



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

**UNDERSTANDING  
YOUR STRESS**

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*Real*LOVE.com®

Understanding and Treating Your Unrecognized Post-Childhood Stress Disorder

# Introduction

The Ultimate Guide to Understanding Your Stress is for anyone looking to take the anxiety, anger, frustration, and loneliness out of their life and relationships.

You'll learn answers to the problems below and be introduced to the principles that will eliminate fear, anger, and confusion from your life, replacing them with peace, joy and confidence.

## So IF:

- ✓ You have difficulty maintaining close, intimate, fulfilling relationships.
- ✓ You easily get angry at other people and blame them for how you feel.
- ✓ You tend to avoid people.
- ✓ You have a temper.
- ✓ You have a strong need to be right and win arguments or discussions.
- ✓ You often feel alone.
- ✓ You sometimes, use alcohol to “take the edge off” the tension you feel.
- ✓ You are often mystified by the behavior of other people.
- ✓ You often have difficulty understanding why you feel as you do.
- ✓ People around you, spouse, kids, coworkers, sometimes seem to avoid you.
- ✓ Your reactions to some situations—fear, pain, anger, withdrawal—seem out of proportion to the event itself.
- ✓ You use your intellect, physical appearance, competence, accomplishments, wit, money, or other assets to get other people to pay attention to you.
- ✓ You are unable to remember much of anything from your childhood.
- ✓ You feel numb in your relationships with others.
- ✓ You have a hard time sleeping or concentrating.
- ✓ You feel discouraged, lost, miserable, and guilty but can't figure out why.
- ✓ You feel hurt by what other people do or fail to do for you.

## THEN I have some good news...

- ✓ You'll have a level of confidence that will eliminate fear from your life. That's a miraculous feeling.
- ✓ You'll enjoy a richly fulfilling relationship with your partner, friends, and others.
- ✓ You'll enjoy being with your children, and they will enjoy being with you. No more contention.
- ✓ You won't get irritated at the many little things that bother you now.
- ✓ You'll discover who you really are, which fewer than 1% of people recognize now.
- ✓ You'll lose whatever addictions you have—to food, alcohol, drugs, sex, and more.
- ✓ You'll finally understand all the puzzling and annoying behaviors of everyone around you.
- ✓ You'll enjoy sex in ways you can't imagine now.
- ✓ You'll get a sense of satisfaction and excitement from your job that you've never known.
- ✓ Dating will become effortless and rewarding. No more frustration.
- ✓ You will never have to feel alone again.
- ✓ You'll know what to do if you begin to feel sad, angry, or alone.

Anger, frustration, and loneliness have become so common that we accept these feelings as normal, even unavoidable. We feel like we have to settle for less than we really want.

### **WRONG.**

We just don't know any better. If you will follow the clear, simple principles in this report, you will experience a level of peace, joy, and confidence you never thought possible.

Really.

## What You'll Learn

### **Chapter 1: The Central Trauma We All Share**

*There **is** something in your past that might explain how you feel and behave now.*

What PTSD and scurvy have in common with the fear, irritability, anger, defensiveness, and difficulty with relationships you may suffer from.

### **Chapter 2: Our Core Need for Unconditional Love—Real Love**

*The secret to happiness and fulfilling relationships is Real Love.*

This chapter teaches you what Real Love—unconditional love—really is and how it affects you and your relationships.

### **Chapter 3: Introduction to PCSD—Post-Childhood Stress Disorder**

*Parents do the best they can, but quite often they unintentionally affect their children in a variety of ways that are seldom understood.*

Learn more about PCSD from this example of a woman suffering from PCSD.

### **Chapter 4: You and PCSD**

*In any given moment, you're reacting to the amount of love you feel from everyone, past and present, not just from the person you're interacting with.*

Take the quiz in this chapter to find out if you suffer from PCSD.

