Why Addictions are Intimacy Killers

Addiction and Intimacy

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Addiction and Intimacy: 
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Introduction

As an observer of human behavior I have come to a conclusion: addiction prevents relationship intimacy. Over the past few years I have worked with many individuals struggling with various forms of addiction. I am convinced that intimacy and addiction are juxtaposed to one another. I have never met someone who is struggling with an addiction who can also tell me that they are in a deep satisfying intimate relationship.

This observation has led to the question: why does someone struggling with an addiction have a hard time creating an intimate relationship? My musing on this topic can be found below. In addition, I will introduce how someone seeking to overcome addiction can develop true intimacy.

Before I share my thoughts let me first attempt to define addiction and intimacy so that we begin at the same starting point.

Definition of Addiction

There are three common components in addiction literature. A simple definition encompasses two of the key points: Addiction is a recurrent failure to control the behavior and is a continuation of the behavior despite increasingly harmful consequences. The third component involves the compulsive nature of addiction; the compulsive cravings are so powerful they overtake rational thinking in the addict.

The three elements of addiction:

- Recurrent failure to control one’s behavior
- Continuation of behavior despite consequences (job loss, loss of family, etc.)
- Compulsive behavior

Definition of Intimacy

The definition of intimacy is more challenging to identify. It is much like asking one to define love. Therefore, the concept of intimacy will be described rather than defined. Intimacy between two people generally involves sharing physical touch and closeness, disclosing emotions, discussing feelings and personal thoughts, developing mutual trust, and engaging in spiritual experiences together.

The six key elements of intimacy:

- Physical intimacy
- Emotional intimacy
- Verbal intimacy
- Intellectual
- Psychological intimacy
Now that intimacy and addiction have been defined and described, let’s look at the specific reasons why addiction destroys intimacy.

**Why Addictions are Intimacy Killers**

Achieving deep levels of intimacy is not something that spontaneously happens in relationships. Society continually struggles to understand how profound and true intimacy can be generated. The culprit of misconceptions is media that presents the fantasy view of intimacy. For example, how often do you see couples who are as deeply “in-love” as couples seen in the movies? Such examples are definitely around us, but they are not the norm. The media leaves out the challenges and difficulties that happen after “Happily Ever-After.” Here’s the point: True intimacy requires two people to be emotionally mature and self-aware. One partner cannot create intimacy by himself or herself.

Now bring addiction into the equation. A person struggling with addiction generally is self-focused, has low self-worth, lacks emotional maturity, and has feelings of being out of control. Each of these components hurt any chance of intimacy in relationships. I would submit that it makes true intimacy virtually impossible to achieve.

Individuals struggling with addictions still engage in relationships. They find excitement in being sexual and they attempt to connect with others. They date and marry. Their relationships are often intense for better and worse. However, their relationships often end in disaster. Why? Intimacy requires a person to let another person see into their very core. Any other kind of intimacy is limited, regardless of the intensity. Limited intimacy can simply be described as pseudo-intimacy. You cannot fake genuine intimacy.

In true intimacy you cannot keep secrets and you cannot hide who you really are. Those dealing with addictions often struggle in relationships because they maintain secrets and they feel the need to hide who they “really” are from their partner because they fear rejection. The consequence is that their partner knows something is wrong, but the addict must keep their secret or they will have to “get honest” about the addiction they live with each and every day.

*Self-Focus (Part 1—The Problem)*

It is not fun being an addict. Living with secrets and the constant thoughts surrounding the addiction is gut-wrenching. The very fact that an addict thinks so much about their addiction limits how much they think about those who are around them. Their partners feel resentful of the addict because “it” is the number one priority in their lives. If you eat, drink, and sleep your addiction, there is little room for your partner. Consequently, partners of addicts feel abandoned and left out. They feel like they do not receive empathy or compassion when they have problems or concerns. Those struggling with
addictions have a hard time seeing the needs of others because they are so caught up in their own world of addiction.

The exception to Self-Focus

Please note: There is an alternative behavior to the self-focus approach. This approach occurs when individuals attempt to focus on others needs rather than their own. These individuals become so focused on taking care “others” (e.g. kids, neighbors, anyone but themselves) that they appear like everything is okay. This accomplishes two things: It gets the attention off of them and it makes up for the inner secret that encumbers their life. Internally they may believe that if they serve others and work hard enough, everything (their addiction) will go away, diminish, or even be justified.

Low Self-Worth (Part I—The Problem)

I have never met someone struggling with addiction who feels a high self-worth. People with high self-worth are people who are in control of their lives. They feel control in their lives and can influence the outcome of things that happen to them. They also lift others up, develop close relationships, and give of their time and talents to others. Those struggling with addiction have a hard time looking in the mirror. They beat themselves up with their own thoughts. They truly believe that their cause is hopeless and that they are helpless. They buy into the lie that change is impossible.

As a consequence of feeling low self-worth they are uncomfortable being around others, including their partner. They often isolate themselves and prevent others from getting close to them. This isolation only exacerbates their problems and keeps them from interacting or connecting with others. Soon they believe that people are judging them and looking down upon them. These are the self-worth issues that addicts deal with on a regular basis.

Emotional Maturity (Part I—The Problem)

Those involved in addictions have likely had a hard time dealing with their emotions for much of their lives. It is highly probable that they grew up in homes where love and acceptance were limited. They may have had controlling parents who were more concerned about looking “right” and being “perfect” than they were in their child’s happiness. In such an environment, expressing undesired emotions was not permissible. Any emotion (sad, lonely, scared, and frustrated) was likely stamped out or ignored. The common result of living in this type of environment is hiding from reality and turning to numbing experiences (addictions). As a result they have learned to self-medicate when dealing with difficult experiences. They never learned emotional regulation. Consequently, their range of emotions from anger to sorrow and feelings of genuine love and joy are undeveloped. They struggle dealing with their own anger. They have a hard time expressing feelings of love. Simply said, they are emotionally unprepared to deal with intimate relationships. Can they learn? Absolutely! But I am getting ahead of myself.
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Being Out of Control (Part 1—The Problem)

“Eighty percent of my thoughts are about my addiction”, claimed my client. “Eighty percent” I asked. “Yes, eighty percent, at least” was the reply.

Do you think about anything 80% of the time? This is the life of an addict. Their thoughts and appetites control them. They have physical and psychological cravings. Their need to satisfy their addiction occurs at anytime and anywhere. They desire to take control of their life, but feel like that is impossible. As a result of their dominating thoughts, they struggle with almost all of their relationships. They will miss activities and events because of their addiction. They may give up previous hobbies and passions for their addiction. These absences only leave them feeling more out of control.

When a person feels out of control they often have problems with proper eating habits, exercise, hygiene, work, and finances. They literally lose focus of life long goals until they realize that their life is not what they wanted it to be. This is when they feel bad about wasted time, ruined relationships, and lost jobs. Yet, they are scared to make the changes necessary to regain control of their life. Intimacy for those whose lives are out of control is non-existent.

Seeking and Finding False Intimacy (Part 1—The Problem)

Those struggling with addiction do not avoid relationships. In fact, ask anyone struggling to overcome an addiction and they will tell you that one of their deepest desires is to have a loving relationship. Some may even tell you that they have achieved intimacy, but their understanding of intimacy has been limited due to the way society and the media have depicted intimacy. True intimacy is far more than sexual intercourse and reaching orgasm. Those who misunderstand intimacy find themselves in empty unfulfilled relationships. Over time their intimacy wears off. It is much like eating empty calories. They feel good while eating them, and remain satiated for thirty minutes afterwards, and then they are gone.

Another problem with misunderstanding intimacy is that individuals generally find what they are looking for. In other words, if one is looking for sex, they can find it. Developing sexual intimacy before the other types of intimacy (e.g. emotional, intellectual, and psychological) places too much emphasis on the physical. While physical intimacy is enjoyable, it cannot sustain a relationship. Developing the other forms of intimacy is critical or the relationship will eventually hit significant obstacles.

Sexual intimacy is so enjoyable that some couples learn how to hide or ignore other relationship problems because their sex is good. Many couples have told me that they have great sex, but they are divorcing. Does this make sense? Sure, they were enjoying the act of sex, but avoiding real intimacy. I believe that so many people just want to be loved so they engage in sex, but never do they get to the point where they feel a deep level of intimacy. Eventually, sex alone is not enough. Hiding behind sex can last for years, but not a lifetime.
Fear of Intimacy (Part 1—The Problem)

Another challenge for individuals dealing with addiction is that they have a genuine fear of intimacy. Under “emotional maturity” described above, I discussed the influence of one’s childhood on addiction. Growing up in an environment where parents were emotionally unavailable, neglectful, controlling, and/or rejecting, creates internal fears of intimacy for these individuals as they mature. Their relationships were likely not with caring parents who taught them love and appreciation for others. Compassion and expressions of love were likely left out of consistent day to day routines.

These emotional voids either create individuals who are extremely skeptical of relationships or it turns them into someone who pursues relationships with all they have, only to feel let down because they care more about the concept of the relationship than their newest pursuit. Those who are skeptical of relationships often push others away or enter relationships where they can control everything. Ultimately, they prove to themselves that relationships are a waste of time. Statements like, “Women are all a bunch of whining, complaining, money seeking, selfish, leeches” or “Men are sex hungry, uncaring, self-centered jerks” are common to hear from individuals who are skeptical of relationship intimacy.

This type of language makes it clear that their life experiences have created so much internal pain that they have turned people into things and objects. Once people are turned into objects that will hurt you, you perceive them as the enemy and must defend yourself from them. It then becomes easier to treat others with little respect, which certainly makes achieving any type of intimacy impossible.

Those who pursue relationships often seek out closeness to prove that they are lovable. They enter in and out of relationships as often as Americans eat out. They are very good in the beginning of relationships, but are very poor in the end. Their desire for intimacy is so strong that they pursue with passion. Early in relationships this passion is appealing to others. However, their intensity often pushes others away. They find in relationships that they are doing all of the work to maintain the relationship. Eventually they realize that they care more about the relationship than the person in whom they are interested. This awareness generally leads them to pull away as they have experienced this pattern all too often. In the end they too are afraid of intimacy.

Since intimacy is unachievable, even hurtful to think about, the addictive behavior becomes the default behavior to escape from pain. Individuals mask their hurt and emotional pain. They guard their emotions and pain because they are scared of what they might learn about themselves and others. Truly their addictive behavior becomes their comforter.

This makes it challenging as a professional since I realize that I am asking a person struggling with addiction to give up their best support. Most commonly they learned, in their childhood, to turn to their addictive behavior. Asking them to give that up for a potentially scary relationship is like asking a cat to jump in water. Yet, I continue to ask
because I know deep down in the heart of ALL human beings, seeking and finding true intimacy is a core desire.

