

Self-Care & Healing From Abusive Relationships

Part 1

A Step by Step Look at Healing

Narcissistic abuse is, in many ways, the worst kind of abuse. It is an attack on all fronts: mental, emotional, and sometimes even physical. It undermines the person's confidence and can even cause them to question their own sanity. People who have suffered narcissistic abuse often end up with PTSD or even narcissistic traits of their own. This is not surprising. Dealing with a narcissist is literally like being at war. It is being under attack all the time with no let up, no time to heal, and no way to defend yourself. Narcissism is like a virus that spreads itself to every person it touches in some way or another.

But after you get out of the abusive situation, what do you do? What can you expect? Firstly, you have to remember that it takes the body and the mind a few days to process each stressful incident that has happened. Since dealing with narcissists usually entails ongoing and even daily abuse, you may not have had the time to recover that you needed. So it's likely you will be recovering for a while. For example, it takes the body three days to recover from a physical incident of abuse and the reactions that go with it. If you're being physically assaulted every day, there is no time to recover. All of that is still in there, needing to be processed and in time, it will be. So just remember that recovery does not end with the relationship. It begins with ending the relationship. Healing takes place after the recovery as a matter of course. And even if you were not physically abused, your body goes through changes and reactions when you are upset or when abuse happens, which I'll clarify in a minute, so physical recovery time is still necessary.

Emotionally, you're likely to be very torn. You hate the narcissist for what they have done and you are likely to be very angry but you also feel that you love the narcissist on some level. You may need to grieve your relationship. It may not have been what you thought it was, but it still deserves to be grieved. You lost something important to you, and the fact that it wasn't real to the narcissist doesn't even matter. It was real *to you*. It was important *to you*. Don't be afraid to grieve for what you've lost. It's important if you want to truly heal. It's OK to say "I loved this person. I wanted to be with this person. I thought it could work" or however you feel. In a very real way, something died. In narcissistic relationships, the realization that the narcissist is not who we thought they were can feel like someone actually *did* die. Acknowledge those feelings and process them. Grief is how healing starts. Grief does take time to go through and it does not start until there is a legitimate recognition that the relationship is truly over.

Grief can be complicated by things though. It may take time to recognize that the relationship is truly over and to let go of the idea of it. You may have become enmeshed with the narcissist and may be sharing what's called a trauma bond with them. Trauma bonding is a very powerful. Like the name says, it is the bonding of someone to another person through abuse or some other type of trauma. It is both biological and emotional. Bonding of any kind is not love or trust or affection, even though it feels very strong and even though there is a desire to reunite with the person. Unlike love and affection, a bond grows greater over time regardless of your actual feelings. You can have a traumatic bond with a person you don't even like, and feel unable to leave or let the relationship go even though you dislike or even hate this person.

This is often what causes people to stay in all types of relationships even though everyone involved is

miserable. The push-pull of narcissistic relationships is one of the things that creates this dynamic. Fighting is exciting. Making up is exciting. The cycle of idealize and devalue, the drama in general is exciting. Not exciting in a good way, but exciting in a clinical way. Your mind and body become hyped up and upset, hormones are released, things start happening. Then the calm comes, and more hormones are released, more things start happening. This is sometimes called an arousal-jag.

Your body and mind become accustomed to this roller coaster over a period of time and eventually begin to crave it, even though intellectually you may hate it and the stress that it is causing you. The narcissist craves it, too; it's often representative of the environment they were raised in and because of that they suffer from chronic boredom and feelings of emptiness. This is one reason they intentionally provoke fights and cause problems. Without all that drama and fussing, they just don't feel alive. It may be how you were raised, too, and that's why you were susceptible to it. They - and you - also crave the affection and calm that follows the drama. Without war, you wouldn't know what peace is, right?

So there you both are, stuck in this cycle that you may not even recognize. Because of trauma bonding and enmeshment, it is very difficult to walk away from these relationships, even when you truly dislike this person and truly recognize the relationship is abusive, empty or pointless. This is why being discarded is so painful. Not only is the relationship that you put your very soul into over and your illusions totally shattered - which is bad enough in and of itself - but now you have the war with no peace. Your body and mind are addicted to that cycle and when it gets broken, it's extremely hard to deal with. Breaking trauma bonds is very difficult, and I will cover that in a future podcast, but once you do so, you are still going to be left with all of these conflicting feelings and likely grief. Let yourself feel all of it. It's normal and it's how you get through it.

Once these things are not as immediate and powerful, you may find that you are still very angry. You have every right to be. This person abused you, treated you badly and hurt you. Anger is important, as it is often the reason people leave relationships. However, holding on to anger or hatred for long periods of time is detrimental. Yes, it feels safer to be angry because anger is strong, but in the end, you are actually making yourself more vulnerable, not less by holding on to it. Don't you deserve a break? Haven't you been through enough? Now you have to carry this hate and anger and resentment around all the time on top of it all? The good news is, you don't.

If anger is acknowledged and processed, it will work itself out naturally. Be careful to let that happen, rather than trying to hold on to it. It will fade over time, as it is supposed to. One of the ways to work through your anger is to understand what happened. Emotions cloud everything. They make things much harder to see and deal with. Sometimes emotions make things hard to understand. For example, a lot of people have a hard time with believing that the narcissist's abuse is not personal. It *feels* personal to them, and of course it does. But with a bit of distance, from a non-emotional standpoint, we can see that it isn't about us at all.

That's one thing that really helps people be less angry: understanding that this is a disordered, sick and truly miserable person who hurt you for reasons of their own that have nothing to do with you. You couldn't have changed it and you didn't cause it. There was nothing you could do. You were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, and when the danger revealed itself, you did not recognize it because how could you? How can anyone who has not dealt with this understand it? But being angry at the narcissist doesn't hurt them. It doesn't punish them. It does nothing to them because they don't care how you feel. That's part of their disorder. It only hurts you and in time you will find that you are tired of hurting and you will let that anger go.

Once you've dealt with the recovery and all of these emotions, healing can begin. These things are very

important to the healing process and if they do not take place, healing will be incomplete or will not occur. We often see incomplete healing; people say they are healed and believe they are healed, but they are still so angry, or so hyper-vigilant in relationships. This is not healing.

Probably one of the most important functions of healing is to learn why things happen and accept your role in what happened. Of course, you had no role in the narcissist's abuse but you can learn why you did not leave the relationship when the abuse became apparent, or why you became addicted to the chaos cycle in the first place so that you can prevent this from happening again. That is true healing. It's an ongoing process but it's absolutely possible. Narcissists cannot heal, they cannot acknowledge their responsibility in any situation and they cannot learn from mistakes. You can.