### **Chapter 5: The Nature of PCSD**

*Human studies have proven that children are literally molded by love.*

When children don't receive enough love at an early age, they often have difficulty connecting with people for the rest of their lives.

### **Chapter 6: The Wound**

*In Post-Childhood Stress Disorder, the trauma is our entire childhood.*

In this chapter you will learn about the effects of disapproval and how it makes genuine happiness impossible.

### **Chapter 7: PCSD Made Simple**

*People with PCSD are bleeding and blind, and in that condition how could they possibly be happy.*

Using a real-life example, I will show you in this chapter how PCSD occurs.

### **Chapter 8: Why the Wound is Hidden**

*We interpret every experience in the present through the lens created by and influenced by childhood traumas.*

In this chapter you will learn the many factors that hide our PCSD wounds.

### **Chapter 9: The Wound of Helplessness**

*With our expectations and choices, we make it impossible to feel loved.*

In this chapter you will learn about the Laws of Choice and Expectation and how they contribute to the wound of helplessness children and adults feel.

### **Chapter 10: But Don't Parents Sometimes Love Their Children?**

*A child believes what he is taught by his parents, however unintentionally that teaching may have happened.*

Once we realize the negative ways that parents have affected most of us, this becomes valuable information, not for blaming but for healing.

### **Chapter 11: The Treatment of PCSD**

*PCSD is caused by a wound and a lie.*

In this chapter I will discuss a short summary of treating PCSD.

### **Chapter 12: What to Do Next**

We have organized this Guide in a logical progression. Though you can jump around, learning the principles in whatever order you feel you need them, we recommend that you read through the chapters in order.

Take your time. Read and study one chapter at a time. Apply what you learn. And when you feel you've got a practical understanding, move on to the next chapter.

You'll be surprised at how quickly you can implement these principles and gain a new understanding of your own behavior and the behavior of those around you. Then you can focus on the skills that will help you heal the wounds of your past and create rewarding and fulfilling relationships in every area of your life.

Ready to start?



## CHAPTER 1

# THE CENTRAL TRAUMA WE ALL SHARE

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# The Central Trauma We All Share

*There **is** something in your past that might explain how you feel and behave now.*

**What PTSD and scurvy have in common with the fear, irritability, anger, defensiveness, and difficulty with relationships you may suffer from.**

## **The Power of Understanding**

Years ago I attended the trial of Anthony B, a young veteran of the war in Afghanistan who had climbed onto the roof of a tall building in the center of town and aimed his loaded assault rifle at pedestrians on the adjacent streets. Although he didn't shoot anyone, he did frighten people and was charged with making terroristic threats.

From the time of his discharge from the Army—five months before the rifle incident—he had been distant, irritable, and argumentative with family and friends. He broke up with his girlfriend and was making no progress in even looking for a job. He lost all interest in activities he had once enjoyed—sports, hunting, going out with friends—and complained of nightmares, insomnia, and intermittent stomach and joint pains.

Expert witnesses testified that Anthony was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, a condition where people experience a broad array of physical and emotional symptoms after enduring a significant traumatic event, such as combat, a plane crash, rape, or physical assault.

After such a trauma, many people experience a dramatic transformation—literally a “reset”—in how they perceive people and situations. Where once they had seen the world as reasonable, predictable, safe, and even pleasant, the traumatic incident convinces them that the world is now chaotic, hurtful, and frightening—and their subsequent behavior is a response to this altered, distorted perspective.

Two Army officers testified that during his military tour Anthony had killed people, watched good friends die, administered first aid to comrades with ghastly wounds, seen children blown up by IEDs (improvised explosive devices), and lived with the constant threat of being maimed or killed himself. This barrage of highly stressful circumstances had conditioned his body and mind to be in a state of constant alert, so that he was always looking for potential enemies and for ways to protect himself.

This hyperalert state was useful in the military—even lifesaving—but the qualities that enable us to survive trauma are often the very qualities that most interfere with—even destroy—our ability to achieve personal happiness and a sense of fulfillment in our relationships. This concept is so important that it bears repeating:

The skills that enable us to survive  
often interfere with our ability to thrive.