In my educational classes on relationships I often quote Victor L. Brown’s comment from his book, “Human Intimacy.” He wrote, “The lives of most people are histories of their search for intimacy, of their attempts to be socially, physically, and emotionally close to others.” As often as I quote this statement, perhaps even I have overlooked its importance. If searching for intimacy is a key part of our life history, why are we so unprepared to achieve it? I believe that there are two key answers to this question: First, we have a fear of being rejected. Second, achieving intimacy demands self-awareness and emotional intelligence beyond what our family’s and society prepares us for.

**Fear of Rejection (Part I—The Problem)**

The very idea of being rejected in relationships can be debilitating. Emotional rejection, according to Wikipedia, “is the feeling a person experiences when disappointed about not achieving something desired. It is commonly related to a quest of emotional relations, such as among romantic couples. A person may reject for several reasons: lack of reciprocal interest, circumstances like societal codes, desire to make the other person perceive complexity ("playing hard to get"), and fear of placing himself or herself in a situation of vulnerability and heightened interaction.”

When in a relationship everyone has to decide exactly how much they will let another person into their “inner realm.” In every relationship you choose how vulnerable you are willing to be. In essence, you are faced with deciding how much you will let that person into your life. You have to deal with your fears and you must decide if you will pursue your most wonderful dreams or let them go.

Do you dare to let someone close to your inner world? Is it safe? Far too many people, even those without an addiction, fear rejection. They fear if they let someone into their world, that person will reject them. **Self-sabotaging beliefs**, such as: “If they knew what I was really like they would not want to be with me” prevent the possibility of intimacy.

On a logical level it makes sense that so many people have a fear of being rejected. Relationships are failing all of the time. Our culture has opened up the idea that relationship failure is not only possible, but at times inevitable. Two generations ago, divorce was increasing, but it is nothing like it is today. With roughly one out of every two marriages ending in divorce for the past twenty-five years, an entire generation has experienced relationship uncertainty.

Sadly, our society has no idea what to do to reverse this trend. We make it appear that there is nothing we can do about relationship failure. Is it any wonder people turn to other behaviors such as addictions for comfort rather than nurturing and developing an intimate relationship? Eventually, addictive behaviors become easier to turn to when feeling lonely, bored, isolated, hurt, angry, or stressed. Without hope, many wonder if intimacy is ever possible and consequently far too many people approach relationships with
apprehension and fear. The debilitating fear of rejection can be overcome, but it is contingent upon regaining legitimate self-worth. This will later be explored.

Self-Awareness and Emotional Intelligence (Part 1—The Problem)

Self-awareness and emotional intelligence comes with a price. Our families and society do not teach us how to deal with our emotions. Boys don’t cry. Girls whine. Never mind the reasons why. Teaching children to understand their emotions simply does not happen. Then when they mature, they are ill prepared for the pain and stress of adult life. Going to college, getting a job, paying bills, learning how to be in a serious relationship, having children, changing jobs, meeting social obligations, are all issues adults must face.

With maturation comes the expectation that you should know how to be “in charge.” It makes little sense to me that we expect individuals who grow up in families that do not teach them how to succeed and then when they reach adulthood, as if it is a right of passage, they automatically know how to be in relationships, deal with life pressures, and in the end come out smelling like roses.

The neglected piece that we are missing is teaching children to develop enough self-awareness that they understand and cope with their own emotions rather than running and hiding from them. We literally have a society that has no idea of how to deal with emotions. Substance abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, depression, addictions, and anxiety are all manifestations of a society that does not know how to deal with stress.

Those who have learned how to deal with stress and painful emotions find more freedom and inner peace in their lives. The outcome is they are more capable of creating intimate relationships because they understand their own emotions. They are not afraid of them.

Now that I have painted a negative, painful picture of why intimacy is NOT occurring in our society, let me address the question you may be asking, “Is it possible for one struggling to recover from an addiction to achieve intimacy?” The answer is absolutely. The journey is hard, emotionally draining, and physically challenging, but in the end it is the addicts’ greatest accomplishment in life. Never have they achieved something so difficult. Overcoming an addiction is hard enough, developing an intimate relationship is beyond comprehension. Yet, it is possible. All people can stop living below their intimacy potential. So how does this happen? I am glad you asked.
Overcoming Addiction and Achieving True Intimacy

Now comes the fun part. I have previously described the reasons why addiction destroys the possibility of achieving intimacy potential. My work would be half done if I left you without sharing the other side of the coin. True intimacy can eliminate the need for addiction. Addictions and intimacy fulfill the same purpose. They both fill the need for emptiness, loneliness, sadness, fear, stress, worry, anxiety, boredom, etc. One however, leaves you feeling like a million dollars while the other makes you feel worthless.

The creation of intimacy helps overcome addiction. Where’s the evidence? Consider the most common approach to treating addiction—12 step-groups. What happens in those groups to help the addict? Those who succeed say that it is working the steps and feeling accepted in their groups. In these groups they feel safe which allows them to form emotionally intimate experiences. As they develop healthy bonds, they have more reason to leave their addictive behaviors.

Many professionals believe that recovering addicts should be cautious and not engage in relationships. In the early stages of recovery, this may be true. But this brings up more questions. What if the person is already in a relationship? Should we say, “Don’t try to heal your relationship until you are clean.” When exactly is the right time for someone struggling with an addiction to become involved in a relationship? These are the right questions to be asking.

The remainder of this study is to discuss how to develop intimacy with others while simultaneously overcoming an addiction. This requires a definition and description of an intimacy model.

A Model for Achieving Relationship Intimacy

Those who achieve intimacy know true freedom. They are not restrained by fears and worries. They know genuine love. They are compassionate and kind. They find great joy in life. Intimacy is extraordinary and beautiful. It brings out the best in those who seek to obtain it.

The following model of intimacy describes what it is and what it is not. This model describes five types of intimacy:

- **Physical intimacy**—includes touching, kissing, holding each other, and being sexual one with another. If things are going well in a relationship, physical intimacy is generally a positive experience. However, when physical intimacy is a problem, the rest of the relationship suffers. As described by Dr. Schnarch, sexual relationship is a window into the rest of the relationship.

- **Psychological intimacy**—primarily includes honesty, trust, commitment, and loyalty. It is the absence of mind games. If you take any of these elements out of a relationship arguing and fighting will be the most likely outcome.
Psychological intimacy also means that mind games are not a part of the relationship.

- **Emotional intimacy**—involves the sharing of emotions. In relationships where emotions (happy, sad, upset, excited, joyful, worried, etc.) can be openly shared without reservation, the likely outcome is feeling safe in one another’s presence. Couples who have developed emotional intimacy understand and allow each other to have both good and bad emotions without judgment or criticism of the emotion.

- **Verbal intimacy**—the key element behind verbal intimacy is self-disclosure. Self-disclosure involves sharing thoughts, goals, plans, ideas, dreams, and passions. Couples who share verbal intimacy can take any topic of conversation and enjoy their conversation.

- **Intellectual intimacy**—includes common personality traits and qualities that couples share together. The sharing of interests in common skills, hobbies, and talents is common. When couples have intellectual intimacy they can talk for hours about their common interests. They talk about their future life together. They create their story together. Over time couples end up getting caught up in the routines of life and forget to nurture the intellectual part of their relationship. Couples who continue to develop intellectual intimacy continue growing together throughout their marriage.

- **Spiritual intimacy**—forms when two people share spiritual experiences together. This may be through praying together, attending religious services together, and even reading spiritual texts together. Couples who share spiritual intimacy share their beliefs in a higher power with another in ways that draw them closer together.

This model allows us to view intimacy from multiple directions. It has often been said that intimacy is more than sex. This model looks at intimacy from five different directions. As couples strive to improve in these five areas of intimacy, they find their relationship to be more fulfilling and enjoyable.

If you would like to quickly assess the intimacy in your relationship here’s a quick assignment. Write down the amount of intimacy you feel in your current relationship on a scale of 1 to 10 with ten being good intimacy. Here’s an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical intimacy</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological intimacy</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intimacy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal intimacy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual intimacy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual intimacy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This couple would want to improve in the areas of cognitive and psychological intimacy. They would need to seek a better understanding of why these areas are low and what they could do to improve upon them. If both partner’s did this assignment, you might find that their scores were completely different. Their individual needs are different. Their perceptions are different. Understanding intimacy in this way can give you a framework upon which you can improve your relationship.

Creating Intimacy While Overcoming an Addiction

The process of overcoming an addiction can be learned by working backwards from the reasons why addicts do not achieve intimacy. In essence the very things that create an addiction can be used to overcome an addiction.

Self-Awareness and Emotional Intelligence (Part II—The Solution)

Awareness has always been a key to understanding self and others. However, many people have never been taught to look inside of themselves for answers to their own problems. Truly the key to unlocking most emotional pain is within oneself. In treating trauma patients one of the most effective tools is teaching the individual to let go of the pent up emotions. These high-jacked emotions prevent the mind from logically interpreting an experience.

For example, Joyce had a traumatic experience when she was 19 years old. Her step-brother decided come into her room while she was sleeping. Unprepared for what happened he raped her. She felt so guilty inside because she was 19 and should have been able to stop him. This experience was not shared with anyone for almost 35 years. Her emotional pain never left. She felt guilty. She felt like she had let down her family. Every time the memory of that experience came into her mind, she would instantly feel tremendous anxiety. The experience triggered intense emotions inside of her which she tried to avoid at all costs. Trying to numb the pain through drinking didn’t help the pain go away. Eventually at the age of 55 she sought professional help for depression. While discussing her life she reluctantly discussed this experience. What she found was that talking about it somehow let the pain go. Within a week she had told her mother and sister what had happened. There was a physical change within her. You could see it in her eyes. She was no longer carrying the emotional baggage of guilt and shame within herself.

Joyce’s emotional awareness came when she was able to finally let out the trauma she experienced as a 19 year old girl. This experience is not unique. Many individuals do not realize the baggage that they are carrying with them from their childhood or from failed attempts at relationships. Instead of dealing with the baggage they turn to unhealthy behaviors such as addictions. This does not have to be the case. Learning to deal with emotional pain and hurt head on is very freeing. Here’s a strategy for doing this.
First, make a commitment to yourself to write down experiences that have been traumatic for you. Describe what happened and how these experiences have impacted you. Then write down emotions you felt from that experience. Notice as you write you may begin feeling emotional inside. That is normal. Your mind is reliving the experience. That is normal. You don’t have to be afraid of these emotions. Recognize that you are in a safer environment now than you were then. As you write about your experiences you may find that they take on a different meaning. Researchers have found that writing is very good in fighting against depression and can also increase one’s physical health and well-being. Emotional pain is toxic to our insides and when it is let out, the body experiences release.

Writing helps to get in touch with emotions and facilitates learning more about how you really feel. Writing questions can be an effective method for understanding the self. For example, have you ever wondered why you have developed your addiction? Do you know why you turn to your addiction when bored, lonely, angry, stressed, or tired? Writing about these questions can teach you a lot about your behaviors.