How to Break Trauma Bonds & Finally Move On

Trauma bonds are exactly what they sound like: bonds that are formed between people by trauma. And they are strong. Unlike love, bonding is both a biological and emotional process. Bonds don't fade over time. You can't "fall out of bond" the way you can fall out of love. Bonding survives, even when you don't love the person anymore, or even like them. These bonds have to be broken in order to move on and heal. It is very difficult to stay away from a person you have bonded with, which is why people stay in abusive relationships even after they know they should leave, and even after they actually *want* to leave. It's a dirty trick, really. Love is easier to release than a trauma bond, and, an even dirtier trick, the longer a relationship involving a trauma bond goes on, the harder it is to leave. This is especially true when enmeshment occurs, which is the break down of boundaries between people. Enmeshment is when boundaries are so poor, people cannot tell where they end and the other person begins.

Why are Trauma Bonds So Strong?

Trauma bonds are caused by inconsistency in relationships. Love bombing followed by abuse, followed by more love bombing, for example. That's inconsistency. It keeps people off-kilter and continuously looking for a way to get back the good feelings. This type of dynamic occurs in relationships with narcissists, with alcoholics and drug addicts, and in abusive relationships in general. People who have grown up in an abusive environment are especially susceptible to this type of thing. It may be that along with, or in the place of, the natural bonds that occur between parent and child, abused children develop trauma bonds with parents and as adults, without a trauma bond to their partner, they are unable to feel satisfied by the relationship. It doesn't feel like love without abuse, in other words. There's no understanding of peace without war. That's likely why we often see people who have narcissistic parents that then go on to marry a narcissistic person. They've been conditioned that this is how relationships should feel, and this is not just a cognitive thing. It's not just a learned behavior.

Trauma and upset cause hormones to be released in the body, like cortisol. The honeymoon part of the relationship - where everything is nice - causes more hormones to be released, like dopamine. After years of being exposed to this pattern, your body starts to think that this is how it's supposed to be, and so does your mind. It doesn't really know anything else. You become, for all intents and purposes, addicted to the chemical dump, the excitement, the drama. This cycle is sometimes called an arousal-jag. "Regular" relationships feel less intense, and are therefore often experienced as boring, uninteresting or shallow. It feels like only the abusive person can fill that need, which is why it's so hard to stay away. The excitement and intensity of this arousal-jag is often mistaken for love. It isn't. It's a chemical and emotional pattern your body became accustomed to and then dependent on as a result of abuse and inconsistency. It's about the cycle, not the person. This is one reason why being discarded by the narcissist is so painful. You're stuck in the war with no peace. There's no comedown into good feelings, and after years of conditioning, your body and mind believe they cannot get along without it. Again, it's about addiction to the cycle, not the person themselves.

There is often a lot of denial or misunderstanding involved in trauma bonds, but people can prove the reality to themselves by examining how they truly feel. A lot of times, upon examining their feelings honestly, realistically and objectively, people find that they don't actually love the person. They find

that because of the abuse they don't respect them, don't trust them, don't like very many things about them, have nothing in common, find their personality obnoxious or unpleasant, don't like the way this person behaves... It isn't possible to love someone you don't respect or trust, and many people find that what they thought was love actually isn't. They realize that it is only trauma bonds and conditioning keeping them in the relationship. This can be a very liberating realization. Once this is acknowledged, it is easier to address the problem of staying in the relationship even when you know it is unhealthy. And yes, that is a problem.

It's interesting that we always hear people in abusive relationships of all kinds think the abusive person will change. While that may be true sometimes, or at first, most people probably know inside that it isn't true. They know the person isn't going to change. They may have fantasies or hopes of that, but realistically they know it isn't going to happen. They stay anyway though, because their mind and body are addicted to that next honeymoon phase when everything feels good. The fantasies of change are often just a justification for staying, they are not the reason. Once that truth is confronted, it is a lot easier to be honest with yourself about what's going on and why.

This is important because it is absolutely necessary to break through the denial and the conditioning involved here if a trauma bond is going to be broken. If someone is harming you, if they are hitting you, if they are manipulating you, if they are setting you up to be embarrassed or attacking you without provocation, if they are destroying your peace, if they are undermining your confidence, if they are gaslighting you, if they are saying terrible things about you to your children or your friends and family, if they are accusing you day and night of crazy things... *they are abusing you*. This needs to be faced, truly faced, if you are going to be able to understand the situation. Yes, it *is* abuse. Yes, it *is* as bad as it seems. There is no excuse for it and nothing that makes it OK or acceptable. It doesn't matter if this person is nice sometimes. Ted Bundy worked at a suicide hotline, saving lives. You probably wouldn't recommend anyone go on a date with him.

Anyone who abuses you doesn't love you, and you probably don't love them. Abuse destroys love, and it doesn't take that long either. You may have once loved them, but likely don't anymore if the abuse has gone on for a while. You may be locked in a trauma bond with them, and they are just as addicted to the abusive cycle as you are. This is one reason they are constantly pulling at you with their siren songs of hope and change and love. It's not just their desire to control and their fear, though those things are part of it. It's their addiction to the cycle. That's also why the abused person gives in and stays. It isn't that they believe the abusive person's proclamations of change and remorse. It's the cycle. It's that feeling when the madness is over. It's the return of what feels like love. It's like a guy beating his head into the wall. Someone comes up to him and says, "Why are you doing that?" and the guy says, "Because it feels so good when I stop." That's the cycle.

What are Some Signs That You are Experiencing a Trauma Bond?

Some signs you may have a trauma bond would be that denial we talked about, where the person has failed to keep their promises or do what they've said yet you continue to believe them, you feel stuck in the relationship and unable to detach from this person even though you don't want to be in it anymore or don't love or even like the person anymore, you have stayed in the relationship past the point where you consciously know you shouldn't have, and the desire to reunite with this person feels irresistible when you do leave. It's so painful it's like an amputation. Ending relationships is often painful but if it is *so* painful that it feels like it's going to destroy you and you cannot bear it, something is wrong with

that. Let me say right here that, although there are some similarities, trauma bonds are not codependency. They are a different dynamic.

Breaking a Trauma Bond

The way to break a trauma bond is by consciously deciding to live in reality. It's about confronting your own denials and illusions. That means facing the truth of the situation, whatever that is. This person is abusive and they are not going to change. It doesn't matter if you hope they will or fantasize that they might. They are not going to. Their motives, reasons, intentions and excuses don't matter. It isn't about them. It's about the truth, and the simple truth is that it isn't going to change. Another truth you need to face may be the truth that you don't love this person anymore. It's almost certainly the truth that they don't love you and cannot be the person you need. It's OK to grieve these things; they need to be acknowledged and they are going to hurt because you are losing something valuable to yourself. But you can't let that stop you from facing these things down. It's only temporary.

