

# Willfulness & Love Addiction

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I have researched this and no one knows why some children are willful and others are not. I just know that I was a willful child, and I had a codependent mother who never set limits with me. I am convinced that there is a correlation between this and my love addiction

Currently, I am helping two women who are struggling to let go of a relationship. One of them is in love (love addiction), and the other is not. She is addicted to her husband who she hates (relationship addiction). I asked them both if they were willful and stubborn children and they said yes.

We talk a lot in recovery about the relationship between unmet childhood needs, which usually refer to neglect and abuse. We did not get enough love and attention at home. We may have been bullied at school and have low self-esteem. This explains why we fall in love so easily even if the person is not right for us.

We also understand projection and the inherent need to hold on to something that we think is going to give us what we did not get as children. The less love we got, the more we hold on to what little we have, even if it is practically non-existent (inadequate relationship).

There are a lot of reasons love addicts hold on so tight. In this article, I want to discuss holding on to the wrong person out of sheer willfulness, and more importantly, what to do about it.

First, describe the situation. Try to state the facts—why did you fall in love with this particular person in the first place? What happened? What do you think went wrong?

Ask yourself if willfulness is a shortcoming you have had since childhood and therefore a serious habit for you. Write down some examples in a fourth step inventory. Then ask yourself if this is why you are holding on so long.

How are you willful about this situation? Describe your emotions, your thoughts and your physical sensations that reflect how you are resisting the situation and how you don't want to tolerate what is happening. For instance, are you rebelling against rejection? Are you blaming yourself as an excuse for hanging on? Are you being stubborn about this even when your therapist points this out to you and you know he or she is right.

What are you willing to do? In this step we will explore the alternative to willfulness—the concept of willingness. If you had accepted all the facts of the situation, what would your emotions and thoughts be? What would you be then willing to do? Is there a different, more flexible solution as opposed to spending unnecessary energy fighting the unchangeable facts? Take your time and think about it.

Perhaps the concept of willingness vs. willfulness is a little abstract at first to internalize. Take your time and think about how you would apply the willingness approach in your everyday life. Also, maybe you will become aware that you spend a lot of time refusing to accept what cannot be changed. Use this awareness to try to substitute this attitude with the more liberating one—willingness.

I can still be a willful person, but I now recognize this. I have changed this much at least. I have a program of recovery that includes acceptance of what I cannot change. It is not easy, but I made a commitment to myself, and I act on it whether I feel like or not. I let go when necessary.

As a love addict, the hardest thing for me to let go of is a relationship—especially if I have invested a lot of time and emotion in it. But the good news is that I can now set limits with my inner child and willful teenager and let go—act like an adult. As David Richo says in his book, *How to be an Adult*, acceptance and change are the key to growing up and feeling better about yourself and about life.