

# Healing from Peer Rejection

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The first person to recognize the relationship between peer rejection, and love addiction, was Susan Peabody in her book, *Addiction to Love*.

Rejection often refers to the feelings of grief, sadness, or shame that someone feels when others do not accept them, including parents or others in their lives. Sometimes children feel rejected by their peers and suffer tremendously from anxiety and self-loathing.

Rejection has a place in our lives and is believed to come from the need in ancient times to belong to a tribe or group. Not belonging or being rejected meant death. Many tribes or groups used ostracism to control the behaviors of their members. So, humanity developed the need and desire to be accepted, and when we face rejection, we are mortified.

Unfortunately, for many, being rejected leads to being afraid of further rejection, bringing problematic behavior to avoid it. People may isolate themselves or hold back from making connections with others because they are afraid of being rejected. Fear of rejection leads to loneliness and depression as we respond subconsciously to our need to be accepted into a group.

Fear of rejection often occurs with many mental health conditions, including social anxiety, borderline personality disorder, avoidant personality disorder, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, to name a few.

## **The Neurology of Rejection Trauma**

Thanks to the amygdala, memories of rejection are stored via a complex process that occurs in the brain, which attaches meaning to experiences. If peers reject a child, the pain of rejection gets reinforced to gain importance and meaning. The rejection turns into our predominant emotional story.

Research has shown that emotional pain is worse and results in more brain activity than remembering physical pain. For instance, it hurts much more to remember an event where your parent rejected you than to remember when you broke your leg. The leg healed up quickly and left few emotional scars, yet the memory of the rejection from your parent lasts for decades and sometimes for a lifetime.

### **Six Methods Used to Overcome Rejection Trauma**

Rejection trauma leaves us feeling like we do not belong anywhere, and we tend to behave in ways that cause us to be rejected by those we know in the present. Living with rejection trauma may seem to be impossible to overcome, yet there are at least six methods that can help you to do just that.

- **Acknowledge and Recognize the Trauma.** Those who have experienced childhood trauma spend many years minimizing what happened to them by pretending it didn't happen. This leads to feelings of guilt and self-blame. To heal, we must acknowledge that a traumatic rejection happened to us in childhood and that we were in no way responsible for it.
- **Learn to Let Go and to Accept What Happened.** Accepting what happened to you does not mean you agree with it or that it

isn't essential. Acceptance means deciding to deal with it and not allow your life to be ruled by your past any longer. To accomplish acceptance, one must first go through letting go. Letting go isn't a magical procedure. Instead, it means no longer allowing the terrible memories of the past to rob us of living our best life today.

- **Ending Self-Criticism.** One of the most common behaviors of people suffering from rejection trauma is they become self-critical. They engage in behaviors such as listing their faults, focusing on their shortcomings, and punishing themselves constantly. When these folks are met with rejection at work or in love, they employ a harsh and abusive inner dialogue, convincing themselves that they deserve rejection. Ending self-abuse isn't easy but to do so they must list their good qualities and remind themselves constantly that they are worthwhile and do not deserve rejection.
- **Make Connections with Those Who Appreciate You.** Living in rejection destabilizes our need to belong, causing an unsettledness and restlessness after social or intimate rejection. We need to form new connections and form a core group to treat rejection. These people need not be related, but a family of choice made up of people who appreciate and care for us. We must have emotional support from a core group to remind ourselves we are loved, wanted, and valued.
- **Restore Self-Worth.** Using self-affirming exercises, such as reciting positive affirmations, is a great way to restore motivation, confidence, and self-esteem after a rejection. In using self-affirmations, we remind ourselves of our skills and abilities, plus our value. First, make a list of your good qualities and then write a brief few sentences about one of them. By doing this, we will remind ourselves how valuable we are, and raise our self-esteem.

- **Take Stock of Potential Changes.** Sometimes we need to reassess our strategy if we have experienced rejection. We need to explore our behaviors to see if there is indeed a reason for the rejection we have experienced, such as not caring for our appearance. When we find these shortcomings, we can begin changing what we can (not the things we cannot change) and focus on trying again. Sometimes we bring on the rejection of others because we are too busy expecting rejection. We may isolate ourselves away from the very people who would love to form a lasting relationship with us.

I hope you have enjoyed this series on rejection trauma and have learned the information you need to overcome it. Although it has ruined many lives, this type of rejection need not affect you forever. It takes some time, self-patience, and, yes, self-love to overcome rejection trauma.

“Life is too short to waste any amount of time on wondering what other people think about you. In the first place, if they had better things going on in their lives, they wouldn’t have the time to sit around and talk about you. What’s important to me is not others’ opinions of me, but what’s important to me is my opinion of myself.”– C. Joybell C.