

The Ambivalent

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I have been working with love addicts for thirty years. Years ago when searching for a term to describe the love avoidant I came up with the terms “Ambivalent Love Addict,” and “Ambivalent Love Avoidant.” The more I work with people who have these conditions the more I have come to believe that all children who suffered neglect and abuse are ambivalent. So my new term is “Ambivalent.”

The Love Avoidant usually suffered from some kind of emotional incest. For them love is problematic. They can love romantically but never had healthy emotional intimacy modeled to them.

The Love Addict was usually abandoned and now craves romantic love and relationships to substitute for what they did not get as children.

I experienced neglect and incest so I am most certainly an ambivalent. I knew nothing about healthy love until I researched it on the internet. My favorite guide was *A Fine Romance* by Judith Sills.

The world has gone from arranged marriages to an obsession with romantic love. We all need to get help finding the middle ground. Therefore, reach out and find a professional who can guide you.

I have been dreaming about love and relationships since the fifth grade. I could not wait until I grew up and found some to settle down with. Unfortunately, things did not work out and for years I did not know why.

In my thirties I took a good hard look at what was holding me back, and I had to admit that while I thought I wanted love I was really ambivalent. I also discovered that I was not alone.

By this I mean that most of my friends were in the same predicament. We want love, but we are afraid of it. We seek out a relationship and then sabotage it the first chance we get. We want space and when we get it we are lonely. We can't live without a relationship and we can't live with it. What is going on here? It is simple.

I believe that ambivalence is more common than we want to admit. We are no longer bound by a social order that dictates we marry and have children. We are no longer bound by a division of labor where the man has his duties [bread winner] and we have ours [domestic bliss]. We have choices and now we are confused.

Ambivalents have the following characteristics:

- We crave love, but we also fear it.
- We only get involved with emotionally unavailable people.
- We sabotage relationships once they get serious or our fear of intimacy comes up.
- We often initiate relationships with more than one person at the same time in order to avoid moving to a deeper level with any one person.
- We break up and make up over and over again in the same relationship and become addicted to this pattern.
- We sexualize relationships to such a degree that emotional intimacy is non-existent, and then become addicted to either the sex or the relationship—often both.
- We cannot commit to the future. We live in the moment.

- We can love and commit, but this will go hand in hand with avoidance tactics, like a difficulty with affection and opening up emotionally.
- We are there and yet we are not there.
- We come close, and then move away.
- We let other things outside of the relationship get in the way, i.e., hobbies, work, friends, lovers, addictions—anything.
- We just cannot open up to a deeper level of emotional intimacy, and yet we are unable to let go of the relationship.
- We have affairs to avoid emotional intimacy with our partner.

The is a lot we can to if we are ambivalent.

- We can admit that we need help and reach out to a support group or get into therapy. Here we can explore what happened in our family of origin to make us feel uncomfortable in relationships. We can ask ourselves if our role models gave us the feeling that relationships are going to hurt us.
- We can read about healthy relationships. In this modern age there is no set rules about love. When I was growing up things were simple. Men were in charge and women took care of the family. Modern relationships are more complicated and we need to learn how find the right partner so that we are safe to stay committed when our fear comes up.
- We can change what we value when it comes to relationships. We stop thinking sex and romance it the only important part of a relationship. We can work toward something more like emotional intimacy with the right partner.

- We can stop thinking that if love is not as exciting it will sustain you longer and can be just as satisfying.
- We can look for an available partner and then stay the course when we start becoming ambivalent.
- We might consider therapy to understand where our ambivalence comes from. Were our parental role models ambivalent? Do the chaotic relationships in our family of origin give us an uneasy feeling when we fall in love and fall into a relationship? Do we idealize relationships because our family of origin was so dysfunctional?
- As Judith Sills put it, “we can stop looking for someone perfect and find someone to love.”

This worked for me. I stopped idealizing unavailable men like my father. I found someone who I was attracted to but not obsessed with. I gave the relationship a chance and after awhile fell in love. I stuck it out when I got frightened for no explainable reason. Today I am happily married to someone I would never have chosen for myself twenty years ago and I am no longer ambivalent.