are unable to feel anything when someone freely admires or appreciates you as much as you do them.

It is important for therapists seeking to help people overcome these entrenched patterns to provide specialized support and prepare to vigorously challenge their client’s tightly held beliefs. These patterns do not give up without a fight because the roots of the problem run so deep.

Therapists interested in more information, go to www.abandonment.net.
Why do we elevate those who hurt us?

Being left by someone you love activates fear – primal abandonment fear – set deeply into your mammalian brain. Abandoners become powerful figures to your amygdala, owing to the pain they caused by leaving you. Pain is a powerful reinforcer, conditioning you to feel aroused whenever you think about or see this person. This ongoing reactivity (known as ‘carrying a torch’) confuses you into thinking that you must still love the person and that she must be very special to hold your interest for so long. In fact your ex may not have been special at all, but because she caused such intense pain, you confuse your lingering reactivity as proof of how irreplaceable and special she was. This may not be true at all. What you are experiencing is separation anxiety – a natural biological concomitant to breaking an attachment and adjusting to the rigors of being alone\(^\text{16}\) – regardless of the specialness of your former partner.

Feeling insecure and idealizing those who cause pain set the stage for developing abandoholism.

Once you make your abandoner ‘special,’ your life is ruled by contradictions. You confuse calmness for boredom, tension for excitement, insecurity for love\(^\text{17}\).

Scientific Tidbit: Being with someone who is a challenge stimulates surges of catecholamines (adrenaline, NE), which, combined with your opiates and other hormones causes you to feel infatuated. Infatuation is a cocaine-like emotional high that intensifies your sexual feelings and mediates the rigors of intimacy. Caught up in the heat of passion (mediated by these neurochemicals) two people just getting acquainted are able to be intimate without embarrassment. To stay high, abandoholics keep seeking uncommitted partners. When someone comes along who is available, your body doesn’t produce enough catecholamines to support this high. You experience this as “having no chemistry” and go into withdrawal from your addiction. Unless you’re inebriated on love chemicals, you can’t tolerate the intimacy of a real relationship. So you run.

Like a junky desperate for a love-fix, you search for another lover who arouses just the right dose of fear to get you emotionally loaded. You’re in denial: when your body is ‘attracted’ (addicted) it tells you you’re ‘in-love.’ When your partner becomes available, your love-hormones stop flowing and you fall out of love.
Abandoholics are in denial and extremely cunning at keeping the truth hidden from their friends, therapists, and themselves. What truth? That they appear to be looking for a relationship when in fact they are looking for emotional candy to feed their abandohol addiction.

As people learn about this concept, they find all kinds of ways to apply it.

“I’ve spent most of my thirties strung out on abandohol,” declares Roberta, having gained the awareness that her volatile emotional life has been the result of being attracted to abandoners.

The abandonment compulsion is insidious. You didn’t know it’s developing. Until now you didn’t have a name for it. It’s been unconscious. You didn’t realize that you’ve transferred unresolved feelings from your parents and old high school heartbreakers directly into your current relationships. Yet little by little you’ve grown addicted to the roller coaster of pursuing abandoners, having become your own worst enemy. Millions are caught up in this drama, a passion play I call, “The Agony and the Ecstasy.”

The Ecstasy is the opportunity to conquer that love-challenge – the thrill of seduction.

The Agony is feeling rejected – the bittersweet tragedy of unrequited love.

When you meet partners you think are better than you, you can’t resist going after them because they are a challenge. You imbue them with power, see them as special, and then feel immediately insecure. They respond by treating you as if you’re not good enough. Now you’re hooked. You get conquest fever, drawn to the drama. You obsess about how to win them over. You’re incessantly craving a love-fix. The more your partners withhold, distance from and reject you, the more intense the craving. You feel ecstasy when you’re trying to seduce them and agony when they’re pulling away.
Abandoholics have learned to associate the agony and ecstasy with being in love. They get propelled into the drama full throttle.

