

Attachment & Emotional Abandonment

It's curious to many why people become addicted to drugs, sex, lust, fantasy, food, appearance, exercise, gambling, power, spending & acquiring money, etc. At its core, addiction is a very simple phenomenon: addictions are the outcomes and evidences of faulty attachments (or lack of attachments) in a person's life.

Childhood

Emotional attachment is critical in a child's life. Children (and all people) must be attached to an individual who is consistent, compassionate, boundaried, honest, validating, and who allows the child (person) to be vulnerable and express their feelings, whether those feelings appear to be accurate or not, desirable or not, enjoyable or not. If a child or person doesn't form an attachment or bond to someone who displays these characteristics of emotional safety (i.e. to a person who is emotionally available), the child or person will not be connected, attached or bonded to anyone, which will create emotional consequences for the child/person.

Because of this lack of emotional attachment, the child can become emotionally shut-down/numb and won't understand or appreciate how the lack of validation, consistency, empathy, compassion and holding of appropriate boundaries with them is emotionally, spiritually and physically affecting them in significant and traumatic ways. The outcome/consequence is that the child or person who is emotionally disconnected or unattached feels alone in the world, not of value, unimportant, not enough, unworthy, unseen and unloved, and can represent themselves as arrogant, entitled, deserving, better than, exceptional, unforgiving, emotionally disconnected and/or vacant. This phenomenon is called shame.

Because what we perceive is our "reality," when a person hears (perceives and/or remembers) messages of, "You are no good," "You don't matter," "You are alone," "I don't care what you want," "You are better than others," "You can do what you want," "There are no consequences," "You are an exception to the rules," and so forth, they internalize these messages into beliefs inside of themselves. Over time, these messages morph into and become "truths" about them; although these messages

are not the Truth, the person unfortunately believes these aggressive messages (whether they are aggressive towards self or others), and they begin to constantly scan their environment and horizon for "evidence" that these beliefs (of shame) are true; however, shame's messages are never the Truth¹. Once these shame messages have been internalized, the person (child or adult) will live their life in a reactionary state to the dictates of these false, deceptive messages (Faulty Core Beliefs) and rarely will they know these messages are present, because they will be so normalized and familiar to them.

A child can feel/hear shame and begin to believe and internalize shame's messages when they are very young (i.e. birth - 5 years). When we "buy into" and support shame's lies as Truth, we engage in the act of emotionally abandoning and detaching from ourselves and from the Reality around us. The person becomes unable to believe the real Truth about their worthiness, their value, their importance (therefore, they are being/feeling abandoned emotionally) because they have "agreed" with shame's voice and think that shame's messages are the Truth. Anytime someone tells this person the Truth or Reality about himself or herself, he or she will block the Truth because it contradicts with shame's lies and creates confusion inside them. Children and adults become so indoctrinated into these Faulty Core Beliefs that they will become defensive and attack anything or anyone who challenges or threatens their distorted reality. Children can feel and believe shame messages throughout their entire childhoods, and if a parent or adult is not aware of how shame is speaking to the child, shame can go undetected for years, if not the person's entire lifetime. This is one of the greatest forms of emotional abandonment and tragedies that children and adults alike experience in life: never knowing they have been deceived by shame, and thus not being able to challenge shame's lies with Truth. Shame begets more shame.

1. See the "Faulty Core Beliefs & Denial" workbook and videos for more information

Choosing Relationships

Another example of emotional abandonment (shame) is the choosing of friends, spouses, business associates and so forth, which resemble and mirror disconnected and emotionally detached relationships from childhood. When we've been shamed (emotionally abandoned) in childhood, we've been conditioned not to connect or attach emotionally or spiritually to self and/or others, and therefore we choose relationships and attachments with people who are not emotionally available, which means they are unavailable to connect with or attach to. These relationships feel familiar, "comfortable" and similar to our relationships from childhood (i.e. you "married your mother" or "father," etc.). Oftentimes, our parents or primary care-providers were shamed as well, and because they had not healed their own emotional detachment and erroneous beliefs (shame) about themselves, they inadvertently passed their shame onto us, their children, which then created a sense of emotional abandonment and neglect (shame) inside of us (their children). It was not intentional; it just happens when shame is expressed or projected in the home or society, in media, church, familial, school or other environments—we as children will pick up whatever shame-based beliefs, thoughts, values, fears, expectations and emotions are being shared and expressed, and make them our own. When someone believes "I'm not enough" or "I'm bad" or "I'm better or more important than others" or "I'm not lovable," "I'm the exception," it is a type of emotional abandonment or disconnect from the Truth of who they truly are—because none of those statements are the Truth. The lie of shame disconnects me from the Truth of my reality which is: I am lovable, I am worthy, I'm not bad, I'm not better or more important than another, I'm like everyone else. These statements are the Truth and when we hear Truth we stay connected to ourselves and God or our Higher Power.