It's time to stop waiting and stop living on hope. Try to make an effort to live in real time. Feel how you feel now. This is affecting you *now*. It is hurting you *now*. Don't let your mind just brush that off or deny it in favor of hopeful thoughts for the future. This *is* the future. This is the outcome of those same hopeful thoughts you had last week or last month or last year. How did that work out? Is it any different?

In the same way, don't overburden yourself with thoughts of tomorrow. Just get through now. The idea of what you have to do or face tomorrow can be scary, so live intentionally and focus the present for now. It really is like breaking a drug addiction or an obsession, and the best way to do that is to live one day at a time, making choices that only work in your best interest. Is it in your best interest to talk to this person? Regardless of how you *feel*, what does reality say? In another parallel to drug addiction, it's important to learn that the thing that makes you feel better temporarily is hurting you in the long run. Feelings are not permanent. They will change, and you will feel better. Is giving in worth all the work you've done just for temporary relief? Relief that isn't even real and won't last? Evaluating things this way and practicing self control go a long way toward helping you stay on track and break away from the cycle. Because enmeshment often occurs with trauma bonds, it is very important to create and enforce strong boundaries. Boundaries are how we teach other people to respect us, and how we respect ourselves.

Examples of boundaries are:

- I will not deal with people who are disrespectful to me
- If my partner hits me, I will end the relationship

You can also create boundaries to reinforce self-respect and self-care, such as:

- I will remember that no one is perfect
- I will not blame others for things I am responsible for because I take ownership of my life. I am not helpless.

Breaking habits and changing patterns is hard, especially when there is a biological chemical

component in the situation, but it is very possible. Using a journal can help, and writing your feelings down. It's important to acknowledge them. Yes, you may want to see this person or speak to them. That's normal in this situation, even if it doesn't seem to make sense. So acknowledge all of your feelings and get them out. You can also write down the fantasies and illusions you had about the relationship, and then write down the reality.

Fantasy: *I thought we were going to get married.*

Reality: *This person was a serial cheater and cannot commit to one relationship.*

Fantasy: *I thought if they loved me enough, they would stop abusing me.*

Reality: *This person is abusive and does not understand love.*

Fantasy: *I thought my mother would care more about me if I always did what she wanted.*

Reality: *My mother is a person who does not understand how to care about somebody or appreciate when they care about her.*

In this way, you drive the reality home to yourself so that denial and rationalizations cannot get a foothold in your thoughts. This is often painful, but many times when you acknowledge and state these things, the hope and illusions you have carried around no longer have the power over you that they once did.

Trauma bonds take time to break, as they took time to form, but don't get discouraged. Every day you can console yourself with the knowledge that what you are doing is right and healthy. The chemical component also takes time to break, but in time it can be repaired as well, when you learn to see these things for what they are so that you don't equate the intensity of trauma with the feeling of love anymore. It is up to you to break the cycle in your life so that you can stop engaging in relationships that are hurting you, destroying your peace and undermining your self-worth. Once you've broken the trauma bond and begun to heal, you can look forward to the future and start building a healthier life with healthier focus and connections. The cycle of trauma bonding becomes so ingrained in a person's life partly because of their inability to recognize what love is. That's not your fault, so it's time to fix it and stop using outdated programming that you don't need anymore. Start showing love to yourself and stop accepting less from others. You really do deserve better.

Boundaries & How to Create Them

Boundaries are the way we teach other to respect us, and how we respect ourselves. Another term for boundaries could be deal breakers. When someone does something that disrespects or crosses your boundaries, that's a deal breaker. And it should be, honestly. This person has blatantly shown that respecting you is not important to them. A healthy relationship cannot be built on that. Respect is inextricably linked to trust. If someone disrespects you, they have violated your trust. Very few relationships can survive that without serious effort from both parties to rebuild the trust that was broken. In relationships with narcissists or alcoholics, for example, there is just too much selfishness and dysfunction involved for that to happen.

In most abusive relationships, there is a serious lack of boundaries between the people involved. Enmeshment often occurs, which is where boundaries between people are so weak and damaged that their individuality disappears. We might see this for instance in codependent enabling relationships between parents and a child that is addicted to drugs. Their child's pain has become their pain. Their child's struggle has become their struggle. They give their child money, even though they know he will buy drugs with it. They don't call the police when their child steals from them, even though they know she has taken these things to pawn or trade for drugs. They allow their child to live in their home, leaving needles around or having unsavory characters over or whatever the case may be.

This happens because the parents don't have strong, healthy boundaries. They cannot separate themselves emotionally from the situation in order to see it clearly. Everything is controlled by the child's emotions and what this person wants, rather than logic and what is the right thing. The parents subject themselves to abuse and more importantly, they are not doing right by their child - because they are too blinded by their child's emotions and pain to care for themselves or their child, and because they are blind to the fact that their own needs are being met this way as well. They operate on the premise that relieving their child's discomfort - which is now their discomfort - makes them good parents. They tell themselves that giving their child money is better than what their son or daughter might go do if they didn't. They tell themselves giving their child the money keeps the peace.

There is a belief that this happens because the parents can't stand to see their child in pain. While this is certainly true, it happens because they cannot separate themselves from their child. It's the parents who cannot take the pain. If they were able to think clearly and were able to distance themselves from Ground Zero, so to speak, they would realize that they are not helping at all. They are not relieving their child's pain. They are enabling it and making it worse.

This type of enmeshment and enabling happens in abusive romantic relationships as well. The partner who does not leave or call the police after they have been battered, or when their property is destroyed. The partner who does not end the relationship with a serial cheater. The partner is enabling the abuser's behavior by not doing anything about it, by making excuses for it and by tolerating it. Enabling is about not enforcing boundaries - and therefore not enforcing consequences - for behavior that is not OK. Boundaries and enabling or codependent behavior go hand in hand. Codependent people and enablers have poor boundaries. Boundaries are about saying, "I love myself and I will not allow myself to be treated this way by anyone." Boundaries centered around stopping enabling behaviors are about saying,

"I love myself and I also love *you*, which is why I will not be a part of this wrong thing you are doing. I will not help you hurt yourself or others."

Setting up and communicating boundaries can be difficult. People who are used to just running over your boundaries will likely react badly to it suddenly not being so easy anymore. You should not let this stop you. People sometimes say things like, "Well, that's just how I am. I can't stand up to people." No, that's what you've learned. You can learn to be assertive, just like you learned not to be. People often fear the reaction from others, but look at it like this: do they worry about how you feel? Obviously not, if they don't care to respect or consider you. Maybe if you assert yourself and enforce your boundaries, they will learn to. And even they don't, you won't be putting up with abuse and disrespect anymore.