Another effective tool for gaining self-awareness is talking about what you are experiencing. Many people question whether counseling is effective. Counseling can be very helpful for individuals who are stuck with emotions and feelings that they cannot shake. Counseling is also helpful in helping individuals gain awareness into why they are doing things to hurt themselves and their relationships.

Individuals dealing with addictions can make great strides in overcoming their addiction by increasing their self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Self-awareness creates internal freedom from painful emotions that have been trapped inside.

Writing, talking, pondering, and more writing can be the key to get started in the recovery process. Those who understand themselves can ultimately set themselves free from the addiction that has weighed them down. This awareness often translates into how they treat others around them. As an individual gains more self-awareness they are able to see how their emotions (e.g. anger, frustration, etc.) impact those around them. This awareness can lead them into being more emotionally responsible with their partner. In return, they are more likely to gain the trust of their partner. Intimacy begins to be a possibility.

**Fear of Rejection (Part II—The Solution)**

The fear of rejection is a dominate feeling for many. It is especially powerful in individuals dealing with addiction. They fear that others will reject them because of their behaviors. They think that if people new what they were really like they would surely be rejected. This belief often creates a self fulfilling prophecy. Their own fears cause them to push people away before they can be hurt.

The process of reversing this is not only possible, but enjoyable. The truth about rejection is that people reject people who treat them poorly. When is the last time you heard
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someone say, “He treats me too well so I am going to divorce him.” It doesn’t happen. Who would knowingly reject someone who treats them with dignity, kindness, and respect? People stay in relationships when they feel valued and respected. People divorce when they are treated with little respect and are not valued.

Understanding Why People Reject Others

One key to understanding rejection in relationships is understanding the people who reject others. For example, if you felt rejected as a child by a parent, you would benefit by understanding more about your parent who rejected you. Why would any parent willingly reject their own child? As you ponder upon this question, I assume you would realize that no parent in their right mind would reject a child. Children are inherently good. Unhealthy people reject other humans. They do so because of their own issues. If you contemplate these thoughts you may realize for the first time in your life that those who have rejected you have done so because of their issues and not at all because of who you are.

The Power of Controlling Your Destiny

The most powerful way to overcome a fear of rejection is found in our own behavior. I firmly believe that if I treat people well they will not reject me. They may not always like my approach to things, but they are not going to reject me. It is empowering to know that my actions can impact how others treat me. Furthermore, if I am treating people appropriately, but they are NOT treating me well, I must validate myself and spend less time focusing on that relationship. I treat people with respect and expect them to treat me with respect.

Those who live in fear of rejection forget that they do not have to be victims of circumstance. Below I will discuss five principles that will empower you to NEVER feel like you are being rejected again. These principles create healthy relationships and help couples develop deeper levels of intimacy in their relationships.

Five Principles that Alleviate the Fear of Rejection

Principle #1. Integrity

The principle of integrity is critical for creating intimacy and developing higher levels of trust in relationships. Much like psychological intimacy, integrity requires truth and honesty. Couples who have integrity in relationships create a psychological intimate relationship. Therefore, if you are a person who is emotionally honest and truthful in all of your dealings, you should expect that those who are around you will appreciate you for your integrity.

In a relationship integrity means you are reliable, dependable, truthful, avoid any kind of deceit, and are genuinely honest in all of your communications. If you live this simple principle in ALL of your relationships, you never have to hide your behavior. Many of
your fears will disappear. People fear rejection because they condemn themselves of their own actions or of the unhealthy environment to which they have been exposed. When a person chooses to live a life of integrity, they are choosing to live a lifestyle supports emotional honesty and internal freedom. No more secrets, no more lying, no more deceiving.

**Principle #2. Affirming Worth**

Perhaps the most powerful principle in all of human interaction is sending genuine love and value to another person. Have you ever been around someone who lifted everyone around them up? They make everyone feel good about themselves. Such people affirm the worth of people around them. If you want to see how you are doing in this category think about that the people with whom you spend the most time. Make a list of things that you do to make them feel valued by you. How do you show them that they are important and valuable to you? If you are having a hard time creating this list, it may be that you need to improve in your efforts of validating the people around you.

There is nothing more important in a relationship than feeling valued and loved. If you create an environment where people feel accepted why would they choose to reject you? Emotionally healthy people wouldn’t.

**Principle #3. Commitment to Growth**

In relationships we are either growing together or we are growing apart. Seldom does a relationship stay in the middle. Couples who grow together take time together. They spend time doing things that each other enjoys. The idea of growing together is not unique, however it is under utilized in strengthening relationships. If you want to maintain a relationship it has to be nurtured.

I have never met a couple who spends time nurturing their relationship who wouldn’t at least attempt to resolve a problem before walking away from the relationship. In other words, if you are both attempting to nurture your relationship, why would your partner walk away from you? In most instances they would not. The concept of growing together automatically reduces any chance of rejection.

**Principle #4. Commitment to Agency**

The idea behind agency in relationships is that you cannot force or control others. The moment one person tries to manipulate or control another person in a relationship, problems will begin to emerge. I have talked with many people who have used control and manipulation as a means to make their partner love them. This simply does not work. You can never make someone love you. Conversely, the more freedom a person feels in a relationship the more likely they are to increase their love for you. This may sound counter intuitive, but when people are free to choose they generally choose relationships where they can be themselves without the fear of being controlled or manipulated.
I have talked with many people over the years who feel like they cannot be themselves in their relationships. The consequence is that they want out of their relationship. They often end up divorced because they couldn’t develop their skills and talents. If you want to ensure that you are not being rejected because you are controlling, let your partner feel free to be themselves.

*Principle #5. Learn to Trust Your Instincts*

Each of us has a unique gift—our instincts. Those who have learned to listen to their “inner voice” know how to resolve problems that do not make sense. For example, if someone who knows how to listen to their instincts fears rejection they will begin pondering and asking themselves questions such as, “Why am I afraid of being rejected?” As they ponder this question, they will learn what they are afraid of and then seek solutions to overcoming their fear. They may realize that their fears are not rationale. They may realize that their own behavior is pushing others away which creates their own rejection. Regardless of what they are feeling, these individuals learn to trust their instincts.

When people learn to listen to their instincts, they also are less likely to have an addiction. Why? Because their instincts help them deal with emotional pain and addictive cravings. Those who trust their instincts learn to solve their problems.

Those who implement these principles in their lives are much more likely to succeed in ALL of their relationships. As you learn to apply these five principles in your relationships you will become more confident and worry less about being rejected. You can be confident that you will succeed when you use these principles.

*Fear of Intimacy (Part II—The Solution)*

The idea of letting someone look into your soul may sound dangerous and scary. Yet intimacy is just that; letting someone see into you. It is much easier to keep our relationships at a distance and settle for surface level intimacy. However, surface level intimacy is not rewarding and often leaves an unfulfilled feeling.

Recently I was talking with a couple that had been married for over 10 years. They were seeking help for their marriage. As I asked them questions about intimacy in their relationship they both responded that they had kept it on the surface. They did not dare share with each other their true feelings and emotions because they feared the other would not care or respond.

When problems came up they didn’t know how to solve them so they shut-off the lines of communication that would resolve their differences. On an individual level they were lonely and frustrated. Because they were disconnected, the husband had returned to addictive behaviors that had comforted him as a child. Soon he was spending more time away from home because he knew she would complain to him about something. His addictive behavior took over his life; he became consumed with it. His wife, not knowing
he had returned to addictive behavior, grew resentful of his absence. She also began to wonder what was wrong with her. She knew something was wrong with their relationship, but feared he would be upset if she discussed her pain or needs with him. She was afraid to let him see her inner pain and he had come to the conclusion that she was attempting to control his life.

I wonder what would happen if this couple were able to track every thought, feeling, and emotion that each other was feeling. Certainly they would see the inner pain and loneliness. They would see the hurt in each other. Even though they may see the resentment and feelings of animosity within their partner’s heart, they would understand it. Deep down they would see their partner’s desire to be understood, to be loved, to be cared for, and to be openly accepted.

Would you be comfortable with your partner understanding all of your thoughts, feelings, and emotions? Would you be comfortable being an open book for someone close to you to read? Your answer to this question will tell you about how comfortable you are with yourself and intimacy. The less comfortable you are with this idea, the less intimacy you will allow into your life.

**So why do we have fears of intimacy?** There are two primary reasons: The first comes from unresolved childhood and relationship issues. The second stems from personal behaviors that we are ashamed of. Below I will discuss each of these in detail and offer ideas and suggestions for how to resolve them.

**Resolving Childhood Issues**

“I don’t want to look back at my childhood it is too painful”, exclaimed my client. If you are like this client, revisiting experiences where hurt, neglect, or abuse occurred is not something you want to do. These experiences trigger very painful emotions and memories. However, you cannot run or hide from your past if you want to achieve inner peace and find true relationship intimacy.

Since our past can block us from seeing what true intimacy looks like we must learn how to see our past in a healthy way. While each of us desire a strong intimate bond with another person, we must realize that one simply does not enter into a relationship and achieve immediate intimacy. Our fears overcome us and we become overwhelmed with the possibility of someone really seeing who we really are.

Who are we really? We form ideas of who we are and how our needs will or will not be filled at a very early age. We literally draw conclusions about closeness and intimacy at a very early age. Children know when they are being nurtured and loved. They know when they are neglected. They know whether they should keep their behaviors a secret or whether it is safe to tell mom and dad.

What conclusion can a child draw about himself if his parent’s are controlling, mean, hurtful, neglectful, or non-valuing? What happens when a child only feels loved when he
is doing exactly what mom or dad wants? These children learn to see love and intimacy the way they experienced it growing up. Many realize the degree of intimacy was not healthy or affirming, but they do not know any different. If anything, they are apprehensive about finding and maintaining a loving relationship.

If you would like to understand more about yourself, I would invite you to take some time and look at the messages you learned in your childhood about intimacy and relationships? Did your parents know how to meet your needs? Did they show you genuine value and love? Did they value you only when you did what they wanted? Did you feel safe talking with them about anything, or did you feel like you had to hold back. As you answer these questions you will learn a lot about why you approach love and intimacy the way you do as an adult.

Since many of our fears of intimacy stem from early life experiences, the way to resolve these fears is to understand our past and subsequently learn what healthy relationships look like. During the childhood years, most children cannot make sense of why they are being treated the way that they are. Yet, they still have to create meaning of what they are experiencing. They often come to believe that there is something wrong with them, otherwise their parent’s would not treat them they way they do.

Common beliefs adopted during childhood years include:

- I am a bad person
- I won’t amount to much
- I am a failure
- I will never be good enough
- I am not lovable
- There is something wrong with me

With these beliefs solidly in place they enter their teenage years looking for something but they do not know what. They are generally skeptical or afraid of relationships at this time because of the beliefs they have about themselves. Generally speaking, these fears make them uncomfortable around others. They may seem to be overly shy. As they interact with others they feel anxious inside. Why? They are afraid that there is something wrong with them or that others will make fun of them.