**Insecurity is an aphrodisiac.**

If you are a hard-core abandoholic, you’re drawn to a kind of love that is highly combustible. The hottest sex is when you’re trying to seduce a hard-to-get lover. Insecurity becomes your aphrodisiac. You can’t appreciate the ecstasy without the agony. These intoxicated states are produced when you sense emotional danger – the danger being your lover’s propensity to abandon you the minute you get attached.

At the other end of the seesaw, you turn off and shut down when you happen to successfully win someone’s love. If your lover succumbs to your charms – heaven forbid – you suddenly feel too comfortable, too sure of him to stay interested. There’s not enough challenge to sustain your sexual energy. You interpret your turn-off as his not being right for you.

*Do your friends and therapists help or hinder you?*

Whether you’re a hard core love-junkie or just a garden variety abandoholic, the most common maneuver is to tell your friends, “I know she seems ideal for me, but there isn’t any chemistry,” or “He’s a nice guy, but I’m not attracted to him.”

Your friends tend to believe in the mythology of “the right chemistry” and accept your excuses at face value (and so do many therapists). You’ve programmed them to agree with you. You get them to say, “You’re right not to settle,” or “You just need to find the right person.” To break these patterns, you need to eject your old tapes and reprogram your friends. Be honest
with yourself and realize that nobody is directing your life but YOU.

*How about following your gut?*

Both ends of the spectrum – abandoholism and abandophobism – cause its victims to misinterpret self-help’s latest directive to “follow your gut.” In your case, following your gut most likely got you into these patterns. Your gut got you to pursue someone who made your heart go pitter pat, not because he’s the right one, but because he’s likely to abandon you. And your gut got you to avoid someone else because he didn’t press the right insecurity buttons.

Enrich your mind. Follow your wisdom. But until you overcome your abandonment compulsion, beware of your gut. Your earlier heartbreaks and disconnections have made it hard for you to read it correctly.

**Gaining self-esteem by proxy:**

Some people try to gain self-esteem by association, that is, by selecting a partner who has socially valued attributes that help you compensate for something you feel is lacking in yourself. Psychoanalyst and author Richard Robertiello refers to this type of choice as a ‘narcissistic extension.’ The danger in seeking to esteem-by-proxy is that your self-worth remains in someone else’s hands. This leaves you in a one-down position and perpetuates your cycles of neediness and low self-esteem.

As you’re working your way through the stages of abandonment, take advantage of the possibilities that are all around you for renewal, growth, and love. You need to learn more about yourself, come out of denial, cleanse your perspective of the negative thinking tapes of the past, and transform your patterns.
The Abandoholic Checklist:

If you’ve been looking for love in all the wrong places could it be

I.Q. Dig deep, be honest, and check all that apply.

__ You are unable to tolerate the sober dynamics of a mature relationship?
__ You are accustomed to being on the outside looking in – it’s an emotional state you’re familiar with?
__ You are a perfectionist and this causes you to reject imperfect, yet realistic candidates?
__ You prefer the ideal relationships in your mind to realistic flesh and blood ones?
__ Your inner child is so lonely it smothers your lovers with too much neediness?
__ You obsess about your ex because it is the only way you can maintain any connection with him/her even though it keeps you in pain?
__ You’re emotionally clinging to the past to avoid taking a new risk?
__ You’re not able to handle the emotional responsibility of being needed and wanted?
__ You’re unable to make decisions, to commit?
__ You’re afraid of someone getting too close to you for fear they will engulf you with their needs and expectations?
__ You have a poor self image and can’t tolerate any obvious shortcomings in your partner, as if his or her flaws reflect directly on you?
You seek ‘unrealistically attractive’ partners to compensate you for something you don’t like about yourself – trying to gain self-worth by proxy?

You don’t know how to appreciate a mutual relationship because without the lovesick feelings, you feel bored and empty?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, be assured that we will continue to identify the myths, false values, defense mechanisms, and patterns that keep you outside of love. In Chapter Seven, we will explore the issue of how to love available partners. Taking incremental steps, you’ll get unstuck and overcome your barriers to finding love.