It's really about your motivation and your determination, because boundaries don't mean anything if they are not enforced, if there are no consequences when someone crosses them. It becomes just words that you're saying. Actions have to follow words or the words don't mean anything. If you set a boundary that you will end your marriage if your spouse quits one more job, then they quit another job and you don't end the marriage, you've just taught this person that they don't need to listen to you because you're not being serious. You've taught them that they don't need to respect you because you don't respect yourself.

People will often say, "Well, I tried to enforce boundaries but it didn't work." That's not really possible. If you are actually enforcing boundaries, it will not fail. The problem is that many people don't want to change. They are afraid to, or maybe they think the other person should have to, not them. While abusive people are most definitely in the wrong, focusing on them is not going to help you. It's time for *less* focus on them, not more. Focusing on yourself and why you've been putting up with this behavior is what will help you. Creating boundaries is the first step to remedying that situation.

It seems to be that people think boundaries don't work if someone crosses them. That's not how it works. The point of creating the boundary with your job-quitting spouse, for example, is not to scare them into doing what you want. You cannot control other people, and that isn't what boundaries are for. Boundaries are not for other people. They are for you. They are you standing up and saying, "I will not put up with this anymore. You can act however you want on your time, but you won't act that way on mine, because I will not be part of it." You cannot change another person. You cannot control them and you cannot fix them. It is not up to you to see to their well-being, emotional or otherwise. It is not up to you to fix their problems. Their problems are their problems and your problems are your problems. Don't take responsibility for something someone else needs to do for themselves. You are not helping them. In fact, you are hurting them, and yourself.

Just like when dealing with trauma bonds, it's really important to be honest with yourself here and break down your own excuses, illusions and denials. Relationships - even abusive or dysfunctional ones - require two to tango. Refusing to own your part of the situation means that it can never be fixed. If you are enabling someone, you can stop. If you are enmeshed with someone, you can separate. If you are codependent, you can become independent. If you have a trauma bond with someone, you can break it. Boundaries are the key to all of it. So how do you do it?

The first thing is to identify why your boundaries are so poor in the first place. A lot of people say "Well, I just have a hard time saying no." But why? Why do you have a hard time saying no? That's the question that needs to be answered. Maybe you're afraid people will become angry with you, or that they will not like you anymore. Maybe you feel guilty for some reason. Maybe you fear that people will abandon you or reject you. Maybe you feel that things are so far gone it's hopeless. Maybe you just want others to be happy. Maybe you do it because you just feel it's easier. Whatever the reasons are,

write them down. (Don't be embarrassed. No one will see it but you.)

After you've done that, then write down all the reasons you think these things are more important than your self-respect. Because that's what we're talking about here: respecting yourself. Caring for yourself. It's time to take control and responsibility for your life and your feelings out of the hands of other people and put it into your own. You do that by recognizing that your own choices have played just as big a part in the situation as everything else.

Everything is a choice. That can be hard for some people to hear, but it's the truth. Usually we find that people who say they have no choice in a situation *do* have a choice, but they don't like one or more of the options. Following our example, the parents of the addicted adult child *could* send their child to rehab or kick them out of the house but they don't like those options. They don't want to do that, and the addicted child certainly does not want that. So they sacrifice their own health and their own self-respect and their financial stability and who knows what else to give the addicted person what they want, all the while telling themselves that they have no choice. And by now they probably feel like they don't.

Upon examining your writings honestly here, you might find that you don't really have all that much self-respect, even if you didn't realize it before - but that's OK! Creating and enforcing boundaries will help you build it, and so will the realization that you are in charge of your own life and therefore don't have to do these things anymore. Change can be scary but you know what? It feels good to say no sometimes. It feels good to say, "No, I don't have to put up with this anymore." Sometimes people don't even realize that, but it's true. You don't have to put up with anything you don't want to put up with.

Once you've identified the reasons why you've had issues with boundaries, you can start addressing them by constructing a list of deal breakers and consequences. This is the list of things other people do that you don't like, and what consequences there will be if they do them. Make sure they are specific. This prevents you from rationalizing later. For example, you might say, "I will not associate with people who do drugs. If I find out that someone does drugs, our relationship will be over." Or, "I will not have anything to do with people who call me names. If someone calls me names, I will no longer be around them." Or, "I will not allow someone to manipulate or guilt me into doing things I know are wrong, or don't want to do." These are the rules for how you will allow yourself to be treated.

You can make specific boundaries for specific people as well, like "I will not stay on the phone with Dad if he starts to insult or attack me. I will hang up," or "If my spouse begins screaming and breaking things, I will not tolerate that. I will call the police." Write what you mean, and mean what you write. Remember, boundaries only work if you enforce them. If you are not going to do what you say you will do, they are pointless.

After you've created your list of deal breakers, you can create a list of personal boundaries, too. This is a list of deals you are making with yourself to make sure that not only do others not disrespect you, but that you don't disrespect yourself. This can be things like:

- I will not sleep with someone I haven't known very long.
- I will not drink until I pass out.
- I will not obsessively check my ex's social media accounts.
- I will not give money to people who I know will buy drugs with it.
- I will not continue arguments that I know are pointless, unreasonable or unfair.

Whatever behaviors there are that you think you need to address. It's important to be honest here, to really own your feelings and behaviors. Don't forget two to tango. They may not change but it won't

matter if you can change to where you don't choose to put up with any of that anymore.

After you've written these things down, it's time to put them in place. Make them very clear and communicate them well to other people. If you are on the phone with Dad and Dad starts in on his abuse, you simply say, "Dad. I've decided I'm not going to put up with being talked to like this anymore" and hang up. He'll either get it or he won't. Either way, you are not listening to abuse from him anymore. It's time to stop feeling bad for thinking you deserve respect.

A few things to remember are that it is not selfish to refuse to be abused or taken advantage of, it's not wrong to refuse to carry other people's burdens and self-respect matters more than the opinions of other people, especially people who don't respect you. You have to be able to look yourself in the eye every day.

It can be especially hard to enforce boundaries if you feel guilty or if you feel sorry for someone. It helps to think of saying "No" as a way of saying, "I love you." For instance, if you have an addicted loved one, don't look at it as you are saying, "No, I will not give you any money." Look at it as you are saying, "I love you and I don't want you to be hurt, so I cannot be a part of that anymore." That is what you are saying anyway. It's not about the money. It's about you refusing to participate in someone's self-destruction anymore, or your own. Making excuses for other people or yourself only hurts everyone involved. People don't have a right to ask you to shoulder their burdens and you don't have a right to take them. Enmeshed relationships, codependent relationships, relationships where abusive behaviors are enabled, excused or tolerated... these are all abusive and unhealthy in their own way. You don't have to be a part of it anymore. All you have to do is decide not to be.