When Anthony returned home and was discharged from the military, the actual threats of war were gone, but he was unable to turn off his fears, so his body and mind remained fixed in a hyperexcited and defensive condition. He looked for potential danger everywhere—even in his sleep—certain that he still needed to defend himself from the enemy, whom he saw at every turn.

The court heard testimony from family members and friends, who said that prior to his tour in Afghanistan, Anthony had been filled with youthful promise. He was a disciplined athlete, good student, cherished member of his family, and welcome participant in his social circles.

Before going to war, he had demonstrated none of the symptoms that led to his emotional disability and criminal charges, so it was clear that his combat experiences had changed him in a significant, fundamental way.

As the judge and jury learned about Anthony's condition, it was obvious from their expressions and posture that they were increasingly filled with compassion for him. Their initial desire to punish him was replaced with an interest in helping him to make a healthier transition from combat to a peaceful home life.

Toward that end, he was found guilty of the stated crime, but he was sentenced only to a period of therapy.

Had you been in the courtroom and listened to the testimonies of the experts, you too would have felt compassion for Anthony. As a result of your understanding of



PTSD, you would have realized that Anthony was not a bad kid. His ability to cope with life had simply been overwhelmed, resulting in behaviors that he never would have chosen without the influence of the trauma he experienced.

You too would have chosen to help him, not punish him. Such is the power of understanding. It is the primary purpose of this report that you will feel the power that naturally derives from a greater understanding of circumstances and people—including yourself.

As I watched the trial, it occurred to me that I had counseled a great many people with symptoms quite similar to Anthony's: fear, irritability, anger, defensiveness, difficulty with relationships, vague and persistent physical complaints, and so on. But they had experienced no obvious traumatic event—like combat or physical assault—so why were their symptoms so similar to Anthony's? How could I explain their feelings and behavior?

Many people have said to me, "My life is completely screwed up—I'm not happy, I feel discouraged, my relationships with others are unfulfilling, even awful—but I don't understand *why* I'm having these problems. I can understand why some people have problems—they were raped, or they were sexually assaulted as children, or they had parents who were alcoholics—but I don't have any explanations like that for my misery, so I just feel lost. And guilty. I don't know what to think or do."

It's bad enough when we suffer the unhappiness of personal discouragement and difficult relationships, but when we can't explain the **cause** of our misery, we're also plagued with confusion, guilt, and self-doubt. We want to **understand** the origin of our problems, both to lift the fog of confusion and to give us some insight into how we might find the happiness we all seek.

Is there something in our past that might explain how we feel and behave now? Yes, there is, and this understanding has the power to change our lives profoundly.

## **THE HIDDEN WOUNDS WE ALL SHARE**

It turns out that nearly all of us suffer from a form of post-traumatic stress disorder, and because it is generally unrecognized, it continues unchecked to cause the vast majority of the unhappiness in the world. We have suffered from repeated traumatic events that have been so minor—when examined individually—**and** so common that we have come to view these events as **normal**, in the sense that they are not unusual or **ab**normal. And because we are blind to these injuries, we don't

do anything about them, which allows their destructive effects to continue, to accumulate, and to spread.

Throughout this guide, as I describe these “hidden wounds,” I will often speak of them as a universal phenomenon, as something we “all” share. This may seem presumptuous, but as I have interviewed, observed, and corresponded with tens of thousands of people, I have come to believe that less than 2% of the population is relatively unaffected by these wounds. If, after reading more about this condition, you decide that it doesn’t apply to you, you may still benefit enormously by learning more about the rest of us.

### **Missing Elements Causing Trauma**

To illustrate how our common wounds could be hidden but still deadly, allow me to compare it to a physical disorder that occupies a prominent place in the history of medicine. For centuries great numbers of sailors on long voyages suffered from a terrible sickness that was characterized by weakness, bleeding gums, tooth loss, wounds that didn’t heal, bleeding and pain in the joints, heart failure, and hemorrhages in the brain. It was not uncommon for half the crew of a ship to die of this disease.