**Exploring your Personal Love Map**

*Examining your values*

If you’re just coming out of a relationship, you’re probably not yet ready to act on many of the insights you are reading about here in this chapter. Even so, it helps to plant the seeds of these ideas now so that they can come up later, yielding change. If you’re not ready to think about anyone but your ex right now, consider the possibility that someday you may be in a position to accept a new person into your life. Your goal here is to inoculate yourself against future heartbreak.

Let’s look at the cinderblock wall that blocks you from love. It’s usually put together by romantic myths left over from junior high school days and false values acquired from living in our material world. These values and myths are based on outside appearances and unrealistic expectations about what love is – fickle notions of who is a good catch. The

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**Word of Caution:**
During shattering, it is too early to reconnect with a new person. Shattering is all about learning how to handle the feelings, not how to run into someone else’s arms. But it is important to have vision, a game plan for the future. People have a hard time believing they have a future because their hopes and dreams have been shattered. That’s why I’m shedding some light at the end of the tunnel now.
glue holding your stonewall together comes from your primitive ego, not your adult wisdom. It is reinforced by old defense mechanisms which have become maladaptive to your task of finding a relationship. Finding a relationship means following the high road.

*What is your idea of a good catch?*

Take time to examine your values as they relate to your choices in partners. More often than not, to break your cycles of abandonment, you have to change your values – values about who you consider to be or not to be a suitable catch. Changing your values means examining deeply held beliefs, questioning their merit, actively refuting their assumptions, and substituting more realistic ones.

Let’s dig around a little bit into the foundation of your belief system and examine your concept of what you think is attractive and which attributes, such as financial success, personality, looks, confidant air, educational achievement, social background, etc. you value most.19

What attributes do you value about prospective partners? _______________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

*Do you remember when you first learned to value these attributes? Where were you? What were the circumstances? Which friend or family held similar values and may have influenced you?* _______________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

*Which of these old values tend to get you into the most trouble when choosing a potential partner?* _______________________

19
What new values can you substitute that might ensure greater emotional stability in future relationships?  __________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Repeat this line of questioning each time you identify another trait you’ve been attracted to.

As you begin to sort through your values, discarding some, replacing others, you are taking an important step in recovering from your addiction to abandohol. You may for example discover you have a weakness for men with big egos and that this usually causes your self-esteem to plummet and your heart to break. What to do? You can choose to abstain from this type of man. As you revamp your values and beliefs about love, you gain emotional sobriety. You come down from the love-chemicals and high stakes drama to a more sober place of wisdom. Rather than remain in the intoxicated pursuing role, you can remain emotionally temperate, developing a relationship with yourself to become self-reliant, ultimately choosing partners who can meet you halfway. Stay grounded – connected to yourself for once – rather than giving all of your power away and pursuing the illusion of love.

What would emotional sobriety look like in your life?  _________________________

____________________________________________________________________

How would it affect your choices in forming new relationships?  __________________

_____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
What would its benefits be? _______________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

What strengths will help you recover from your abandonment cycles? ______________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Solutions and Antidotes

Sometimes the new lesson you must learn has to do with learning how to recognize the dynamics of a healthy, secure relationship. For many of you the lesson is learning how to tolerate being loved.

I.Q  (Check to your heart’s desire)

Do you want someone who:

___ knows his/her own heart and mind?

___ would rather work through the conflicts and barriers than abandon the relationship?

___ doesn’t lose interest even after the initial infatuation dies down and the falling in love feelings subside?

___ wants to be together as much or more than you do?

___ has real staying power?

Now before you get all excited and think, “Yes! This is exactly what I want!” think again. Before convincing yourself that you are capable of handling an available mate, query yourself to see if you’re as ready as you think you are. It may be necessary to come out of denial and peel away old layers of self-deceit before you can truly entertain this possibility.
Ask yourself: If this person were fully available to you and not going away, would you still have feelings for him or her? How might it feel to be in a relationship where unless you walk away, you remain committed. Since your mate isn’t going anywhere, unless you get rid of him, you’re in it seemingly forever.