Creating Guilt-Free Boundaries

Most people who become entangled with narcissists or who get into abusive relationships in general have very poor boundaries. Luckily, this is something that can be changed and that's why we talk about them so much. You can learn to establish and uphold strong boundaries so that you don't fall victim to abusive relationships anymore.

One of the reasons it can be hard to establish boundaries is guilt. Often, people who have not always had strong boundaries can feel guilty about trying to create them. They may feel that they are being selfish or that they are going to be perceived as uncaring. It's understandable; many people who have poor boundaries are that way because they were raised in an invalidating or abusive environment where boundaries were punished, destroyed or not permitted. Because of this, we often find that a lot of the guilt people believe they feel when trying to establish boundaries is actually not guilt at all, but conditioning. They've been conditioned to believe that caring about themselves is wrong, that defending themselves is hurtful to others and that protecting themselves is selfish. This could not be farther from the truth, but that kind of conditioning sticks with a person and can be difficult to break. It's by no means impossible, though.

As we just learned, boundaries are the rules we create for ourselves regarding how we will accept being treated. They reflect our self-respect and how much we value ourselves. If we allow others to abuse us, we are not valuing ourselves enough and we need to work on creating boundaries that reinforce our self-respect. People treat us how we allow them to treat us, and except in very extreme circumstances, nobody has any power over you that you did not give them. You can take that back any time you want. All you have to do is decide that you are not giving people the power to hurt you anymore. That's one of the things that not reacting and the grey rock method teach us. These techniques take the power over your emotions and reactions away from the narcissist or the abuser and put that power back into your own hands, where it belongs. Reacting to things is a choice. You really can choose not to let something bother you.

Whether the guilt you are feeling is genuine or whether it is the result of conditioning, it's important to remember that there is nothing wrong with caring about yourself and there is nothing selfish about refusing to put up with abuse. It becomes selfish when expectations are unreasonable, or when the definition of abuse must be stretched to fit the situation. This is what we see with narcissists. To a narcissist, not being permitted to have their way is abuse. This is of course ridiculous. No one always gets what they want, nor should they, and this is an unreasonable expectation. To a narcissist, you are abusive if you do not put their needs above your own. This is again unreasonable. When things become unreasonable and unfair, that's when they become abusive. Expectations should be fair, reasonable and balanced. They should not result in you or anyone else being hurt or being put in situations that are unfair.

One really good way you can decide whether your own boundaries are selfish or unreasonable is to ask yourself what you would think if a friend was describing the same situation to you. Would you think your friend was being selfish or unreasonable? If you would, then maybe you are being unreasonable. If you wouldn't, then maybe you should lighten up on yourself a little. This can help you create some

emotional distance between yourself and the situation so that you can see it a little more clearly.

For example, if a friend told you that someone asked her to do something for them, but she was feeling ill and wanted to tell them she couldn't do it, would you really accuse her of being selfish for that? No. So don't think that of yourself. If a friend told you that his girlfriend had destroyed his property multiple times and he didn't want to see her anymore, would you really insist that he was being unreasonable and should give her another chance? Of course not. So cut yourself some slack. You're a person, too. You're allowed to make mistakes, you're allowed to have a bad day, you're allowed to be need some time and you're allowed to change your mind. You are allowed to say no.

You're allowed to say "I don't like that." You're allowed to say, "I don't want to do that." You're allowed to demand respect and leave the situation if you don't get it. No buts. That's it. The only reason to feel bad about not accepting abuse is because you have been conditioned to think that way. Sometimes just facing that conditioning for what it is can strip it of its power. So much of what we as humans do is conditioning and reflex. When we learn to examine things and live more intentionally, a lot of that falls by the wayside and we see it for what it is: outdated programming that we don't need anymore.

Why Unconditional Love is Not Good For You

We hear a lot about unconditional love. It's romanticized and sung about, movies revolve around it, and many actively seek it out, believing it is the way things should be. Certainly the world makes it sound like it is. But is unconditional love really good for you or your partner? Should you really aspire to love someone no matter what they do?

Fantasy vs. Reality

Unconditional love is fine to talk about in an abstract or romanticized context, but in reality it is not only unrealistic and unreasonable, it's almost impossible. Love can be destroyed by treating another person badly, and honestly, it should be. Unconditional love between two adults is not healthy. It is not normal or safe to continue to love someone no matter how badly they treat you. It's self-destructive and dangerous. For a perfect example, look at pathological narcissists. They are the reigning champions of emotionally abusive relationships. Narcissists demand perfect, unconditional love from their partners, but are unable to give respect, consideration, compassion or anything at all in return. Is this fair? Is it reasonable? Is it healthy? No, it's none of those things. It's an unfair situation in which one person is expected to exhaust themselves by giving unrelentingly while the other person simply takes and enjoys it. Unconditional love is a nice concept, but there should never be a situation where a person feels confident that no matter what horrible things they do, you will never reject them.

This is one reason narcissists do not feel "safe" in relationships. They are looking for that perfect, unconditional love they did not get from their parents. This just does not exist in romantic relationships - and it shouldn't. It's not healthy or OK for either person. Relationships need boundaries and limits to be successful. Love without limits certainly sounds wonderful and it is a favorite fantasy for many, but it is not feasible in a real relationship. We do not live in a TV show or a movie. This is real life with real people. We all have limits and we should. It is how we protect ourselves. Healthy people have boundaries and they uphold them. It is how they take control of their own lives and keep others from treating them badly. Healthy, reasonable people do not attempt to bypass or cross your boundaries while still claiming that you should love them anyway. Reasonable people will understand that when they have crossed the line, the relationship cannot continue. Only selfish or unreasonable people claim otherwise.

For example, narcissists are unable to understand that if you treat someone badly, if you do horrible things to a person, if you lie to them, if you smear their character, if you destroy their friendships and turn people against them... that person will stop loving you. Narcissists continue to insist that if you do not still love them despite the terrible things they've done, you are withholding, cruel and unfair. This is because the love they are looking for is the type of love one expects from a parent, which they feel is supposed to be unconditional, perfect and all-encompassing. Of course, all people looking for unconditional love are not narcissists by any means, but narcissists are a good example of why that kind of expectation is unfair. An adult has no right to expect this type of love from another adult.