In many respects the affected sailors behaved as though they had been physically injured, but there was no history of identifiable trauma, so the physicians of the day were baffled. They used all their skills to treat the symptoms and signs of the problem—they cleaned and bandaged the wounds, cleaned the gums and teeth, and prescribed rest and increased food rations—but nothing they did was effective. They even named the disorder **scurvy**—also known as the “great sea plague”—but choosing a name brought them no closer to an understanding of the cause nor to an effective treatment.

As early as 1601 at least one ship captain learned that eating citrus fruits eliminated scurvy, although it wasn’t until 1795 that the British Admiralty ordered lemon juice to be carried on their ships. During that period alone, nearly one million sailors died of an easily preventable disease.

Finally, in 1933 Vitamin C was isolated, and the lack of it was identified as the cause of scurvy.

For hundreds of years people died all around the world because it was not recognized that the **lack** of a single molecule was causing significant **trauma** to the body at the molecular and cellular levels, which in turned caused wounds that

could be seen with the eye. Without Vitamin C, people were starving to death, even though their bellies were filled with bread and beef.

Similarly, nearly all of us today are starving to death—emotionally, spiritually, and even physically—for the lack of a single “molecule” in our emotional and spiritual diets. This starvation is a form of trauma that begins in childhood and continues throughout the rest of our lives.

Regrettably, no one is identifying the missing molecule. We’re seeing the **end results** of these repetitive “micro-traumas”—we can all agree that something is wrong when we feel alone, when we’re irritable, when we’re afraid, when we’re angry, and when our relationships are in conflict—but we’re not identifying the **cause** of our unhappiness.

In our ignorance, we respond by trying to control the symptoms—the anger, conflict, withdrawal, and loneliness—without addressing the root cause, which is uniformly ineffective and causes even more confusion and frustration.

Fortunately, we can learn to identify the missing element in our lives—the absence of which has been causing the unnoticed trauma to our souls—and to find it, which will give us the power to eliminate our emptiness, fear, and pain, much as we learned to eliminate the ravages of scurvy with the consumption of citrus fruits and Vitamin C.

## **AN ADDITIONAL RESOURCE**

The Real Love Company has a large [YouTube channel](#) where you can get a more personal sense of what life and parenting with Real Love *feels* like. Like, Subscribe and click the “Bell” to the Real Love Company on YouTube and regularly watch videos that teach you how to eliminate your pain and fear and replace them with peace and confidence.

[Testimonials of the Healing Power of Real Love®](#)



## CHAPTER 2

# OUR CORE NEED FOR UNCONDITIONAL LOVE—REAL LOVE

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*Real*LOVE.com<sup>®</sup>

# Our Core Need for Unconditional Love—Real Love

*The secret to happiness and fulfilling relationships is Real Love.*

**This chapter teaches you what Real Love—unconditional love—is and how it affects you and your relationships.**

So, what is this missing Vitamin C of the soul? What is it that we all need badly but tend not to get in sufficient supply, if at all? What is this thing we need most in order to be happy? Intuitively, we already sense what we need to feel emotionally fulfilled, or happy. We see evidence of it in the unifying theme of most of our literature, movies, magazines, and even our commercial advertisements.

More than anything else, what we all need is love. I have made that statement as I have spoken to hundreds of thousands of people, and consistently they have recognized the truth of it. We talk about love, we fantasize about it, we're afraid we won't find it or maintain it, and we search for it as a kind of Holy Grail.

Scientific studies have demonstrated that from early childhood our brains are literally molded by love. Without love, severe deficits in brain chemistry can occur. Without love, infants literally die, even though they have adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care. Without love, we experience much higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, dementia, depression, accidents, and suicide. According to Dr. John Cacioppo, prominent researcher at the University of Chicago, "The absence of love poses a greater risk to our health than smoking."

