

# Relationship Addicts

Susan Peabody

There is a lot in the media about love addiction, but what about Relationship Addicts? How do they differ from Love Addicts? What makes them special and harder to treat? Why are they more likely to relapse?

Relationship Addicts [RAs] were the first type of love addict to be recognized. They were first called co-alcoholics and then later codependents. As the media moved on to write extensively about the Love Addict, Relationship Addicts have been left in the dust—until recently. Now there is a resurgence of interest in the RA.

Let me begin, by stating that what sets an RA apart from a Love Addict, is that he or she is in a relationship. Love Addicts are often obsessing about someone who is unavailable. Furthermore, most RAs are also codependent. [Please note that there are as many male RAs as women.]

There are three types of Relationship Addicts (RAs):

Those who no longer love their partner romantically. The honeymoon is over. Still, they cannot let go. Usually, they are so unhappy that the relationship is affecting their health, spirit and emotional well being. Even if their partner batters them, and they are in danger, they cannot let go. They are afraid of being alone. They are afraid of withdrawal. They are afraid of change. They do not want to hurt or abandon their partners. I describe this as “I hate you don’t leave me.”

Those who are addicted to a relationship with a parent, child, friend, sibling, or anyone for whom they have never had romantic feelings.

Those who goes from one relationship to another without taking a break in between. They are terrified of being alone. Often they seek out a new relationship when the one they are in begins to deteriorate. Some RAs of this kind have never lived alone in their entire life. Relationships are their life.

Signs to look out for.

1. You are too dependent on this person (financially or emotionally).
2. You do not know where you leave off and he or she begins.
3. You hang out with this person too much.
4. You cannot make decisions without this person’s input.

5. This person comes first. You always do what he or she says. You give in too much.
6. You doubt your own decisions.
7. Your needs are less important than the needs of this person.
8. When you are not in contact you go into withdrawal.
9. You have overwhelming compulsion to contact this person even when you are living your own life.
10. You always want to make sure he or she is okay.
11. Everyone has told you the relationship is unhealthy but you keep hanging on.

At the later stages of the addiction, you can't stand this person but you can't let him or her go. You feel relief initially when this person is not around, but then you panic and want to make contact for no explainable reason.

Treatment for RAs is more complicated because RAs want to continue their relationships with their children, parents, or friends. Sometimes they have financial ties, shared custody, or a business relationship with an ex-partner. No Contact does not work for them. This is why RAs relapse more often.

Relationship addicts who need or want to stay involved need to approach recovery differently. They need to create healthy boundaries which help them stay connected and yet enjoy their own lives. This is not easy. I suggest they read about boundaries and learn what they are.

Once you know what healthy boundaries are, enforce them. This is a process and will take time, but don't give up. As Robin Norwood explained in her book, *Women Who Love Too Much*, the people you have been addicted to will rebel when you start taking care of yourself, but they will fall in line and actually encourage you if they really care.

You are as important as everyone else in your life. Creating your independence is the first step in establishing healthy relationships. When you love and honor yourself you have more to offer others. Not all the things you think they want, but the gift of yourself which is even more meaningful.