The Bottom Line

If you are looking for unconditional love, take a minute to think about how unrealistic this actually is. Do you really think it's possible for another adult to continue to love and respect you no matter what you do? Before you dismiss that, remember: it's not about lowering your standards. It's about being realistic. The romanticized relationships we see on television and in other media are not reality. They are fantasy. Real people have real problems, and real baggage, and real hang ups. Requiring unconditional love from a partner is like requiring perfection. It's unfair and impossible. Unrealistic expectations regarding love and partners cause more damage to relationships than probably anything else.

If you are being accused of not giving unconditional love, think about what the person demanding it is actually saying to you. They are essentially saying, "You are required to love me no matter what I do. I don't have to earn that love or do anything to sustain it, and I don't have to reciprocate it. You simply owe it to me." Does that sound fair to you? No? That's because it isn't. Love is not supposed to be a hostage situation where you have to perform according to another person's demands. Most people seeking unconditional love are actually seeking a guarantee, and this is often in the form of a free pass. They want to know that no matter what they do or how they act, they will still be loved. This is not reasonable, realistic or fair. It is in fact unbelievably unfair to insist that something is wrong with the other person if they do not love you anyway in spite of bad treatment. If someone does not give unconditional love to you, it does not mean they've done something wrong. It means your expectations are too high. They are unreasonable. You are expecting too much from your partner and are creating disappointment and pain for both people involved.

Conversely, if you think you give your partner unconditional love, do you really? What if they hit you? What if they shot or stabbed you? What if they hurt your child? Would you still love them in any of those cases? For an overwhelming majority of people, the answer to these questions is no. This is why unconditional love is great for TV and movies but bad for real life. You probably would not still love someone in those situations and you *should* not. Continuing to love a person in these situations is unhealthy and dangerous. The only relationship where a person would probably still love someone who has done those things is the relationship between a parent and their child. In all other relationships, the love would be damaged, probably irrevocably. And that is as it should be.

Healing Yourself From Codependency

We hear a lot about empaths and codependent people these days. There is an awakening happening in the world and a lot of people are experiencing things that they don't understand. There is often confusion, especially with things that are similar but not the same. Empaths and codependents fall into this category. While there are some similarities, they are generally different. Empaths who are unskilled or unable to control their receptivity can become codependents if they are not careful. Here we will examine the differences between the two and what you can do to heal from codependency.

What is an Empath?

Empaths are people who are literally able to feel the emotions of others. They are the opposite of a narcissist. They are nurturing, caring and sensitive. Empaths who are unaware of their gift might notice that strangers open up to them without solicitation, or that they can always accurately gauge the emotional "tone" of a room or situation. Empaths are often able to tell right away if someone is sad or if they are hiding something. In fact, it is not uncommon for empaths to be jokingly referred to as "human lie detectors." Empaths are not dependent on the other person or people for emotional sustenance, approval or validation. The bond that empaths create with others is sometimes called "telempathy," and it is usually associated with spiritual, psychological or physical healing.

What is a Codependent?

Codependent people are reliant on others for their emotional sustenance. Codependents can be empaths and they can bond with others, but codependency has nothing to do with healing. In fact, codependency is a wound that needs healing. Codependency occurs when someone's needs are not being met and they become "merged" with another person in an attempt to meet them. It is often described as not knowing where they end and the other person begins. Codependency is unhealthy and dangerous, because the codependent sacrifices their own well-being for the other person. They often feel trapped or guilty into doing things they'd rather not do. Codependency is a largely self-inflicted problem, and it is very fixable in a non-personality-disordered person. Many times, enablers of mental illness and addiction have codependent problems. Codependency is sometimes seen as controlling or manipulative. It can be detrimental to the other person, such as in cases of a parent constantly giving money to a drug-addicted child. It is a prominent personality trait in the covert narcissist.

What is the difference?

As we can see, there are similarities between codependents and empaths. Both are extraordinarily sensitive to the feelings and needs of others, both are caretakers, and both are what we could consider "helpers," but there is a very big difference: codependency is destructive and harmful to a person and their relationships. Empathy is the exact opposite. There are other differences, too.

One of these differences is that empaths generally have healthy, strong boundaries between themselves and other people. Codependent people generally do not. This is what causes the inability to tell where they end and the other person begins. Boundaries are necessary in order to protect ourselves from unhealthy interactions or from being 'engulfed' by another person's personality and losing our identity, but codependents have a large amount of trouble with this.

Another difference is in how they respectively process another person's feelings and behavior. An empath will read the behavior and offer insight if needed or asked, but not feel personally affected. A codependent will feel *responsible* for the other person's feelings or behaviors. They are often unable to say "no" to things and have trouble separating their own feelings from the other person's. This is because of their difficulty with boundaries. When there is no boundary, there is no buffer or delineation between the self and the other person.

One of the biggest differences between the empath and the codependent is in goals and driving forces. The driving force of the codependent is often fear. Where empaths are generally able to communicate their feelings and boundaries clearly, codependents have a lot of trouble with this because they fear the other person's reaction and, more deeply, the possibility of approval and/or love being taken away from them as a result of not doing what the other person wants. This is a toxic situation that results in the codependent doing, saying or agreeing to things that they are not OK with.

We often find guilt at the bottom of the behavior as well. For example, the mother has meshed with the child emotionally; all she can see are his feelings. She feels guilty because she works so much and she feels this means she is not a very good mother, so she gives the child whatever he wants. She knows it is not productive or healthy but she cannot seem to stop and now whenever she does not give in, the child rages until she does. As the child gets older, he sees this underlying guilt and hits that button every time he wants something. When the mother says, "No, I will not give you money because you'll buy drugs with it," he says, "I wouldn't need drugs if I ever had a mother who was there for me! I hate you!" If she gives him what he wants, he will stop saying he hates her. Her son hating her is her worst fear come true and she simply cannot stand against it, especially because he is in so much pain on top of that. So she gives him the money, reinforcing the cycle for the thousandth time. She mistakenly believes that stopping her son's emotional upset - and her own - makes her a good mother. This is how the cycle continues.

The goals of the two personalities are different as well. Empaths are generally interested in healing and helping others, whereas codependents are interested in having their own needs met because they cannot do so themselves. The empath's end goal is generally "to help," whereas the codependent's end goal is generally "to be loved." Codependents often *believe* their goal is to help, but we can see the true goal in the way that codependents often support or enable behavior that actually hurts the other person (such as giving a drug addict money or making excuses for a partner's dangerous, risky behavior). These are things a healthy empath would not do. Empaths generally will not support or engage in emotionally unhealthy situations, but codependents often do. This is because the codependent mistakenly believes the ends justify the means. If they have to suffer in order to feel needed or loved, they will do it. This is a sign of hurt, not love, and it needs to be addressed.