But not just any kind of love will do. We've all had many negative experiences with what we thought was "love," so we know that not everything labeled "love" will fill our needs.

The only kind of love that will make us genuinely happy and whole is what I call Real Love.

***Real Love is caring about the happiness of another person***  
without any thought for what we might get for ourselves.

It's also Real Love when other people care about **our** happiness in a similar way. Real Love is unconditional. It's not Real Love when I do what you **want** and you like me—frankly, that's worthless. It's Real Love when I make mistakes—when I'm stupid and flawed and inconvenient—but you're not disappointed or angry at me. We'll discuss the importance of these two conditions—disappointment and anger—in a few paragraphs.

When I use the word **happiness**, I do not mean the brief and superficial pleasure that comes from money, sex, power, or the conditional approval we earn from others when we behave as they want. Nor do I mean the temporary feeling of satisfaction we experience in the absence of immediate conflict or disaster. Real happiness is not the feeling we get from being entertained or from persuading people to do what we want.

Real happiness is a profound and lasting sense of peace and fulfillment that deeply satisfies and enlarges the soul. It doesn't go away when circumstances are difficult. It survives and even grows during hardship and struggle. True happiness is our entire reason to live, and it can be obtained only as we find Real Love and share it with others.

***With Real Love, nothing else matters;  
without it, nothing else is enough.***

Sadly, few of us have sufficiently received or given this kind of love. From the time we were small children, we observed that when we were clean and quiet, when we got good grades, and when we were otherwise obedient and cooperative, our parents and others smiled at us, patted our heads, and spoke kindly to us. With their words and behavior, they told us what good boys and girls we were.

But what happened when we fought with our sisters, made too much noise, got bad grades, or dragged mud across the clean living room carpet? Then did people smile at us or speak gentle, loving words? No, they frowned, sighed with disappointment, and often spoke in harsh tones. Just as the positive behaviors of other people communicated to us that we were loved, the **withdrawal** of these

behaviors could only have meant that we were **not** being loved—certainly not unconditionally, which is the only kind of love that matters.

Although it was unintentional, our parents and others taught us this terrible message: “When you’re good, I love you, but when you’re not, I don’t—or at least I love you a great deal less.” Right now many of you are experiencing a storm in your heads. You’re thinking, “Wait a minute. My parents loved me. Sure, they got mad at me sometimes, but they still loved me—right?”

To answer this question, imagine for a moment that you and I begin working together on a project. After a few minutes, you make a mistake. I stand up from my chair with my fists clenched and the veins popping in my neck. Angrily I berate you for what you’ve done, barking that you’ve made things much more difficult for me personally, and you’ve delayed the completion of our project.

Now, stop to think. All our lives we’ve tended simply to **get angry** or to **react** to anger, rather than considering what it **means**. So let’s consider that now. In the moment I become angry, what am I communicating to you? I’m saying,

- “Look at what you did *to me!*”
- “Do you not see what you *should* have done *for me?*”
- “How dare you fail to remember that the true center of the universe is . . . *Me!!*”

Notice that when I am disappointed or irritated at you, all my words and behavior essentially boil down to a single selfish expression: **Me-Me-Me**. And while I’m standing over you screaming **Me-Me-Me**, is there any way you can feel my unconditional concern for **your** happiness? Not a chance.

Anger is so common in our daily interactions that it’s become a kind of background noise that we scarcely notice until there is an explosion of obvious rage. But even the slightest expressions of anger are enough to inflict wounds that seriously dampen any possibility of feeling loved and happy.

Far more often than we realize, we are frustrated, annoyed, grumpy, impatient, exasperated, irritated, disgusted, and tense. We use these words to minimize our anger, because somehow, we know deep down that we’re being selfish and unloving.