If they can get past these initial fears and create even one relationship they can begin the healing process. They need someone, anyone, to accept them. Their greatest desire is for someone to tell them that they are good enough. However, even when someone is telling them that they are good enough they have a hard time believing that anyone can really accept and love them.

During the teen years and young adulthood they are likely to turn to addictive behaviors to soothe their inner pain. Drinking, drugs, eating disorders, pornography, empty sexual experiences, and risk taking is common at this time. Without realizing what they are doing, they develop a dependence upon their behaviors. It comforts them from the pain they feel inside. The addictive behavior, however, also makes them feel out of control.
In addition to struggling with developing a healthy relationship, they have the battle with an addiction. The process of resolving both of these issues lies in understanding themselves and their need to be nurtured. The addiction has likely become their comforter. The emptiness they feel from their relationships triggers inside of them an awareness of what they do not have—closeness and intimacy.

As individuals come to realize they have been self-medicating to get away from their pain, they also realize other things can bring inner peace, acceptance, and feelings of being nurtured. They do not have to turn to their addictive behavior to find these things. They can find it in healthy behaviors such as developing healthy relationships, and strengthening their mind and body.

John’s story illustrates this concept. John grew up in a very rough environment. His dad was an alcoholic. His mother was afraid of his dad and basically did everything she could to stay out of trouble with her husband. John saw his dad come home drunk and beat his mother many times. At times he saw his dad demand sex from his mother. His dad was constantly pushing his mom for more sex. Soon he too was seeking out sexual experiences. He came to believe that the only way he would be accepted was through sexual acts.

When John came to therapy he had a deep-seeded sexual addiction. Pornography and one night sexual experiences encompassed his life as he matured. As we discussed his past and how he was attempting to finding comfort, his awareness increased. He saw how his experiences growing up influenced his beliefs about himself and relationships. He had no idea of what a healthy relationship looked like, but he was interested in learning how to have one. He realized that he was seeking acceptance through sexual experiences but was still feeling empty. In fact, he would seek out a sexual experience and then push the person away. He acknowledged that he did this because he was afraid that they would see behind his behavior and reject him. We discussed how he could respond when he was feeling bad about himself and his relationships rather than looking for validation through one night stands and viewing pornography.

Over time John enrolled in college and began to focus on developing himself. He sincerely desired to learn what healthy relationships were like. He was open to learning and had a desire to change his behavior. He worked hard to learn more about himself. While he was doing this work he found someone that he wanted to marry. This presented him with a different set of issues. He had to face his fear of intimacy and rejection head on.

We reviewed his fears and self beliefs that were developed in his childhood. I asked him to identify his beliefs about closeness in relationships. His underlying beliefs and fear was—if she or anyone really knew me they would reject me.

Understanding the importance of self-disclosure in developing healthy relationships I had John deal with these fears head on. We role played what he could tell his girlfriend and a few days later he disclosed to her his childhood experiences and how they had impacted...
his approach to relationships. He told her about his sexual addiction. His self-disclosure made him more vulnerable than he had ever been. Taking this risk was very significant in his long-term change.

His girlfriend’s response surprised him. She acknowledged that she had a hard time with his past, but she was willing to try to understand him. Her response helped him realize that his silent secrets had created isolation and separation from others. Ultimately they had prevented him from letting anyone close to him. He was amazed at how his disclosure to his girlfriend changed his perception of himself. His openness created more accountability to himself and her.

As John continued to learn how to communicate openly with his girlfriend he realized how much easier it was being open with others. He learned that his fears had seriously limited his ability to connect in relationships. This experience is true of many people who are learning to create deeper levels of intimacy. In an article about intimacy in relationships the authors suggest, “The level of intimacy reached within a given relationship seems to depend on the kind of information disclosed. Descriptive self-disclosure, for instance, occurs when people tell the facts of their lives….self-disclosure involves the quality of disclosure each person contributes to the relationship. People tend to match each other in how intimate their disclosures are” (Hook, Gerstein, Detterich, and Gridley, 2003).

The points in this section are very important, therefore I want to highlight them for your review.

**Key Points and Questions:**

- Understand the conclusions you have drawn about yourself are a result of your experiences in childhood
- Learn how your childhood experiences have impacted your approach to love and intimacy. Is your approach healthy or not? How would you change it?
- Your beliefs significantly impact how you see yourself and others. As a result of your childhood, what beliefs do you have about yourself and intimacy in relationships?
- Many people use an addiction to self-medicate rather than deal with their inner pain. Are you using your addiction as self-medication to prevent yourself from dealing with unresolved issues?
- Those who learn and seek new ideas to help themselves overcome their addiction are making progress. Are you receptive to new ideas and help for your addiction? How much time are you spending on your recovery?
- Taking risks in your communication with others may make you more vulnerable but emotional intimacy only comes when you open up and share yourself with someone. Are you learning to be more open in your communication?
- Secrets prevent intimacy and create a strong fear of intimacy. Are you being totally honest in your communication with others?
Resolving Personal Behaviors that Create Shame

The second part of dealing with a fear of intimacy involves overcoming addictive behaviors that create shame. As we learn more about intimacy we realize that shame is a key component that prevents individuals from developing intimate relationships. As long as their addiction has a powerful hold on them, shame overwhelms them. Shame can lead to relapse and contribute to the overall negative mood of an individual struggling with addiction.

What is often misunderstood by those who shame themselves into relapse is that recovery takes time, energy, and persistence. More often than not individuals with an addiction have repeatedly told themselves that they were done with their addictive behavior, only to relapse once more. Ninety-five percent of addicts struggle to overcome an addiction and continue to relapse until they learn the skills necessary to recover completely. Only 5% of addicts go cold turkey while trying to quit an addiction (Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1995). Most people overcome their addictions (Peele, 2004). Notice how few people succeed by going cold turkey, but many people actually succeed in overcoming addictions. This may sound contrary to what we hear about addiction, but according to Dr. Stanton Peele’s work, many people kick their addictions.

Now it is your turn. You can kick an addiction. It is possible. However, you will have to let your mind believe you can. Understand that shame leads to relapse while guilt changes behavior. The idea of shame vs. guilt may be new to you. The reason is most people think of these two words as synonyms. Dr. Harper points out that shame is often confused with guilt. He writes, “guilt is a recognition that our behavior has violated a standard or value that is important to us or significant to others… It involves recognizing that others or ourselves may have been hurt by our choices, and it usually motivates us to change behavior either by not doing it again or by doing something else that is acceptable under the standard and that doesn’t hurt others” (Harper, 2005). Shame, on the other hand is an emotion that involves negative feelings about ourselves and a deep desire to keep others from discovering what we think are the negative aspects of ourselves (Harper, 2005).

Individuals who turn negative behaviors into shame-based responses come to believe that they are seriously flawed in some way. They feel guilt, but the feelings of guilt are not used to change behavior -- rather it is turned into excessive, chronic, intense, and overwhelming feelings of inadequacy. In order to succeed in overcoming an addiction it is paramount that you stop beating yourself up over your past behaviors. Then, and only then, will you feel comfortable in your efforts to connect with someone else.

As you deal with shame and resolve to change your life, realize that there are actions you can take that will lead to long-term recovery. Reducing shame and negative self-beliefs is critical to long-term recovery. As individuals begin the process of change they seldom know where to begin. Therefore, I recommend using the following list. This list comes from individuals that have successfully overcome an addiction. You can use it as a checklist and to measure your progress:
Addiction and Intimacy

• **Recognize the problem**—If you do not see your behavior as a problem, you cannot overcome an addiction. Once you realize that the problem exists move on to the next stage.

• **Make preparations to succeed**—Understand that success happens by learning how to succeed. You have to **learn how to succeed**. This includes learning the tools by reading books, attending groups, participating in educational classes, and seeking personal counseling. Specific tools you will learn throughout this article include developing healthy communication patterns, being honest, learning emotional regulation, understanding how your childhood is impacting your life today, etc.

• **Begin taking action**—Armed with information to succeed you should have more hope and a belief that you can succeed. This knowledge should help you understand that long-term change is a process. As you take actions you see personal progress and realize that the things you are learning work.

• **Maintain your successes**—You focus on the successes you have experienced while recognizing that you cannot let your guard down. In addition, you start feeling more comfortable in relationships.

These are the key steps as found in the book, “Changing for Good” by James Prochaska and his colleagues’. Their work validates research that many people overcome addictive behaviors. If you would like to assess yourself based upon these levels, you will find a brief assessment in Appendix A of this manuscript. This assessment primarily focuses on pornography addiction, but you can easily replace the word pornography with any other addiction.

When individuals begin making progress (moving from the preparation stage, to taking action, and then to the maintenance stage) they begin looking outward and toward connecting with others. Over the years I have encountered many people in therapy with a strong desire to overcome their addiction. As they make progress they almost always start asking questions about relationships. They start feeling like connecting with someone else is no longer an impossible idea. The fear of intimacy is partially removed because those in recovery begin seeing themselves in a different light. They have more hope and begin wondering if they can succeed in relationships. This leads us to the next section.

**Seeking and Finding False Intimacy (Part II—The Solution)**

In order to create an intimate relationship, one must stop seeking false intimacy and stop accepting mediocre intimacy. Mediocre intimacy can be described as individuals and couples settling for what they have without doing work to improve their relationship. Intimacy requires work, but if individuals are seeking intimacy in the wrong place, their efforts will be a fruitless regardless of their intentions and desires.

The opposite of finding false intimacy is finding someone who is a true friend. True friends have a unique bond. They lift each other up. They feel valued and cared about regardless of the mistakes they make. They can share anything with each other without fears, worries, and concerns. Many individuals I have met who struggle with an addiction have never had this type of intimate relationship. They may have had one or two surface
type friendships, but never have they allowed themselves to get close to others. They hold their emotions close to the collar, and limit how much they share with others.

Recently I was talking with a couple that has been married for 65 years. Out of curiosity I asked them what made their marriage work. They both said, “We just get along.” They continued by telling me that they were committed to each other. They talked about how hard it was trying to keep up with their children and grand-children. As I listened, I was amazed by the simplicity of their relationship. They made their relationship sound so easy. Since our discussion I have wondered what it means to “get along.” Is it really that simple?

In contrast, consider the handsome young man who sought counseling to overcome his discomfort with relationships. He wanted to be in a relationship, but he was concerned that he may never find someone to marry. As he responded to my question about intimate experiences he had had in his life, he openly declared that he never has felt close to anyone besides his mother. In our discussion, he told me that he regularly went out with women but never felt close to any of them. I asked him what his conversations were like. He said, “I generally listen, but never really talk about myself, I am afraid that I will bore them.”

While these two stories may not strike you as unique, consider the real differences between these individuals. What makes it so two people like this can find intimacy for 65 years while one person (in his 20’s) feels like he’s never really had intimacy and may never find it? The answer is obvious when you understand and study intimacy. If you have never had it, you are skeptical you can achieve it. You fear intimacy itself because you are afraid of being hurt. However, once you understand it and feel like you have it, you NEVER want to give it up. Then you say ordinary things like, “We just get along.”