Codependents often suffer from self-image and self-esteem problems. They may believe someone will not love or like them if they do not sacrifice unfairly, or they may feel that they have no value without the other person. Again, this is a sign of a wound that needs to be healed. Approval and validation from others should not be so important that a person will cause themselves harm to get it. We see this in

Borderline Personality Disorder all the time, as well as the manipulation of other people because of fear. Manipulation of others through deceit or withholding of feelings is still manipulation, and even if it seems harmless or "for the greater good," it isn't. Relationships need honesty and boundaries to be healthy.

What can you do?

Empaths generally become codependents when they do not have good boundaries established. Strong boundaries are essential for everybody but they are imperative for the empath. Because the empath feels things so deeply, there needs to be a clear line between the self and other people, our own feelings and other people's feelings, our own personalities and other people's personalities. When these boundaries are blurred or don't exist, enmeshment occurs - and enmeshment is very strong with an empath. This is the dynamic between the empath and the narcissist. It is an unhealthy, unsustainable situation where both parties end up feeling trapped and unhappy.

Even if the empath is *not* a codependent, they may become enmeshed with a codependent if boundaries are not kept strong and inflexible. Codependents such as pathological narcissists will push for enmeshment because they don't feel secure without it. This must be guarded against and boundaries are how we do that. This is why it's very important to not fall victim to what's called "boundary ambivalence." This happens when we set a boundary but we don't enforce it. It tells the other person that we are not really serious about respecting ourselves and they don't have to be serious about respecting us, either. When you say, "If you cheat on me again, I'm leaving you" but you stay in the relationship when they cheat on you again, you have shown your partner that you don't really mean what you say and that you are not to be taken seriously. You are essentially saying, "I don't respect myself and you have permission to treat me badly." People only treat us the way we allow them to treat us. If you don't take your word seriously, nobody will and no relationship is worth your self-respect.

If you worry that you might be codependent, take a personal inventory. Why are you in this relationship? Do you feel you are sacrificing for others all the time? Are you able to meet your own needs or are you relying on the other person to do this for you? Do you speak up when you are unhappy with something or don't want to do something? Are you always feeling trapped or guilty into things you don't want to do? Do you feel taken for granted, or that you always need to fix everything? Do you anticipate the needs of others? This in particular is a red flag for codependency. Empaths generally do not attempt to learn what others need and supply that for them, but codependents do this often.

It is important to identify the problem - as well as your role in the problem - so that you can work on the solution. Again: people only treat us the way we allow them to treat us. Denial is very common with codependency, but we are responsible for our own behavior and our own feelings, so accepting your role in the problem can be difficult but it is necessary. If you are not prepared to do that and to be really honest about it, you are not prepared to heal from codependency.

In order to begin healing from codependency:

- Identify the problem and your role in it
- Take a *very* honest inventory of yourself to find out why you are codependent
- Address unresolved issues from your past (find a great way to do that here)
- Work on setting boundaries and sticking to them
- Work on self-esteem and self-image
- Work on identifying and meeting your needs yourself

- Work on saying what you mean and meaning what you say
- Learn to let go of guilt
- Remind yourself that you are not responsible for the actions or feelings of others
- Practice assertiveness
- Get therapy if necessary

For empaths and other caretakers, it can also be necessary to find another area to focus your empathy on where you are not being taken advantage of or associating with toxic people to get your needs met. A situation where you are not so personally involved such as volunteering can do wonders for changing perspective and fulfilling that need to help.

If you have trouble setting boundaries, practice, practice, practice. Look in the mirror and say, "I don't like that, and I will not tolerate it" or maybe, "No, thank you, I have other plans." Try out being assertive in situations that you find yourself in. You will be surprised how many people can take a "no" without getting upset. If someone does get upset, remember that it is a reflection of who *they* are, not who you are. You have the right to your own feelings and your own needs, and anyone who does not respect that is not someone who should be in your life.

Ending The Cycle of More

We are all unhappy with some things sometimes. Our job, our social life, our marriage or relationship, even our children or parents. But if you are finding that you are constantly unhappy with almost everything, chances are that the problem is not really any of those things. The problem is more likely that something inside you that is preventing you from being happy and enjoying your life. If you keep changing jobs, relationships, locations or friends to try and fix it, you are only making things worse because you are addressing the wrong problem.

Let's clear the air right now: despite what TV tells us, stuff will not make you happy. Trying to purchase happiness only results in an endless game of chase, where you just continuously run after the next thing you think you need instead of ever being able to enjoy what you actually have. It's a vicious cycle that never stops. If you are truly happy inside, you will not need to keep searching for that "something" that will magically make everything better. Whether it's a new car or TV or new clothes, a new job, a new boyfriend or plastic surgery for a new nose, none of these things provide lasting happiness. You can dump as many new things, as many drugs, as much food and sex on top of that empty feeling as you want and all you are going to want is more because you are not addressing the real problem. It'll never be enough.

Many people don't know what true happiness even feels like; they mistake the "high" provided by new acquisitions for happiness. Instead of searching for things to *make* you happy, concentrate on being happy inside yourself. Desire is the root to all suffering. You hurt because you want, and some people want so badly that they confuse this with need. This causes chronic dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Happiness is in balance and appreciation. There is nothing wrong with having goals or with wanting things, so long as their importance is not such that you cannot be happy without them.

If you feel resentment, anger, distress or sadness when you are unable to get or achieve something you want, it might be time to ask yourself why it is so important to you and what it really means. For example: if you are depressed or upset when you cannot buy new clothes, why are you upset? Do you feel less attractive without them? Do you feel that it reflects badly on you as a person when you are not wearing the latest styles? These are things that actually have nothing to do with clothes; they are about your self-image. Everyone wants to look good and there is nothing wrong with that, but it should not be a major drive or force in a person's life. It should not cause undue stress or upset. If it does, it's time to figure out why.

Another example could be that you get bored or resentful at a job or in a relationship after a while. There can certainly be awful jobs and bad relationships but if this is a pattern in your life, it's time to find out why. What is it you like about the relationship or job in the beginning? Why can you not sustain that over time? Maybe all you really like in the beginning is the feeling of acquisition or conquest, not the actual job or person themselves. Maybe your expectations or goals are unrealistic. No job is going to be exciting every day and neither is any relationship. It is unrealistic to expect this so it may be time to take some personal inventory and try to understand why you cannot be satisfied. Chronic boredom that occurs this way is an indication that something else is wrong. If you must

constantly be stimulated, it might be worth it to ask yourself what you are trying to distract yourself from. What are you trying to avoid?