**Fifteen check-off points for Coming out of Denial**

1. Dig deep into your soul where your personal truth resides and check all that apply.

When someone wants and needs me:

__ Would I suddenly start to feel ambivalent about this extremely available person, i.e. start to feel uncomfortable about some of his or her deficits?

__ Would I feel stuck?

__ Think I might be settling – that this person is not good enough for me, not the type I’ve been looking for?

__ Find my own ability to commit isn’t kicking in?

__ Start acting badly toward my partner to provoke him into ending it?

__ Would I arouse my partner’s insecurities by pulling away and then criticize him/her for being too insecure, too needy, or too dependent on me?

__ Suddenly think someone else is more attractive?

__ Complain about feeling bored, confined, pressured?

__ Start pick, pick, picking at his or her inadequacies? On a bad day, become emotionally abusive?
__ Feel envious of my single friends and wish I had my freedom back so I could meet new people?

__ Begin to shut down emotionally, feel no passion, no sexual interest? Get that proverbial headache at bedtime?

__ Feel unduly influenced by my family and friends’ apparent disapproval of my partner?

__ Keep one foot in the relationship, one foot out and remain non-committal?

__ Start telling my friends that the chemistry isn’t right. This way they can become my accomplices and dutifully recite back, “You haven’t met the right person yet” to help me justify my feelings of wanting to break up?

__ Have difficulty accepting the normal ambivalence that is part and parcel of a realistic relationship? ♥

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you’re like most of us. Learning to resist the emotional candy of conquest and accept the emotional sustenance of a realistic relationship requires a great deal of perspective and insight. It takes a lot of courage to admit you have a problem adjusting to the relatively tame, seemingly boring dynamics of a secure relationship. You deserve credit for being able to lift the veil of self-deceit. Denial is a dense fog that keeps the rest of the world too confused to recognize the obstacles blocking them from finding love. For you the fog is lifting. Your task is to stay grounded and focus your libidinal needs, not on hard-to-get lovers, but on mutuality and trust.

Q When I’ve felt ambivalent about a partner, I’ve tended to act out in the following ways:

______________________________________________________
No matter what your issues are – whether you’ve been ruled by fear of engulfment, have difficulty tolerating intimacy, or feel unable to take on the emotional responsibility of a real relationship, now is the time to commence real change. Whether mutuality has bored you in the past and being loved turned you into a viper, after going through a painful abandonment, loneliness is even more unbearable. Loneliness holds a hidden gift. It helps you hit your emotional bottom. Falling into its dark pit motivates change. Once you learn to cleanse your wound of self-defeating behaviors, this bottom you’ve hit acts like a trampoline that propels you to heights of new awareness.

Abandonment recovery provides tools with which to deconstruct your invisible barriers. Your goal is to find greater life and love than before.

**Cleansing**

As we have discussed, we have a tendency to idealize those whose love we long for, sometimes especially those who have deeply hurt us. One of the ways we avoid facing a loss is by psychologically tucking them into our heart where they can remain part of us. Unfortunately we often make this mental representation more special and powerful than we make ourselves. We incorporate the abandoner so tightly that his message of rejection and unworthiness seeps
into the core of our belief system where it undermines our sense of self and interferes in the choices we make.

Shattering cracks us open to the core, exposing raw nerves, and spewing contaminants. We feel everything. Our abandonment wound is open and accessible. We learned about centering in the last chapter. Our task for this chapter is to cleanse the open abandonment wound. First and foremost, we’re cleansing our patterns of abandonment, sorting through and discarding the debris of false values, outdated beliefs, and negative messages left over from previous losses, disappointments, and heartbreaks. In revamping our values, we start from a new beginning.

Swan lesson two, cleansing

In the story, the little girl returns to the black swan for guidance. She has been centering in and encountering feelings of terror and grief. Her need for her parents creates unbearable anguish and pain. Holding them sacred creates the false illusion of keeping them near, but their profound message of rejection blocks her from finding inner peace. She arrives at the water’s edge, watching her beautiful swan glide toward her.
“It hurts inside,” cries the little girl. “I want my daddy to come get me!”