I would guess that many people “go through the motions” while dating and even in marriage. They believe that the intimacy they are getting in their relationship is as good as it can or will get. Yes, they are experiencing some form of intimacy, but it is so far below what it could be. They are not reaching their intimacy potential.

The process of developing deep intimacy requires two people who are emotionally prepared for a healthy relationship. Those who achieve intimacy generally feel like they are the best of friends. Have you ever thought about what makes two people best friends? Next, have you considered if you treat those closest to you as if they were your best friend? Your answer to this question is another measuring stick to your personal comfort level with intimacy. While there are many answers for what makes two people friends, there are some common principles that make up friendships. Here’s a short list:

- Mutual trust and respect
- Honesty
- Genuine compassion and love
- Desire for the others well-being
- Understanding each others hurts and joys
The ability to share anything with each other

We all desire a true friend. One of the most exhilarating features of a loving relationship is the knowledge that someone loves, understands, and approves of you (Berscheid, 1985). We all know when someone is genuinely loving us because our heart tells us so. The same is true when we feel disconnected from our loved one. Intimacy cannot be faked without underlying problems cropping up. True intimacy requires honesty and trust. It develops as two people learn to let down their guard and open up to each other.

Perhaps you are wondering whether you can find true intimacy in a relationship. If you are in a relationship, you may wonder if it could happen between you and your spouse. Not only can it happen, it can happen the moment two people choose to apply principles in their relationship. Over the past few years I have performed five or six weddings. These experiences are always humbling as I want to help these couples get started on the right foot. During each of the ceremonies I discuss one key element: Love. I tell them that love is something you choose to do each and every day. We choose to love. We choose not to love. It is a choice we all have to make each and every day of our lives. As we love one another we send validation of acceptance and desire for each other. This is very rewarding.

Identifying healthy people and relationships

One important element to finding true intimacy is learning to identify people who are capable of having a healthy relationship. Yes, there are people who are not fit for relationships. That does not mean people cannot learn to be “in” a relationship, but they may not be in a place in their life where they can give themselves to another person. Remember that intimacy requires two people who are capable of giving themselves to each other. If one party cannot fully give him/herself to the relationship, try as you might to make it work, it will ALWAYS come up empty. That is why addiction prevents intimacy.

You may be asking how you can identify people who are healthy. Or maybe you are already in a relationship and wondering whether you or your spouse are capable of succeeding in your relationship. The answer to both of these questions is not as complex as you think. Whether you are in a relationship or not, the measuring stick is based upon the principles discussed in the “Fear of Intimacy - Part 1” section. The principles of integrity, affirming worth, growing together, agency, and trusting instincts are good sources of measurement. You may want to go back and re-read those five principles. In fact, in our educational classes we recommend that individuals memorize them. These principles truly are great guides to assessing yourself and others.

Next we encourage you to evaluate the five categories of intimacy: physical, emotional, psychological, cognitive/intellectual, and spiritual. In the beginning of every relationship it is critical to assess yourself and the person you are dating. Are both of you comfortable developing intimate experiences? Does one type of intimacy (e.g. physical intimacy) dominate the relationship or is there a good balance?
When couples learn the simple concepts that make relationships work they are amazed at its simplicity. I often tell couples that relationship intimacy is NOT hard. Live the principles (as found in The Model for Intimacy, and the Five Principles illustrated in Fear of Intimacy Part 1) and you too will develop a relationship with true intimacy and deep friendship.

In addition to these measuring sticks, we would encourage you to visit our website www.testyourelationship.com and assess your relationship. This test was devised by myself and Mr. Kenneth Patey. In this test we identified specific behaviors that hurt and ultimately destroy relationships. This test is a report that you fill out on your partner’s behavior in the relationship. Once you provide us answers to the test questions we provide you with item-by-item feedback for each of your responses. The questions will help you identify healthy and unhealthy patterns and behaviors in your relationship. Our answers help you understand what you can expect if the behaviors do not change.

**Being Out of Control (Part II—The Solution)**

The opposite of being out of control is having the ability to impact the direction your life takes. As individuals begin the recovery process, they regain more control over their life. They make choices based upon what is good for them rather than what feels good. Perhaps most importantly is they stop running from their past or current emotional pain.

In order to be in control one must learn to deal with the pains of life. No one escapes pain in this world. Therefore, when those who begin to gain control of their life realize that they have to face their challenges and trials head on. They don’t try to hide or ignore their difficulties.

The process of gaining control is done through being productive and proactive. There is a simple principle that leads to happiness in this life. I call this the “Productivity Principle.” Productive people feel good about themselves and their life. They choose to create. They use their mind. They push themselves to be active and useful. The counter behavior is idleness or laziness. Those who are idle often have lower energy, feel down, are frustrated, and are more prone to turn to addictive behaviors. Individuals who are proactive and productive generally feel more energy and their excitement can be observed. They live lives that others admire and desire. More importantly, productive people generally feel good about themselves.

One way out of an addiction is to be proactive in your recovery. Develop relationship skills. Focus on increasing your abilities and talents. Look for opportunities to move up in your company or move to a new job opportunity that pushes you to be better. Addictions pull people away from who they really are and who they can become. My invitation to you is to move beyond your past by becoming who you can and were meant to be.
Emotional Maturity (Part II—The Solution)

Perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of intelligence is the understanding and processing of emotions. In a very compelling book on intelligence, Dr. Daniel Goleman suggests that “Emotional Intelligence” may be more important than standardized I.Q. This information matches the findings of Thomas Stanley in his book, “The Millionaire Mind.” In Stanley’s book he illustrates how millionaires use their emotional strengths more than intellect to make money. Those who develop emotional awareness and act upon this knowledge will be more successful in life and relationships.

Most individuals struggling with an addiction turn to those behaviors because they do not know how to deal with their emotions. They feel tremendous anxiety and hide from emotional pain and hurt. Our culture makes it easy to avoid emotions by providing events and activities that can become addictive (e.g. access to drugs, alcohol, entertainment in all of its varieties, etc.). Consequently, many people would rather distract from their negative emotions.

Those who understand and learn to appropriately deal with their emotions have a tremendous advantage in life. Their advantage comes in developing healthy relationships, understanding how to regulate their emotions, and feeling inner calm and peace.

Increasing your self-awareness is something anyone can learn. Look at the “How’s” and “Why’s” of life. You could begin this process by asking yourself the following questions and writing down your answers:

- What emotion/s do I feel the most? Are you generally happy, angry, upset, excited, worried, and joyful?
- Why do I feel these emotions and not others as much?
- How do my emotions impact the people around me?
- How do the people around me impact my emotions?
- How does your past life experiences (good and bad) impact your emotions and behaviors today?
- How effective are you at dealing with your emotions?

These questions may seem simple, but they are not trivial. They are crucial to increasing your personal awareness. I invite you to critically consider each of the questions above. Write down your answers. Before reading on, I encourage you to take the time and do the assignments below.

Assignments:

- When feeling stressed, what are your most common behaviors? Example: I get upset; I drink; I try to ignore it and hope it goes away.
- What do you do when you are bored? Do you turn to addictive behaviors when bored?
• Why do you turn to addictive behaviors? For example, if you struggle with drinking, why do you drink?

Before you read on let's do a commitment check. Did you answer the questions and do these assignments? If not, take the time to do them. Those who succeed pay the price and show their level of commitment to themselves and their spouse.

Let me illustrate this point. Not long ago I met with a couple for marital counseling. The previous week I had met with the husband. He was struggling to overcome an addiction. His wife was very hurt by his actions, but she wanted things to work out. She questioned how committed he was by saying, “If he was committed I think he would have done the assignment you gave him ten minutes before we came to this appointment.” His actions sent a message to his wife.

Your chances of succeeding in relationships, overcoming addictions, and resolving other emotional pain will increase significantly as you increase your emotional maturity.

Once you have completed these writing assignments, re-read your answers at least two more times. Understanding yourself and your emotions will increase as you re-read these answers. Next you will want to identify emotions that you can change. For example, if you are often lonely and sad, write down solutions to these emotions. Identifying your emotions is good, coming up with solutions is even better.

Increasing emotional intelligence takes time and effort. You shouldn’t expect that it will occur in an instant. Recently, I was talking with a man who has been trying to repair his relationship with his wife. His anger and addiction had pushed her almost completely out of his life. In a joint session with his wife, he was telling me how during a recent conversation he had stopped his anger and really tried to understand what his wife was saying to him. He said, “It was one of the first times I sat and listened.” Tears came to his eyes as he explained his “ah-ha” moment. He was tired of ruining his relationship. He realized that for the first time in his life he could understand her emotions and not feel threatened by them. This led them to a much deeper level of intimacy. Understanding our emotions is NOT rocket science, it is common sense. We don’t have to run from emotions, they teach us many things about ourselves and others if we will learn to listen.

In review, there are two keys to emotional maturity: AWARENESS and ACTION. As you take the time to regularly check your emotions you will increase your awareness. I personally recommend that you take time daily to ponder and meditate about the things happening in your life. Learn about your emotions. What are they trying to tell you? Is something out of balance? What are the good emotions you feel day in and day out?

Once you understand your emotions, the fun can begin. You realize that your emotions are trying to teach you something. This allows you to transition into the action mode. In other words, you begin resolving emotions that are weighing you down. Here’s a personal example from my life.
Addiction and Intimacy

When I was in graduate school, I picked up a side job facilitating domestic violence group classes. This was an invaluable experience for me. I learned many things, but perhaps most important I learned about myself. One morning my wife told me that she had an appointment to get her hair cut at 2:30 p.m. She asked if I could watch our 1 year old daughter. I agreed to the task but explained I would need to leave at 4:00 p.m. to meet with my first client. She indicated that would not be a problem.

Around 3:50 p.m. when my wife was not home I began to worry. At 4:00 p.m. I received a phone call from the office telling me that my appointment was waiting for me. At 4:20 my wife was still not home so I called and cancelled my appointment. No call from my wife. At 4:30 I was really getting worried. Worry was not my only emotion. I was starting to feel upset. Why didn’t my wife respect my time? She knew I had an appointment. This was costing us money. I began feeling upset and angry at her.

So imagine this… I am going to be meeting with a group at 6:00 p.m. to talk about controlling your emotions. What a great test for me. I reflected on all of my emotions. What could I say? What was I really feeling? How did I want to approach her when she came home? About that time my daughter started crying and I couldn’t calm her down.

At 4:55 p.m. my wife came through the door. What did I say? Before I tell you, consider what would you have said. What would have been appropriate to say? I had come to the realization that my approach would set the tone for the discussion. When she walked through the door I said, “I need to go, next time we will do something different.” I didn’t ask for reasons, I didn’t have time to. More importantly, I wanted to talk with her when we could appropriately discuss what happened.