A child quite naturally knows how to emotionally attach and desires to attach to others, but when the adults in his or her world aren't emotionally available to attach to (because they are shamed and disconnected), the child feels alone, confused, abandoned and eventually interprets this emotional unavailability to mean "I must be bad, not enough, unlovable, unworthy." Because the child does not possess the context of adult experienc-

es, there is no way for the child to interpret it in Truth, such as "My mom is angry but it's not about me. She is stressed, overwhelmed and struggles to manage her emotions because she grew up in an alcoholic home where it was not safe to express emotions. I will give her some feedback and let her know how she is affecting me when she's more calm and rational." A child does not have the ability to think in such an abstract and complex perspective. Instead, what happens is, the child believes the shame messages such as, "It's my fault my mom's angry," "It's because of me that my dad won't play with me," "I'm not good because I can't do things the way my brother does." These interpretations create additional shame messages and further the emotional disconnect within the child. Because the child feels fear that the shame messages are true, the child then attempts to compensate for their perceived lack of value, worth and importance by making up a storyline or explanation that seems rational to them (based on their Faulty Core Beliefs). These storylines deny the Truth, and therefore they "lock" the individual's Faulty Core Beliefs and lack of emotional sophistication and maturity in place.

This same dynamic transpires in adults as well because most adults came from childhoods where these emotional/spiritual vacancies (shame) were present and they have never been addressed, acknowledged or healed. Therefore, shame's lies, messages of unworthiness, entitlement, blame, fear and disconnect persist and adults are rendered helpless in defending themselves because they are completely clueless, unaware, disconnected from their long-standing relationship with distraction, lies and false accusations of self-arrogance and denigration.

Turning to Addiction: Out of the Frying Pan & Into the Fire

These expressions or presentations of emotional abandonment (shame)—especially when present in children, teenagers and young adults—cause people eventually to turn to addictions. The pain of the shame becomes so great that the pleasure of the addiction and the distraction from the shame are a welcomed change. I am willing to "put up with" the consequences of the addiction because I no longer feel trapped in my head only hearing

my shame messages about how bad or unworthy I am. Now, I have an “out” (addiction)—a reprieve from the pain—and for a brief moment, I feel better about myself, more free, connected, understood, etc., even if all of those feelings and thoughts are false and temporary. For this reason, I act out in addictive patterns/manners even though I know I’m going to immediately feel more shame after I act out in my addiction. The fleeting or momentary benefit (relief/release) far outweighs the ongoing battering and barrage of my shame belittling me and my inability to manage life and all the emotions and demands therein. The benefit outweighs the consequence (for now). It’s a cycle of shame begetting shame, but at least when I engage my addiction I receive a little relief from the discomfort (shame) I constantly feel.

The Result

The consequence of living in this manner of addictive thinking and behavior is that the feelings of emotional abandonment (shame and disconnect) burrow deeper inside me because now I’m the instigator or perpetrator of the emotional abandonment (shame); I’ve learned how to abandon and shame myself. I’m behaving and choosing in ways that hurt myself, and also hurt those I love by lying to them, keeping secrets from them, isolating, becoming defensive, becoming aggressive and acting like a victim, and never, ever taking any responsibility for my actions, feelings, choices or consequences. I then become the one I need/desire to detach and disconnect from because I am emotionally unsafe to be around, even for myself. I am abandoning myself, my integrity and my Truth every time I act out in my addiction (because I believe and react to my shame messages). This cycle creates more and more shame inside of me and I experience feelings of isolation, abandonment and being trapped and left for dead.

The True Solution: Healing Abandonment

The very thing I need—emotional connection and attachment—is now the very experience that I chase away and hide from with my choices. Until I choose to stop acting out and learn how to be—and choose to be—emotionally honest and responsible about what I perceive, feel, think, choose and how I act out, and for the consequences that follow, I will never feel attached, loved, connected, or not abandoned, because addiction

is all about living in a perpetual state of shame, fear and victim² which solidifies and perpetuates (and perpetrates additional) beliefs and fears of inadequacy and entitlement.

Disconnection and addiction have closed you and shut you down tightly. You need to have someone hear you, in order to support you to open up. Get validated. As you do so, you will be prepared to engage the following steps towards healing the emotional abandonment (shame) that has taken place in your life. The process of healing includes 7 steps:

1. Believe that you can heal. Make a conscious decision to believe this, and proactively choose to disbelieve opposing viewpoints. (The Truth, as Henry Ford said, is that, “Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t—you’re right.”)
2. Be willing to risk, to be uncomfortable and to do things that are new and contrary to your current lifestyle.
3. Tell your secrets. Connect with a person or people who 1) know how to validate, 2) aren’t afraid to validate, and 3) will hold any and all of your emotions.
4. Become responsible for what you learn / find out about yourself and your history, by engaging a process of repentance and forgiveness of self and others³.
5. You must reframe the storyline (shame) you’ve told yourself by changing your thoughts and perceptions, which will change your behaviors & beliefs.
6. Find a witness to share the authentic Truth (not perceptions) of what actually happened, and forgive self for misinterpreting your history / events in your life.
7. Engage in acts of service to self and others. Service is a powerful tool to motivate self-love and then love towards others.

Engaging in these steps is not the “magic bullet” to heal shame or root out addictions—yet these steps are pointing you in the “right” direction to begin a process where

2. See “Shame & Addiction,” “Faulty Core Beliefs & Denial,” “Anger, Fear & Triggers” & “Drama” workbooks & videos
3. See the “Forgiveness & Humility” workbook and videos

you change your thinking, beliefs and storylines you've been telling yourself. If you are interested in changing your life you need to follow these steps and find a coach/leader/mentor/therapist to guide you through the healing process of reframing shame and therefore

healing addiction(s). If you would like to contact me at support@connexionsclassroom.com and participate in coaching to better support you, that would be a positive first step. Stay focused and life will change!