“Your daddy is not here with you now, Amanda,” says the swan. “Needing him and not having him is causing you great pain. Inside that pain, at its very center, is a special place where only you reside. Center in and cleanse it of bad feelings. Push away those who wound your feelings.”

“It hurts too much! Daddy, please come back.”

“You do not have to let those who cause you pain inside your sacred space.” says the swan. “If someone brings bad feelings, do not share your sacred space with them. That part is there for you and you alone. Push the feelings out of your center so that you can find peace inside.”

“But I don’t want to push my mommy and daddy away,” cries the little girl. “I only want them to come back.”

“Pushing them out of your center doesn’t mean pushing them out of your memory or out of your life,” explains the swan. “It just means pushing them out of the space inside that is sacred. Go to this alone place in the very center of yourself and push the bad feelings away.”

“I want my mommy and daddy.”
“You can still love your parents and yet keep your center safe inside. Keep it a private place where only you reside.”

“How?”

“It means using your imagination, Amanda. Imagine that you are pushing the people who bring bad feelings away from your center. Imagining it makes it so. Imagining creates peaceful feelings. Imagine pushing away the bad feelings.”

The little girl opens her hands, palms facing outward, and begins pushing away from her chest.

“That’s right, Amanda, push those who wound you out. Push away the wounders. Keep the feelings they bring out of your center. Find the space inside that is all yours and only yours and keep it safe. Let your imagination help.”

Healing Gestures

As an observer of human behavior, I have seen people perform this simple “pushing gesture” with one or both hands. Their hands are slightly cupped and turned outward as they motion away from their chest. They might be describing how someone’s actions have hurt them and they use this gesture to soothe themselves. I didn’t consciously register the meaning of this simple gesture, so universal to human body language, until it found its way into this, the second
lesson of the black swan.

The little girl performs this gesture in an exaggerated way because she is profoundly alone and her task is enormous. Now I am able to see that this is the universal gesture people use when attempting to protect themselves from taking someone’s hurtful actions to heart.

Try this simple gesture yourself. Imagine that you are pushing your abandoner or others who have wounded you out of sacred space within. Imagine that your center is a new beginning place, an emotionally serene and sober place, a place that is free from the debris of old tapes, rejection, your need for approval, and the need to make others powerful. Imagine being able to see yourself moving forward without all of the contaminating negative messages you’ve received over the years. Imagine leaving behind the self-defeating patterns that have kept you outside of love.

“The center I’ve found,” says Beverly, “is actually the center of my own abandonment wound, cleansed of impurities. When I center in, I go into the center of my wound, because that’s where I feel life most intensely, where I love, I need, and I want – the place I know I’m alive.”

Following the example of the little girl, exaggerate the cleansing gesture – one you have probably used many times without realizing it. Now deliberately push negative messages and thoughts away from your chest, as if you are cleansing your wound of the outdated values and self-defeating patterns you’ve accumulated over your life. No matter how attached you may still feel to someone who has wounded you, push the bad feelings out of your center so that you can find peace within.
Does missing your ex cause painful feelings? Describe ____________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What negative messages about yourself have you picked up as a result of your abandonment?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What feelings must you work through to find freedom from the pain they bring? ________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Describe what it feels like when you are able to create a sacred space within – one that is free
from wounded feelings and from those who created them? _____________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What strengths enable you to push your abandoner out of your center? ________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What other wounders have you known? Which ones sent negative messages that have left
scarring? _______________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

How did this experience affect your sense of self-worth? ____________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What insight and strengths can you use to cleanse your inner self of negative messages and the
patterns they create? ______________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

This is not the only chapter that will help you push the abandoners out of your sacred space. As we go along, you will find additional support for taking your old heartbreakers off the pedestals you’ve put them on, thereby cleansing yourself of their all-powerful messages about not being good enough.

**Back to the Future**

Once again, the life-changing exercise Back To The Future we explained in the last chapter can propel you forward.

