

Saying Goodbye to Toxic Relationships

A woman-centred psychotherapist shares some of her knowledge about why women choose and stay in toxic relationships. She also gives practical suggestions for permanently breaking these patterns and building successful healthy long-term relationships.

After the long cold days of winter, spring sings her chipper song. As I write this, I have brightly coloured tulips to gaze at happily in my garden. Spring is a great time to start eating healthier, lighter food, wear bright colours, and get outdoors. It also happens to be a great time to fall in love. Perhaps scientists will one day reveal a specific chemical that flies around in the spring air that gets the pheromones going. Who knows? Maybe they already have...but before you take that exuberant leap into a special someone's arms and fall head-over-heels, here are some suggestions to keep your head in the clouds, while your feet are firmly planted on the ground.

In my therapy practise, I work exclusively with women and what seems to make it over and over to the "top 5" list of most important topics in therapy without fail is *how to be in a healthy relationship with a significant other*. From my therapy chair, I hear countless stories of hopes dashed, hearts broken, and very often, women being abused verbally, emotionally, and physically. Their pain is often gut-wrenching, extremely palpable, and difficult to bear witness to. I sit there day after day looking at the most beautiful, intelligent, strong, and capable women -a great inspiration to me in my own life- who are paying me decent money to help them figure out why they keep picking the wrong guys and how they can stop feeling so miserable in relationships.

By the time they enter the therapy door, they have often reached a state of desperation and hopelessness. I can't tell you how many times I've heard women say, "That's it. I give up. I want to be in a healthy relationship but I'm not capable of it. I just keep repeating the same patterns over and over again and I never get what I want."

This is where the therapy starts and the healing begins. Changing self-destructive relationship patterns is a long and difficult, and often frustrating process. But it is completely achievable if you have the courage, guidance, and stick-to-it-ness to do it. Because I am asked so often for help in this area and because I have been through this process myself and ended up in the best relationship I could ever have dreamed of, I wrote a self-help relationship workbook entitled,

“Dump That Chump: A Ten-Step Plan For Ending Bad Relationships and Attracting The Fabulous Partner You Deserve”. It’s available on-line at: www.dumpthatchump.com.

For the purposes of this short article however, I’ve compiled a list of signs that you should look for that will tell you whether your relationship is toxic:

- The people who care about you most don’t like him
- You stop doing things you used to enjoy to be with him
- You feel like you can’t live without him and vice-versa
- He has a bad relationship track-record
- He makes you feel badly about yourself
- He gawks at other women in front of you
- He doesn’t seem to care about what you have to say
- You’ve had a gut feeling that something was wrong from the very beginning
- You feel “on edge” or get “the crazies” when you’re with him and begin to doubt yourself and your judgment

Although it sometimes doesn’t feel like it, it IS possible to walk away from a toxic relationship. The first step is to understand why you’re in the relationship. We learn most about relationships from our families. You have to examine what kind of role models your parents were when it comes to intimate relationships and become aware of what you’ve picked up from them. Even the most dysfunctional family patterns will feel comfortable when they are repeated later in life- but just because they are familiar, it does not mean they are working for you.

You need to examine what you’ve been taught about relationships and how you have applied that teaching to your own life, and then sort out what isn’t useful or productive anymore and find alternatives. Other steps I outline in detail in my book include identifying what your needs are and coming up with a list of your ideal partner’s characteristics.

So many incredible, intelligent women-including myself- have dated toxic people- but it is possible to break the pattern and begin enjoying healthy, happy, and fulfilling long-term relationships. I have seen countless women ditch bad relationships permanently, and achieve great success in attracting and maintaining healthy, fulfilling relationships. How? By digging below the surface and doing the ‘self work’ that is required...there’s no “quick fix”- the work is hard and often painful, but as one who has come out the other side and guided many other women there, I can confidently say that it’s worth it!