Later that night when I returned home, we had a very interesting discussion. She told me that she was having her hair-cut by her cousin and a local beauty school. Her cousin had to have her supervisor check each section of the hair-cut. The consequence was a 2 ½ hour hair cut. My wife didn’t know this would happen. She was sorry that she hadn’t called but she was sitting in a chair waiting for the teacher to come check out the hair-cut.

What lesson did I learn? I need to be in control of my emotions. What value would have it been to our relationship to yell at her? I could have let her have it when she walked in the door. Jumping to conclusions wouldn’t have worked either. The approach was learning and asking questions, gathering more data before I let my emotions get the better of me. While I still have room to grow, that was one occasion that I actually did it right. This experience taught me about evaluating my own feelings and emotions and learning how to best communicate them. Sometimes the most valuable way to deal with emotions is to listen.

Understanding and learning from our emotions is a process that takes time. Those who learn this valuable concept do so by looking inside of themselves and identifying their own emotions. They ask themselves why they feel they way they do. Then they seek solutions for the emotions with which they are not comfortable. If you have been afraid of your emotions these steps will help you gain control of your emotional self.
Addiction and Intimacy

Low Self-Worth (Part II—The Solution)

Deep down at our very core there is goodness inside of us. The problem is that due to life’s experiences many have forgotten this simple truth. We are all amazing beings. Can you accept this about you? This is a critical question that you need to look at. How you approach life is largely impacted by your sense of self. If you believe in yourself you will believe that others respect and value you. If you believe that you are flawed or bad in some way, you will likely believe that others see you that same way.

It is very enjoyable as a therapist to see individuals regain this knowledge. I often see this with clients who are in recovery from an addiction. As they remove themselves further and further from their addiction, they realize that their previous actions do not reflect who they really are. They come to know that they truly are good at heart. Their self-worth increases as they come to this realization. They also become excited about life again. Self-worth is our natural state. We are born with it. It is God given. The challenge is to never forget this simple concept.

Many people may appear to have high self-worth, but do not be fooled by false self-worth. Legitimate self-worth cannot be mistaken. Individuals with high self-worth behave in ways that set them apart from pretenders.

I learned this valuable lesson from Ken Patey, the founder of Growth Climate. In his powerful educational series, he describes three different types of self-worth. In one section of his class he asks members to describe individuals with high self-worth. Below you will find the most common answers he has received over the past 25 years of asking this question.

Descriptions of High Self-Worth

- Happy
- Calm
- Lifts others up
- Enjoys life
- Serves others
- Gives of self
- Works hard and is productive
- Values others
- Is honest
- Truthful
- Considerate
- Patient
- Fun

As you review this list, you may benefit the most by noticing what is NOT on this list. Consider the following list that many people mistake as high self-worth.
Addiction and Intimacy

- Successful
- Drives nice cars
- Has a college education
- Lives in a nice neighborhood
- Gets what he/she wants
- Is a winner
- Is a leader
- Is always in the spotlight
- Has the perfect body

You may not see anything wrong with this last list but it is critical to notice the differences. The first list describes character traits, while the second list focuses more on image and not character. This second list tells me nothing about how a person acts in relationships. Therefore, they could be a person with high or low self-worth. I have met many people in my life as therapist who are physically healthy, but they feel worthless. They are poor at relationships and have very low-self worth.

Self-worth comes from our behaviors that strengthen and build relationships. We have a saying at Growth Climate—“Relationships First.” What does this mean? Think about your relationships first. In order to do this you may ask yourself, “How will my actions impact my relationships with those who are around me? Am I more concerned about my image than my relationships? Do I see how my actions impact other people? Am I sensitive to the needs of the people around me? These questions will help you stay focused on people rather than image. This is a key step to gaining legitimate self-worth.

Next, low self-worth stems from adopting beliefs that keep you trapped. The person struggling with addiction is most likely to recover when he/she understands these beliefs and how they have developed. More often than not these beliefs limit personal growth. Above I said that our natural mind set is high self-worth. Let me explain more about this and how our sense of self-worth is lost:

High self-worth—

We are born with high self-worth. It is an innate characteristic in each of us. However, life experiences can make us question our self-worth. In particular, parents, teachers, siblings, and society can make us question our natural sense of worth. How do they do this? Simple! Put-downs, criticism, ignoring, avoiding, neglecting, inflated expectations, control, and manipulation are just a few ways that cause us to question this worth.

While most parents do not wake up in the morning thinking, “How can I destroy my child’s sense of worth”, their actions can unwittingly create this in their children. The result is that as many children mature, their life’s experiences force them to question their self-worth.
Self-Worth Wrestle—

When an individual begins to struggle with their own worth we call this self-worth wrestle. The wrestle is literally about their worth. They ask themselves questions like: “Is there something wrong with me? Or “Why don’t others like me?” The wrestle, or inner battle, is between the invalidation they have received, their own negative thoughts and their natural intuitive feelings of worth.

In most instances they question their worth because of intense negative emotional experiences. For some, these things occur with an abusive parent, for others it is early sexual experiences. Others were mistreatment by friends or leaders, while others had multiple negative experiences leading to question their worth.

We have to develop a sense of who we are and where we fit in this world. Our mind makes meaning of everything it experiences. Therefore, when we our worth has been deflated by others, or we perceive that others do not value us, we have to make a decision or construct a conclusion about self. In the previous situations listed, the mind will develop insecure feelings about self. The original sense of confidence and a sense of goodness are lost. When the mind accepts the barrage of invalidation, the inner sense of worth is dulled.

Ultimately, individuals begin to question their own instincts. Their inner sense of self knows that they are good, but the outside invalidation is so powerful that they begin to question everything about themselves. This called an instinct wrestle. Questions like “Am I good or bad, right or wrong” are no longer questions they accept as truth. When individuals completely stop trusting what they originally felt and begin believing that there is something genuinely wrong with them, they struggle to find happiness and a sense of purpose. Frustration often turns outward by participating in behaviors that numb the inner pain such as drinking, drugs, and/or seeking sexual gratification (sex, pornography, etc.). Some turn inward and become overly anxious and depressed.

Deny Instincts and Intuitive Responses

In order to deal with feelings of frustration one begins denying instincts and intuitive responses. Our instincts are used to tell us who to trust, who not to trust, what is generally good for us, and what we should avoid. Our instincts also help us develop a sense of who were really are. When instincts are shut-down, there is risk for emotional and relationship problems.

A part of the self still identifies as a naturally a good person, but now there are memories of the invalidation received from others and the potentially addictive behaviors that question the sense of worth. They stop trusting in the goodness of others and question their own internal impressions and thoughts (their instincts). They do not know whom or what to trust.
Over time those caught in this path become skeptical and lack confidence in others including self. At this point individual self-worth is significantly reduced. Since their inner-pain is high and they do not know appropriate coping mechanisms to deal with their feelings, addictive behaviors are employed to cope with inner pain.

**Learned Helplessness**

Without proper coping mechanisms individuals begin feeling helpless and believe there is nothing that they can do about their situation. Their life feels empty. Deep down their most common desire is to be accepted and loved by others. They want to connect with others but they are very cautious and afraid.

The easiest way to deal with this pain is the addictive behavior. The more pain they feel, the more they turn to the addictive behavior. Eventually, they feel as though there is nothing they can do about their circumstances. This is what we call learned helplessness. They feel their life is beyond control.

**Violation of principle**

When a person feels hopeless it is not uncommon for them to violate or act against their own belief and value system. As they stray further from their beliefs they feel more hopeless. Examples of violating their own beliefs include: having sexual affairs, using illegal substances, stealing, engaging in risky behaviors, etc.

Once a person violates their own belief system enough they become numb to their own behaviors; they assume change is not possible. This mindset prevents personal growth and encourages deeper feelings of helplessness. Ultimately, it leads to a sense of worthlessness.

**Non-value for self—non value-by others**

The next step is to stop feeling value for self and rejecting any value coming from others. This is labeled non-value for self and non-value by others. Not everybody walks this far down the path of hopeless and despair. However, many caught in the trap of addiction and who lack hope for intimacy truly don’t feel value for self or value from others. This is an emotionally dangerous mindset.

**Nobody cares about me**

As individuals embrace the idea that they are not valued, they can quickly move to the next stage—Nobody cares about me here. This idea leads individuals to shut-down. They begin feeling like others are out to get them and they consequently isolate themselves from people. Isolation is perhaps the most dangerous behavior because a reality check cannot be given. The human mind begins to believe that others are the “enemy” or at best “non-caring.”
I’m of no value to anyone

The final, and most dangerous, stage is—I’m of no value to anyone. These individuals are at high risk for suicide or other dangerous activities. One drug addict said, “I truly believed that I was better dead than alive.” Fortunately, before she could take her own life, someone intervened and saved her.

Each of these phases builds upon the previous stage. Eventhough it is uncommon to reach the final stage, far too many people do. In our experience as therapists we have learned how to reverse this process.

Reversing the Development of Low Self-Worth
In order to reverse the negative patterns in the mind that are associated with the development of low self-worth we must refer back to the idea of our natural state. We are born with high self-worth; that is who we really are. Returning to this natural state then requires that we back out of the unhealthy patterns that have been established over time. Following are suggestions to help reverse each of the steps listed above:

I’m of no value to anyone (The Solution)

The idea that you are of value is most critical. If you have felt that you truly are of no value to others, I invite you to do two things. Make a list of people that have helped you in one way or the other. It may be hard to make this list it may even be short, but make it anyway.

Next, write down things you have done in an effort to help others. Have your efforts been appreciate or have they been overlooked? Likely someone appreciated something you did. Let me validate you by saying how much I appreciate you reading through this material. I know that you have struggled mightily in your relationships, but you are still trying.

I want to tell you that being of value to someone will ultimately come from your heart. There are many human beings who are lonely and scared. They are alone and feel empty inside. You can feel that void. All I ask of you is to keep living and keep trying. As you follow the principles outlined in this article and in the CD, “Five Sure-Fire Ways to Strengthen Your Relationships” you will realize that you can succeed in your relationships.

Here are two more ideas to help you:

- Begin by thinking of something nice you could do for someone else. Now go and act on it (write a letter of appreciation for someone who did something nice for you, call an old friend and let them know how much you appreciated them, buy a small gift for someone who has done something for you).
- Write down five things that you are grateful for. Sometimes identifying the things we appreciate can lift up our own spirits.
Now let’s move on to next phase.

Nobody cares about me (The Solution)

Much like the step above you have adopted the belief that nobody cares about you. Either your ability to receive love and care is out of kilter or the people around you simply are not capable of giving this most important element of human relations to you. I believe this last sentence is so important I want you to read it again.

Either your ability to receive love and care is out of kilter or the people around you simply are not capable of giving this most important element of human relations to you.

The question you need to address is whether you are currently allowing people to care about you. Are you willing to let the people around you take care of you? Recently, I learned a very valuable lesson regarding giving and receiving service from others. I was talking with a paraplegic woman who has been unable to walk for 35 years. She has been confined to the same room for more than 10 years now. She has had to let others take care of her from morning to evening. For years, her neighbors and friends have been by her side. They have given thousands and thousands of hours of service to her.