Imagine that it’s approximately two years from now and you’re sitting in your comfortable chair before your beautiful view. You’re feeling at peace, fulfilled, and happy because you have successfully overcome your cycle of abandonment. You feel good about yourself for having accomplished this.

*Describe the pattern you’ve overcome in the future.* ______________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

*What main obstacle might you have removed to accomplish this?* ____________________
________________________________________________________________________

*How did you remove it?* ____________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

*What did you have to do differently on a behavioral level to make this happen?* __________
Name the specific action you took to initiate this change. __________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

**Action Vow: “Today I will _____________________________________________________________”**

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**More Food for Thought**

☑ Describe when you’ve felt there was no chemistry with a person who seemed to be right in every other way?

_______________________________________________________________________________

Do you know someone who avoids available partners because they aren’t ready to assume emotional responsibility of a real relationship?  

_______________________________________________________________________________

Have you ever had this problem?  

_______________________________________________________________________________

Name a time “following your gut” got you into romantic turmoil.  

_______________________________________________________________________________

Have does this awareness help?  

_______________________________________________________________________________

Addiction is when you want something that you know is not good for you. Describe your own issue with this problem as it relates not to substances, but to romantic partners.

_______________________________________________________________________________
Name a quality you are attracted in a mate, one that winds up backfiring on you. __________
____________________________________________________________________________

Do you feel you’re making progress with these issues? How? _________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Name strength for overcoming your negative attractions and emotional addictions. _________
________________________________________________________________________________________

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO
1 [2 – LOVE MAP:] “Love map” is a term I borrowed from Tian Dayton’s book, Heartwounds The Impact of Unresolved trauma and Grief on Relationships.

1 [2 – SHATTERED DEFENSES – GOOD TIME FOR GROWTH:] Many drug rehabilitation programs use “shattered defenses” to therapeutic advantage. They promote a therapeutic regression, using provocative techniques to break down the addict’s defenses to increase his reliance on therapeutic principles in hopes that he will internalize a healthier set of behaviors.

3 [2 – ROMANTIC LOVE:] Tiffany Field in “Attachment as Psychobiological Atunement: Being on the Same Wavelength,” shows how we become attuned to our partners (as seen in the synchrony of pupil dilation, respiration rate, vocal cadences, etc). Read Virginia Colin in Human Attachment for insight into the psychobiology of forming primary attachments.

4 [2 – LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT CHEMISTRY:] The chemistries involved in attraction are extensive: Casomorphin, PEA (phenylethylamine), oxytocin, DHEA, to name a few. Read Helen Fisher, Anatomy of Love.

5 [2 – BIOLOGICAL MECHANISMS TO ENSURE ATTACHMENT:] Myron Hofer in “Hidden Regulators, Implications for a New Understanding of Attachment, Separation, and Loss” explains that when two people become entwined in a relationship, they meld into a psychobiological unit – a mutual regulatory system involving neurochemicals, hormones, pheromones, and other bodily systems. See also C. Parkes et al, in The Place of Attachment in Human Behavior.

6 [2 – ARRANGED MARRIAGES:] For differing views on the subject of arranged relationships and romantic attraction, see I Kissed Dating Goodbye by Joshua Harriss and Let’s give Dating a Chance by Jeramy Clark.

7 [2 – ABANDONMENT COMPULSION:] In coming up with the alternative term for “abandoholism” – abandonment compulsion – I am indebted to my friend and colleague Peter Yelton.

8 [2 – FLOWING LOVE CHEMICALS:] One of many the neuro-hormones mentioned above – oxytocin – has been called the “interpersonal hormone.” Laura Klein, Laura Cousins, and Shelly Taylor offer insight about oxytocin and gender differences involving the stress response. They report that when oxytocin is released along with stress hormones in women, it helps to buffer their flight or fight response and encourages them to connect with other women. Oxytocin’s ability to calm fight or flight responses does not occur in men because testosterone, which men produce in high levels when stressed, is found to reduce the effects of oxytocin, while estrogen seems to enhance it. According to the authors of this UCLA study, when women are stressed they tend to befriend; when men are stressed they hole up alone or become aggressive. This article contributed by Nama Frankel. See “Women and Men Differ in their Response to Stress” dated March 16, 2002.