Whatever code words we use to disguise this feeling, it is still anger, and we express it with sighing, rolling our eyes, frowning, and a wide spectrum of voice inflections.

If you have any doubt about the effect of these “milder forms” of anger, try an experiment: While you’re talking with your child, spouse, friend, or coworker, “just” frown a little and let out a sigh of disgust. In that moment, closely observe their face and decide if they’re feeling loved. Ridiculous.

It is imperative that we recognize that the instant we are disappointed or irritated at anyone, the other person hears us say only four words:

***I don't love you.***

I wish I were exaggerating, but our need for Real Love is so profound and so constant that the least withdrawal of that quality is painfully felt. We are highly sensitive to these expressions of disapproval from each other. Just as there are machines that can sense a single molecule of poison or pollutant in a million molecules of air or water, we can sense the faintest disapproval from others.

Disappointment and anger are absolutely incompatible with Real Love, and that is the reason so few of us—probably 1-2%—have felt unconditionally loved with appreciable consistency. On the occasions we’ve made our mistakes, we have seen disappointment and anger so often—from the time we were small children—that we’ve come to believe that all love is conditional. We’ve come to believe that this is how “love” is supposed to be. We’ve come to accept a definition of **love** that is simply not true.

To this day—throughout our adult lives—we have continued to experience love that is conditional, and we accept it as normal. This conditional love can give us brief moments of satisfaction, but we’re still left with a huge hole in our souls, because only Real Love can make us genuinely happy.

When someone is genuinely, unconditionally concerned about our happiness, we feel connected to that person. We feel included in his or her life, and in that instant, we are **no longer alone**. Each moment of unconditional acceptance creates a living thread to the person who accepts us. These threads weave a powerful bond that fills us with a genuine and lasting happiness. Nothing but Real Love can do that.

In addition, when we know that even one person loves us unconditionally, we feel a connection to everyone else. We feel included in the family of all mankind, of which that one person is a part. When we realize how important Real Love is to our emotional health, it’s not difficult to imagine what happens when we **don’t** have enough of it. Without sufficient unconditional love, we can feel only empty, alone, and afraid, a combination of feelings that is insufferably painful.



Each unloving experience—each moment when we don't feel loved unconditionally—may not be as dramatic as combat or rape, but the cumulative effect of thousands of such episodes is **THE** single greatest reason for our individual unhappiness and for the conflict in our relationships.

As early as 1940 renowned psychologists Carl R. Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Nathaniel Raskin, and Stanley Standal were publishing scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals concerning the vital importance of therapists having Real Love for their clients—which they referred to as “unconditional positive regard”—but we have not continued their initial quest. We must recognize the central requirement we all have for Real Love.

### **THE EFFECT OF THE LACK OF REAL LOVE**

In order to get a clearer picture of the effect of the lack of Real Love, imagine for a moment the Grand Canyon. That is one enormous hole in the ground, measuring 277 miles in length, as much as 5000 feet in depth, and about 153 trillion cubic feet in total volume—equivalent to the interior space of 1.3 trillion large cars (191 cars for every person alive on the earth).

Despite its nearly unimaginable size, however, it was not formed by nuclear blasts, or volcanic eruptions, or even the excavation of thousands of bulldozers. The canyon was formed by little drops of water falling from the sky. No single drop, of course, had much effect, but over the course of about twenty million years, a great many rain drops—singly and flowing in trickles, streams, and torrents—gradually cut away the surface of the ground until they had carved out this colossal erosion.

Similarly, each moment that a child does not feel unconditionally loved has the effect of yet another drop falling on exposed soil. These drops join together—not just during childhood but throughout adult life—and steadily erode any possibility of real happiness.

You may be asking, “Are children really this sensitive to not feeling loved?” Oh yes. They're like little barometers, accurately discerning the presence of love in ways that we rarely appreciate. On many occasions I have observed children while they were in the presence of a parent who was expressing anger at someone else—toward their spouse or to another driver on the road, for example. Even though the parent was **not** angry at the child, the child became tense and afraid, even crying on many occasions. Why? Because a child's world is relatively simple: She's either being loved—and therefore feeling happy—or she's not.