Can you imagine letting someone take care of you day after day, month after month, year after year?

If yes, let’s check out the next possibility. You are around people who are not capable of caring, giving, and meeting your needs. There certainly are people who do not know how to give to others. Many people mistakenly assume that others know how to love. When you understand human nature and the fear that many people have of intimacy, you will come to realize that some people have unresolved issues that inhibit them from giving and openly loving other people. Unless they learn how to overcome their personal fears intimacy will not likely be a part of their life.

If you are constantly around people who have not yet learned how to give and love, don’t take it personal. All you can do is learn how to give and receive—you can learn how to love. When you learn this simple concept, your personal world of achieving intimacy can reach new and incredible weights.

Non-value for self—non value-by others (The Solution)

The process of changing from a mind-set of non-value for self to feeling authentic value occurs primarily when individuals realize how the negative beliefs they have come to accept have influenced their life. You are a person of worth. Can you accept this idea? Nobody can take away the unique qualities you possess.

Here’s an assignment to help you identify how you really see yourself:
Take 10 minutes to contemplate your positive qualities. Next, go look into a mirror. What do you see? Do you see a person who is of worth? Do you see a person who can succeed in relationships? The phrase “what you see is what you get” fits into this exercise.

Most people want to feel good about themselves, yet many people simply do not believe it possible. In your past, your sense of worth has likely come from the feedback received from others. This will set you up for a let down. Why? Even good people can let you down. True value comes from within you. Nobody can give that to you or take it away.

The most powerful way to help see value in oneself is through living principles. In the next phase of reclaiming your self-worth, let’s look how you can stop violating personal principles.

Violation of principle (The Solution)

In his masterpiece, “As a Man Thinketh” James Allen wrote, “Suffering is always the effect of wrong through in some direction. It is an indication that the individual is out of harmony with himself, with the law of his being” (pg. 28). Recovering addicts can tell you that they have suffered tremendously. Their life is not turning out the way that they desired it to. However, when individuals begin living their lives based upon principles they begin developing more confidence in self.

The most direct path to recovery for any addict is to live their life based upon principles. Principles are fundamental truths or laws. What are the principles that lead to recovery? They are the same principles listed earlier:

- **Integrity**—being honest and truthful in all of your dealings; being honest with self.

- **Affirming Worth**—valuing self and others; having empathy and compassion for self and others.

- **Commitment to personal and relationship growth**—making a personal commitment to grow and develop personal skills and talents.

- **Commitment to agency**—choosing to be free from the bonds of addiction.

- **Commitment to trusting instincts and intuitive responses**—learning to listen and respond to the internal feelings and promptings you have.

Wittingly or unwittingly, individuals who are in the recovery process inevitably put these principles at the top of their priorities. They often say things like, “I want to be honest with myself and others” or “I am tired of being bound to this addiction.” Surely recovery from negative beliefs about self can be remedied with principles as the standard.
Furthermore, when individuals learn to apply these principles in relationships, they are much more likely to succeed. In my CD, “Five Sure-Fire Ways to Strengthen Your Relationships” I discuss these five principles in depth as they relate to relationships. This CD provides examples of how to apply these principles in relationships. If you haven’t listened to this CD I encourage you to do so.

When these principles guide your life, you will surely feel more confident in yourself. Why? Your behavior is in harmony with what you feel you should be doing. David O. McKay once said, “Indulgence in appetites and desires of the physical man satisfy but for the moment and may lead to unhappiness, misery, and possible degradation; spiritual achievements give ‘joy not to be repented of’” (McKay, 2003).

As individuals begin living with principle, they begin to feel more hope. They begin to see light at the end of the tunnel. Yet, they still have to overcome the feelings of being helpless when their cravings and desires to relapse are so strong.

**Learned Helplessness**

After years of feeling out of control, many addicts realize that the only way to reclaim their life is to STOP feeling hopeless and helpless. The beliefs one acquires about self contribute to the powerful feelings of helplessness. Those beliefs can quickly be reversed when you stop living in fear and begin living with principle.

Concerning this topic Stuart Wilde wrote, “You overcome weakness by leaving it behind you. This means that you become aware of the inner tendencies that bring you down, that do not support a belief in self, that do not endorse a love of self, and you say, ‘I don’t want to be that any more.’ You then move yourself out of the slovenly ways of collective unconscious, into a discipline of power” (Wilde, 1983).

Taking control of your life is what you want. However, this control has been given to others and your addiction. Now it is time to take it back. Live your life the way your conscious knows it can live. As you begin to believe and act upon these beliefs you will see that you do not have to live in fear or worry. You can live with power—power of being in control of your destiny.

Here’s an assignment to help you regain power and control over your life:

Write down five things that you would like to accomplish this week. Each of these items should be something that will make you feel better about yourself. Now the challenge is to do everything in your power to achieve these goals. Review them daily, even hourly if you need to. As you focus on your goals, your desire to return to addictive behaviors will diminish. It is hard to think about relapsing when your mind is focusing on other goals and dreams.
You should have short-term goals and long-term goals. Goals are designed to give us reason to focus. When these goals are achieved, your inner energy will increase and you will amplify confidence in self.

Before we move on to reclaiming your instincts and intuitive responses, let me discuss the importance of not feeling helpless in your relationships. Many people feel helpless in their relationships. They feel like there is nothing they can do to influence their partner or others. This sense of helplessness was likely adopted in childhood when parents and others did not meet your needs or expectations. Such a belief from earlier experiences, left unchallenged, will cause you to feel hopeless in current relationships.

Dr. Susan Jeffers provides a few solutions on this topic in her book, “The Feel the Fear Guide to Lasting Love.” Below are a few of her key points.

- Recognize that how you approach relationships can significantly influence your success. Dr. Jeffers suggests saying to yourself many times each day the following, “I am powerful and loving and I have nothing to fear.”

- Next she recommends that you consider the idea, “Whatever happens in my relationship I will learn and grow from it all.”

- She also recommends the following idea which is key to all relationship success: “The most important purpose of my relationship is to learn how to become a more loving person.”

As you review these three elements you will see her focus is on helping you overcome feelings of fear and helplessness in relationships. In particular, this last statement is critical. As you learn how to become a more loving person, you will feel empowered. Love is created. It doesn’t happen by chance. Your behavior will significantly influence your success. That is why living according to principles, as described above is so important. Do these things and you will find success in your relationships.

Deny Instincts and Intuitive Responses (The Solution)

Now that you realize that your situation is not helpless and are living with principle, it is time to really pick up the pace of your progress. This will happen as you learn to trust your instincts and intuitive responses. Your instincts are guides to solving problems and finding solutions. Your instincts, if you are listening, will help you in times of emotional pain and frustration. They can teach you how to avoid the situations where you will relapse.

After talking with hundreds of individuals struggling with one form of addiction or another I have realized that everyone knows when they are most likely to relapse. They have a feeling, or an inner voice that warns them. As you learn to listen to this voice, you will find it can help you in those times of need.
One client shared a personal story with me about his experience with this inner voice. He told me that he had been alone watching television when he thought to give in and view pornography. Knowing he was alone and that his family was gone, he considered the idea for a moment. In his consideration, he had a clear thought that he needed to get up and go outside rather than stay in his home.

After acting upon this thought, he realized how close he was to turning back to pornography. He shared this experience with me because he was excited about his progress, but he also told me that he was anxious because of how close he had come to relapsing. His instincts were thoughts that came to his mind before he did something that he would regret.

As you learn to trust these thoughts and act upon them you will have more and more experiences where you act upon impressions or thoughts. Most people in recovery have shared with me the split second decisions that have either led them to relapse or to respond effectively. Those who succeed generally wait long enough and think before they act. In the process of thinking, they are more likely to let their instincts guide them rather than run-away emotions.

Your instincts can also help resolve relationship problems. As you encounter conflict or tension if you will take time to ponder ideas or thoughts that come to your mind you will see how your instincts can guide you. You can recognize your instincts if you think thoughts that lead to effective solutions or lead you to acting more honest.

In my CD “Five Sure-Fire Ways to Strengthen Your Relationships” I offer a specific example of how you can use your instincts to resolve relationship problems.

Self-Worth Wrestle (The Solution)

Throughout life many people struggle with their sense of worth. This is a universal challenge. I have lived in many cities in the United States and I have lived in the Far East (Taiwan and China). In each city I have met individuals who struggle with their sense of worth. No matter where one lives they have to make sense of who they are and how they fit into the world around them.

While many struggle with their sense of worth, those who believe in themselves have learned a secret. They learn that they can be okay with or without the validation of others. This is a hard concept for many people to accept. Even though we all need to feel like someone cares about us, individuals who struggle with their worth seem to believe the negative feedback they receive rather than the positive.

Have you ever wondered why we give more credence to individuals who are critical of us than those who give us compliments? Consider the last time that you got into a big argument where negative critical remarks were made? How long did the things said during that argument run through your mind? Perhaps weeks, months, dare I say years?
Now compare that to a compliment someone gave you about how you look or how well you performed a task? Does that feedback last a day or a week? Seldom!

The secret then is to learn to base your worth upon your behaviors. In this section I have tried to carefully walk you out of a state of low self-worth. This is done by recognizing how to feel value for self and others. Then I discussed how to live with principle and the process of avoiding feelings helplessness. Next, I discussed the importance of learning to trust your instincts. As you focus on succeeding in each of these areas, you will notice that your personal struggles with your sense of worth will be diminished. Your confidence and sense of worth will increase.

However, it is critical to remember that it is normal to struggle periodically with our worth. These experiences are moments that cause us to reflect on where we are going and how we are acting. If we have been acting with principle there is no reason to accept the negative barrage of thoughts that are attempting to lower our sense of worth.

As individuals continue on their path to recovery, their self-worth wrestle has more to do with their behaviors of the past rather than their current behaviors. Therefore, one of the best tools for regaining personal self-worth is to live in the present rather than the past. You can do this by “being” who you know you can be. Ultimately, your self-worth can be created by your actions today. Do a good deed. Give of your time and talents. Serve others. Use principles in your relationships. Fill your life with events and activities that are productive and positive. All of these things will help with any struggles you may experience with your sense of worth.

**Return to High Self-Worth**

Finally, you can return to who you innately are. You are a person of infinite worth. I genuinely believe this is true of each of us. We all have so much to contribute to society. This is most likely accomplished in our day to day interaction with the people around us. The greatest service we give to society is through our service. Reflect on the list of qualities previously mentioned as I described high self-worth.

**Descriptions of High Self-Worth:**

- Happy
- Calm
- Lifts others up
- Enjoys life
- Serves others
- Gives of self
- Works hard and is productive
- Values others
- Is honest
- Truthful
- Considerate
If you are doing each of these things you have many reasons to feel confident about yourself. These are character traits that increase inner confidence. Those who possess these qualities generally are fun and enjoyable to be around. They certainly have the ability to create and make friends. If at any time you are struggling with your sense of worth, I suggest that you refer back to this list and then work to increase these qualities in your life. As you incorporate these characteristics into your daily living, you should be able to succeed in other areas of your life, especially relationships.