According to researchers John Capitani et. al. in “Biology of Maternal Behavior,” oxytocin is involved in milk ejection, uterine contraction, and sperm transport. Damasio in Descartes’ Error, suggests that oxytocin is released during stimulation of genitals and nipples, orgasm. Oxytocin is believed to disrupt memory of painful childbirth (so that women will continue having children).

9[2 – LOVESICK FEELINGS:] Robert Sapolsky in Why Zebra’s Don’t Get Ulcers offers a possible explanation about why we get caught up in self-defeating patterns. He suggests that organisms will habituate to a stressor if it is applied over and over because it is predictable by them, and it triggers a smaller stress-response (p.214). Joseph LeDoux in The Synaptic Self says that once you learn a pattern [of avoidance] the amygdala drops out of the circuit because it does not need to involve fear to be aroused (p.251).
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10 [2 – ABANDOHOLISM IS ADDICTIVE:] Jaak Panksepp et.al. in “Brain Systems for the Mediation of Separation and Social Reward,” say that when we build a close relationship, our brain produces opioids. When we break up, the production of certain opioids decreases, and we go into physical withdrawal similar to heroin withdrawal. In other words, our closest relationships actually are opioid addictions – we become addicted and go into withdrawal from our own internal narcotic drugs.

11 [2 – ABANDOPHOBISM:] Abandophobism (avoiding relationships out of fear of abandonment) is a term invented by Armond Demille during our radio interview in 2000.

12 [2 -- NEGATIVE ATTRACTIONS ARE MORE COMPPELLING:] I learned this paradoxical fact of life from Norman Moore ACSW in private consultation.

13 [2 – INSECURE ATTACHMENTS:] This term is found in the work of Mary Ainsworth in “Infant-Mother Attachment.” It’s important to note that criteria for “secure attachment” have been examined for possible cultural biases. See Fred Rothbaum, et. al. in “Attachment and Culture.” For an excellent overview, read Margaret Talbot, “Attachment Theory: The Ultimate Experiment.”

14 [2 – FICKLE ADOLSECENT RELATIONSHIPS:] Psychologist Melissa Downey enlightened me with the insight into unstable and labile per relationships, contributing to the emotionally provocative social environments of school playgrounds, etc.

15 [2 – FEAR INCUBATES:] Incubation of fear is an important finding in Joseph LeDoux’s research on the amygdala, presented in Emotional Brain.

16 [2 – SEPARATION ANXIETY:] Eric Fromm in the Art of Loving suggested that separation anxiety is the root of all emotional distress, disturbance, and dysfunction.


18 [2 – AGONY AND ECSTACY:] Virginia Colin in Human Attachment provides insight into the primal emotions involved in love, citing similarities between romantic love and infant-to-caregiver attachment. In romance, your mood depends on your perception of whether your beloved is responsive or rejecting, just as the baby’s feeling of joy and distress depends on his perceptions of his primary caretaker’s availability or responsiveness(p. 297).

19 [*2 – VALUING ATTRIBUTES:] Lee Alan Dugatkin in The Imitation Factor: Evolution Beyond the Gene, provides valuable insight into the acquisition of some of our romantic values and our tendency toward “monkey see monkey do.” He cites an example in which guppy females chose partners based on which other females found him desirable.

20 [2 – CHOOSING HEALTHY PARTNERS] Julia Vormbrock in “Attachment Theory as Applied to Wartime and Job-Related Marital Separation,” proposes two psychobiological systems involved in human bonds – caregiving and attachment. If a person has difficulty depending on others, she might have an avoidant attachment style, but be quite comfortable with others depending upon her (pp.122-144). A lot of abandonment survivors are most conformable in a caregiving role and tend to initiate intimacy only when a prospective partner needs their support and is in a non-threatening position.