In the moment parents are angry, they are **not** being loving—they're too distracted by their own needs to care about the happiness of others—and children can **feel** that absence of love, as though it were a vacuum. And because most children look to their parents as their primary source of love, when parents get angry, their children feel as though the sun suddenly went dark. It's quite frightening. It's genuinely traumatic.

To children, Real Love isn't just one of life's bonuses. It's not the cherry on top of the cake. It's the entire cake. It's the whole buffet bar. Real Love is indispensable to happiness. It's as essential to a child's emotional and spiritual well-being as air and water are to the life of his body.

Just as Anthony's entire outlook on the world was changed by combat, so a child's entire soul is affected in horrifying ways by the lack of the one ingredient most essential to his happiness.

After counseling with a great number of individuals, couples, and families, I can state with certainty that the vast majority of our fears, anger, and conflicts are rooted in the pain that results from not feeling unconditionally loved. Until we recognize this, we will continue to hack away at the leaves of the problems in our lives—sadness, fear, anger—while failing to heal the roots of our problems. And thus the leaves will continue to grow—perhaps from different places, perhaps with different colors or other variations—and they will choke out the light in our lives.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- <https://reallove.com/>
- <https://realloveparents.com/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/TheRealLoveCompany>
- <https://www.facebook.com/RidiculouslyEffectiveParenting/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/reallovecompany>
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/LovingParentsLIVE>
- <https://www.YouTube.com/c/RealLoveCompany>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/gregbaermd>  
<https://www.Linkedin.com/in/reallove>  
<https://www.Instagram.com/reallovecompany>
- <https://www.instagram.com/ridiculouslyeffectiveparenting>  
<https://www.Pinterest.com/reallovecompany>



## CHAPTER 3

# INTRODUCTION TO PCSD: POST-CHILDHOOD STRESS DISORDER

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*Real*LOVE.com®

# Introduction to PCSD— Post-Childhood Stress Disorder

*Parents do the best they can, but quite often they unintentionally affect their children in a variety of ways that are seldom understood.*

**Learn more about PCSD from this example of a woman suffering from PCSD.**

To briefly illustrate the effect of the lack of Real Love, allow me to share with you a true story about a woman, Rachel, whom I saw not long ago. She is typical of untold millions of people in the world, so many of you will feel like I'm telling ***your*** story.

Don't get too caught up in the details, however, because even though you will be different from her in many superficial ways—you might not, for example, be a woman, or married, or have three children, as Rachel does—her story will teach you principles useful to all of us. What Rachel learned is applicable to us as husbands, wives, lovers, parents, children, employees, coworkers, and so on.

Rachel—married for fifteen years, mother of three children—came to my office and said that she and her husband, Blake, had been to eight previous counselors. She claimed that he just didn't care about her anymore. He was often gone, he neglected his duties as a husband and father, and when he was home, it seemed as though he wasn't there emotionally—“like a ghost,” she said. Over the past several years he had increasingly surfed porn sites, and about a year ago he had an affair with a woman at work. Rachel's face was lined with sadness and anger.

“Tell me about your childhood,” I said.

“I don't wanna talk about that childhood stuff,” she said.

“Up to you, but it matters. And it won’t take long—just a few minutes.”

She agreed, so I asked her to describe her parents, and she assured me that they were “kind and loving.”

“Describe how your father was loving toward you.”

“Well, he worked hard. We never felt like we didn’t have enough.”

“Enough . . .”

“Food, clothes, rides to school, nice house, that kind of thing.”

“What else did he do?”

“He taught us right and wrong. He was a good father.”

“Oh, I’m not here to criticize him in any way. I believe parents do the best they can, but quite often they **unintentionally** affect their children in a variety of ways that are seldom understood. When you were obedient, responsible, and got good grades, what did he do?”