Self-Focus (Part II—The Solution)

When a person struggling with an addiction begins to heal, a key manifestation of their growth can be seen in the acts of service and giving they do. It can also be seen in the way they desire to repair the pain and hurt they have caused others—they desire to make restitution. For months and years at a time their addiction has consumed hours upon hours of their day. Their thoughts and desires have ruled their life. Now they begin to see others. No longer trapped in self, they turn outward and look around. At times this is painful because they feel extreme guilt and shame for what they have missed and the pain they have created.

As they begin to move away from their addiction, their perception of self and others begins to change. The oft felt pain, guilt, shame, emptiness and other negative emotions are replaced with feelings of hope and remorse. They see how their actions have impacted those around them. A true measuring stick of recovery is their ability to see outside of self. Service and giving is almost always a part of recovery. Attempting to make restitution for pain and hurt inflicted upon others is common.

Years ago a good friend of mine shared a story that illustrates this point. Ashley had lost almost everything due to her drug addiction. She had married a very abusive husband who was also addicted to drugs. In a final effort to help Ashley, her parents’ allowed them to live in their home—they had 3 children. Within weeks, family treasures had been stolen from the house. Ashley’s parents had no choice but to call the police. This led to a charged being filed against Ashley and her husband. As most addicts do, Ashley moved on another place. However, soon her drug addiction caught up to her and she was sent to jail.

After spending nearly 18 months in jail Ashley had lost everything. Her children had been taken away by the state, her abusive husband had been in jail, and her family no longer trusted her. Nevertheless, when she was released her parent’s allowed her to return home and live with them until she got back on her feet.

Ashley began attending groups. She began developing a closer relationship with her parent’s and siblings. Soon she was helping others who were struggling with addiction. She was a model person in recovery. Her challenge was to forgive herself for all of the
pain that she had caused others. How do you replace family treasures when you have no money and no job? How do you deal with the loss of your own children? These issues constantly plagued her mind.

Over time Ashley realized that they best she could do is give of her time and talents. She had the ability to be a leader. When she attended groups she contributed in a powerful way. She opened up and told her story. She began helping other women struggling to overcome their addiction. She served in her local congregation. During this time her inner energy was high. Others loved being around her. Her own family embraced her again and allowed her back into their lives.

In talking with Ashley, my friend told me how impressed she was that Ashley was seeking out service opportunities. She had volunteered to go into local schools and talk about drug addiction and warn children to stay away from drugs. No longer trapped in her own addiction, she turned outward.

The key manifestation of her recovery was looking beyond herself. As she gave service to others her energy and hope increased. There is something special that happens to people in recovery as they give service to others. They can give in so many ways. Their giving does at least two things. First, it gives them something to do that will make them feel good about themselves. Second, it helps them see people as people. No longer are people objects. No longer is stealing or taking advantage of others to fulfill ones addiction necessary. No longer are people viewed as the enemy or someone who is always looking down upon them. As one recovers from addictive behaviors they begin to see other people with compassion and empathy. Both are key elements to creating an intimate relationship.

**Compassion and Empathy**

The power of compassion and empathy for others cannot be overstated as an important part of recovery. In most 12-step programs one of the key steps is to “...”. After talking with many individuals in recovery, a thorough analysis of how their addictive behaviors have impacted others is key to their long-term change. Considering how ones’ self impacts others is compassion and empathy.

According to wikipedia.com compassion is a sense of shared suffering, most often combined with a desire to alleviate or reduce such suffering; to show special kindness to those who suffer. Thus compassion is essentially empathy, though with a more active slant in that the compassionate person will seek to actually aid those they feel compassionate for (www.wikipedia.com). When individuals in recovery grasp the power of compassion they turn the corner away from their addiction and enter the road towards intimacy. Who does not desire a partner who is compassionate?

Empathy allows one to see life through another’s eyes. In their book, “The 6 Secrets of a Lasting Relationship” Mark Goulston and Philip Goldberg said this about empathy, “Empathy is not just an essential ingredient for a healthy and enduring relationship, it is a
practical tool for achieving it.” As one recovers from living a self-centered life they will naturally turn towards others and offer assistance.

Following are a few questions that may help you assess how much compassion and empathy you are giving to your partner.

- When I have hurt my partner I attempt to make things right as soon as possible.
- When my partner is upset I try to understand the problem rather than fix it.
- When my partner is having a bad day, I try to help in appropriate ways.
- I am hurt when my partner is having a hard time.
- When we are arguing or fighting I try to listen and understand my partner’s concerns.

As you carefully answer these questions you will recognize the importance of identifying your partner’s emotions. This type of sensitivity is something that many people are uncomfortable with. Why? Emotions are scary for those who have not learned the power of understanding what is being said behind the “emotion.” If you really want to work on being more emotionally in-tune let me refer you to the work of Dr. Daniel Goleman. I strongly recommend his book “Emotional Intelligence”.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of developing a more compassionate and empathic approach to relationships. If you want to take the next step towards recovery begin developing your compassionate and empathic responses. Dr. Goulston outlines a few ways to do this. He writes, “Empathy involves temporarily relinquishing your own point of view to tune into someone else’s. It means identifying with their situation, feelings, and motives to gain a level of insightful awareness greater than ordinary understanding” (Goulston & Goldberg, 2001).

The process of overcoming a self-absorbing addiction is most clearly seen by individuals who begin looking outward rather than inward. If you have ever met a recovering addict who understands this concept, you have likely witnessed the care and compassion they have for others. You have seen the sensitivity they have towards others. In their eyes they have a sparkle, they are reclaiming their life. They have new found hope and joy.

**Conclusion**

So there you have it—addiction and intimacy from my eyes. I hope that this article offers you new insight into why addiction prevents intimacy. More importantly, I hope the solutions presented can be applied in your life. I invite you to read through this article more than once. Highlight the parts that apply to your life now. In a few weeks review it again. Try taking principles discussed and apply them into your day to day living. Then re-evaluate a few days or weeks later.

The human heart desires intimacy, addiction is what happens when we give up hope for intimacy. Our entire civilization is built upon the need for love and acceptance—the need for intimacy. As you apply these principles you will learn more about yourself and
relationship intimacy. I hope you see addiction as something you can overcome and intimacy as something you can achieve.

May God bless you in your journey towards intimacy and away from addiction.

With deepest regards,

Dr. Kevin B. Skinner
Addiction and Intimacy

References:


Emotional Rejection—
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rejection_(emotion)]


## Appendix A: 

### Attitude Toward Pornography Assessment: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I don’t think my viewing of pornography is a problem that I need to change.</td>
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<td>2. I've been thinking that I might want to quit looking at pornography.</td>
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<td>3. It worries me that I might slip back into pornography viewing, so I am reaching out to let others help.</td>
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<td>4. I am doing something to get help so I can stop viewing pornography.</td>
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<td>5. I think my wife’s problems are bigger than mine. I think she is the one who needs the most help in our relationship.</td>
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<td>6. At times I feel like it is too difficult to stop viewing pornography, but I’m working on it.</td>
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<td>7. I have been successful in working to prevent myself from viewing pornography but I’m not sure I can keep up the effort on my own.</td>
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<td>8. It’s possible that pornography may be causing some problems in my marriage (or life), but I don’t really think so.</td>
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<td>9. I wish I had more ideas about how to stop looking at pornography.</td>
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<td>10. I thought once I stopped viewing pornography I would be free of it, but sometimes I still find myself struggling to not give in.</td>
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<td>11. Even though I am not always successful at avoiding pornography, at least I am trying hard to stop viewing it.</td>
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<td>12. At times I seek additional help (i.e. therapist, friend, clergy, family members) to maintain the progress I’ve made with quitting pornography.</td>
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<td>13. There is no reason to treat pornography like it’s a big problem. I don’t see what the big deal is.</td>
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<td>14. At times I feel like it is too difficult to stop viewing pornography, but I’m working on it.</td>
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<td>15. I hope I can find some help to quit looking at pornography.</td>
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<td>16. I thought the hardest part was past me. Now I realize maintaining my progress is challenging.</td>
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<td>17. I look at pornography sometimes, but it’s nothing that I need to change.</td>
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<td>18. I would like to stop viewing pornography, but I don’t know where to begin.</td>
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<td>19. I am actively working on my pornography problem.</td>
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<td>20. I’m trying to prevent myself from having a relapse with my pornography problem.</td>
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<td>21. I would rather deal with the consequences of looking at pornography than try to change.</td>
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<td>22. In the past I told myself over and over again that I would get help to stop viewing pornography, but now I’m actually doing something about it.</td>
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<td>23. I have been doing pretty well with my efforts to quit looking at pornography but it is a lot harder than I thought it would be.</td>
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<td>24. It’s normal for men to look at pornography. I don’t see any reason I should stop viewing it.</td>
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<td>25. I think I am ready to stop looking at pornography.</td>
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<td>26. I am really working hard to quit looking at pornography.</td>
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<td>27. I know that relapses are common for people who are trying to overcome a pornography problem, so I am getting the help I need to see me through.</td>
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<td>28. I don’t see why viewing pornography upsets my wife and others.</td>
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<td>29. I want to stop looking at pornography and I am taking the steps necessary to stop.</td>
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<td>30. After all I’ve done to stop looking at pornography, every now and then it comes back to haunt me.</td>
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<td>31. I may have a problem with pornography, but so do most men.</td>
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<td>32. I will likely start looking for ways to quit viewing pornography</td>
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<td>33. I have a problem with pornography and I really think I should learn how to stop viewing it.</td>
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<td>34. I have started working on quitting pornography, but I would like help.</td>
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<td>35. I’m trying to prevent myself from having a relapse with my pornography problem.</td>
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<td>36. I wish my wife would just accept the fact that pornography is going to be a part of my life.</td>
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<td>37. I’ve been thinking about getting help for my pornography problem.</td>
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<td>38. I have developed new skills to help me stay away from pornography, now my challenge is maintaining my progress.</td>
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<td>39. Even though I’m not perfect at it, I work hard to not look at pornography.</td>
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</table>
About the Author:

Kevin B. Skinner, Ph.D. is a licensed marriage and family therapist. He is the author of many online tests such as “Test Your Relationship”, “The Relationship IQ Test for Singles”, and “Relationship Intimacy Test.” His other works include: *Dating Smarts Workbook* and *Treating Pornography Addiction: The Essential Tools for Recovery*. He has taught marriage and family courses at two universities and is currently a part time faculty member at Brigham Young University. He has taught many classes for singles in many parts of the Western United States. He is currently in private practice.

You can learn more about Dr. Skinner by visiting his websites:

www.growthclimate.com  
www.treating-pornography-addiction.com  
www.intimacytest.com

Dr. Skinner hosts a regular Internet talk show at www.grapevineradio.com. You can also read his blogs at www.growthclimate.com or www.grapevineradio.com