The search for more is draining and it leads to chronic unhappiness. It causes anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, low self-worth, gastrointestinal problems and many of the other physical and emotional problems that come with stress. The key is appreciation. Being appreciative of what you already have goes so far toward happiness, because it removes the root of desire. We are bombarded with messages every day that tell us unless we have, unless we feel, unless we do, unless we can, unless we get _____, we are not good enough, smart enough, pretty enough or fast enough, and therefore we cannot compete and we cannot be happy. None of those things are true but this programming can be very hard to overcome.

The only things that lead to true happiness are love and appreciation. Love is the answer, it is the question, it is the entire point of existing. Appreciation facilitates love. Look around you at how many people don't seem to feel either of these things. The world is sorely lacking in love and appreciation. Is it any wonder so many people are so miserable, both physically and mentally? Enriching yourself spiritually helps tremendously as well. I know that for myself, it helps really put things in perspective. When faced with the eternal grandeur of the soul, the rest of this stuff really seems pretty silly and unimportant.

There are lots of things you can do to help break the Cycle of More. You can make lists of things you should be appreciative of, you can meditate, you can do yoga, you can take walks with no particular purpose and just take in the scenery, you can put your electronic devices away and spend real time with your family, you can take a hot bath and just relax, without worrying what you need to do or get or find or buy. Try to think of at least one thing every day that you are grateful for; after all, if you have food to eat, a place to live and a family, you are better off than 80% of the world's population. You are lucky. You are blessed. What more could you want?

How to Protect Yourself From Anxiety & Depression

Living in today's world is very difficult. The world these days can be cruel, cold and brutal. However, it is also beautiful and amazing, and the key is to never lose sight of the good when we feel overwhelmed by the bad. We can all use a little protection from the emotional battering of the world in it's current incarnation.

- Pay attention to what your body is telling you. Most modern medicine is about silencing the body. We hear how we have to push through the pain and keep on even when we are exhausted. We take supplements or ingest chemicals like caffeine designed to silence, mask or alter what the body is trying to tell us. We may feel this to be necessary sometimes, but it is almost always a mistake. Aches, pains, irritability, chronic illness and feeling tired are warning signs that your body and your mind have had enough. Don't ignore them. Take time when you need to and learn to say "no." This is often a sensitive person's biggest obstacle; it is very difficult to turn people away when we know we can help, but you are no good to anyone if you are not well. You cannot take care of anybody without first taking care of yourself.
- Avoid too many chemicals or sugars. A lot of times, being a sensitive perso means dealing with over-stimulation. Chemicals like caffeine, additives, artificial colors and sugars can make over-stimulation much worse, leading to anxiety and other problems. Cut out the caffeine and the sugar as much as possible.
- Get enough sleep. This seems like a no-brainer, but how many of us actually get enough sleep? Not getting enough sleep is often treated as no big deal, but it has been proven to have the same effect on you as a .05 blood-alcohol content. This dulls reaction times, affects accuracy with tasks, makes us irritable and causes things to bother us more than they should. We need to have all pistons firing correctly if we want to be able to deal with what the world is throwing at us, so be sure to get enough sleep. How do you know you've gotten enough sleep? Your body will let you know.
- Meditate. We probably hear this too much, but the benefits of meditation cannot really be overstated. Studies have proven that meditation works as well or better than psychiatric drugs for combating anxiety, depression and other problems. It can be difficult to do at first, especially with our society's limited attention spans but it is worth it to keep trying. Even if you don't feel like anything is "happening" while you meditate, your brain and your body are benefiting from the relaxation and over time, you will notice a change.
- Remember to be grateful. This one is not as easy as you might suppose. Think about it: in the course of one day, how often do you just feel simple gratitude? How often are you grateful for what you have, or just grateful to be alive? It can be very difficult to remember good things when we are under a constant barrage of negativity from all sides. It's everywhere, and we can very easily be pulled down into despair over it if we don't remind ourselves that there is good out there, too. Easy ways to do that would be to look for stories of people helping each other,

writing down 5 things you are grateful for every day and saying them out loud, helping others who are less fortunate (gratitude is contagious!), remembering times when you yourself were less fortunate and how it got better... There are so many things to be grateful for in this life. Don't forget any of them!

- Let yourself be amazed. We take many things for granted in this life, but if we really think about them, so many of them are truly amazing. Everything from the compact disc to the human hand has its own wonder. How often do you think about it?
- Get back to nature. One of the biggest reasons people are so stressed nowadays is that they are living lives they were not made for. Humans were not created to work, sleep and die. We are wonderfully, beautifully, amazingly complex emotional creatures capable of a huge spectrum of behavior and emotion. We live very unnatural lives compared to our ancestors and taking time to reconnect with that is very beneficial for the mind, body and spirit. Put the phone down. Turn off the TV. Go for a walk. Go camping. Go barefoot! You may have heard of "earthing," which is walking barefoot on the earth in order to ground and balance your body. There is an entire science behind this and it feels wonderful regardless. (This is also called "grounding" in reference to our body's electrical systems and grounding is very important for sensitive people to do.) Get some fresh air and really give yourself time to be alive for a while. You'll be amazed what a difference it makes.
- Visualize protection for yourself. If you find yourself in a situation that is overwhelming you (such as a place where there are a lot of other people, or when dealing with an emotional vampire), the best protection is in your mind. Empaths and other sensitive souls can receive other people's emotional vibrations like an antenna. This can make being around large groups of people difficult and exhausting, even scary or frightening. The way to beat it is to block the reception of this energy. Before entering the situation, close your eyes and visualize the energy being blocked from you. You can visualize an impenetrable shield or bubble around yourself that energy cannot get through. You can visualize an antenna retracting back into your mind so that it is no longer capable of receiving people's emotional output. You can visualize a door closing and blocking access to the recesses of your mind, a cord being unplugged, a ribbon being cut... Whatever visualization appeals to you, you can use and it will work. There is no wrong way to do it. It can take some practice to get it down pat, but the important thing is that the visualization be strong. If you are already in the situation and feel overwhelmed, you can either go into a quiet area and do it or simply concentrate hard right where you are. It does not take long and you should feel some release from the pressure of other people's minds immediately.
- Learn to say no. This bears repeating. Remember: you don't owe anyone anything. Of course we are tasked with helping others; that's why we were created as empaths. This does not mean that we are supposed to help others to our own detriment. Narcissists and other emotional leeches love empaths and sensitive people. They seek them out, because they are like psychic batteries to narcissists, and they will hang on, draining until there is nothing left. Helping others is never supposed to be a burden. Listen to yourself and learn when enough is enough.

It isn't easy being a sensitive person these days but it can be so rewarding if you take care of yourself correctly. By learning to ground and protect yourself, you are making life better for not only yourself but for those you are charged with taking care of in this lifetime.