“He said he was proud of me.”

It was notable that as Rachel said this, her facial expression did not match her words. She wasn’t elated or delighted or even genuinely pleased with her father’s pride in her. Why? Because the only kind of love that truly satisfies a child’s soul—or that of an adult, for that matter—is unconditional love, Real Love.

Although at this point Rachel could not have put words to what she was feeling, deep down she sensed that her father’s pride in her—which was the primary way she felt “love” from him—came at a price. He spoke kind words and smiled at her only when she was behaving in ways he approved.

“What happened when you made mistakes?” I asked. “When you got bad grades, made too much noise, got in trouble?”

Her eyes widened as she said, “Oh, I didn’t do that. I tried very hard to be a good girl. And I was. I didn’t want to disappoint him. Besides, I saw what happened when my older brother got in trouble. My father could be very stern—pretty angry sometimes—and I didn’t want that to happen to me.”

I pulled my chair close to where Rachel was sitting and quietly looked into her eyes for some time. “How often did your father look directly at you, holding your gaze,

and ask you how you were doing, without any hint that he needed a particular reply?"

Tears fell down her cheeks as she finally said, "I would have given anything for a moment of this with him."

I fervently believe that Rachel's father did the best he could with her, but what he gave her was **conditional** approval, and somehow, she knew that. He wasn't capable of giving Real Love—to Rachel or anyone else—because he'd never received it himself. Parents do not **mean** to withhold love from us. The very notion is ridiculous. I've never met a parent who thought, "You know, I **could** give my child the unconditional love she needs, but I don't think I will. I'll ruin the rest of her life instead."

But even though Rachel's father wasn't hurting her intentionally, his behavior was **still wounding her**. He was not truly loving his daughter, and that's all that mattered to her. No child cares about the extenuating circumstances in a parent's life. No young child looks at an angry, disapproving parent and thinks,

You really seem to be in pain, and I'm guessing that in this moment you're reacting badly to me because of a lifetime of not feeling loved yourself. Let's forget about my needs for the moment and concentrate on what you need.

No, children are primarily concerned about their own needs. With children, it's not about analysis. It's not about the past or the future. It's about how they're feeling **right now**, and they are very sensitive to whether they're being loved.

Each time Rachel's father praised her for being good, she enjoyed that, but the feeling lasted only for a moment, and she knew that if she wanted that feeling to continue, she'd have to earn it again.

She also knew what would happen if she **didn't** behave in all the "right ways." She had heard her father's lectures, felt the burden of his criticism on occasion, and witnessed what happened when her brother made mistakes. She sensed that she was **buying** his approval, so even when she succeeded in getting it, it failed to make her happy. Instead she felt the painful absence of the love she needed. She heard the **I don't love you** message thousands of times, and each occasion inflicted a wound that was driven deeper and deeper by the wounds that followed.

Tragically, no one noticed the growing and cumulative effect of all these wounds. Why?

- Because most people have no notion that Real Love even exists as a possibility, so how would anyone have monitored the lack of it in Rachel's life? I have encountered few people indeed who could describe a reliable pattern of unconditional love in their lives.
- Because the same wounds are being inflicted everywhere on almost all children. The wounds then seem normal and become invisible.
- Because each individual wound seems so inconsequential at the time. When parents are irritated at their children, there are no explosions. There is no police report. But even though such moments may last only seconds, their effects continue for much longer periods. Recently I spoke to a forty-year-old man who described an occasion when he was playing baseball at a large picnic for his extended family. He was about ten at the time, and when he attempted to catch a pop fly, it hit him in the face. Not only did it hurt physically, but his father rushed up to him in anger, saying, "What's the matter with you? Can't you catch a simple fly ball?" The boy was devastated and never picked up a ball of any kind again—not for thirty years. Such is the effect of a parent behaving in an unloving way to a child. What seems like a brief moment for the parent can inflict on a child a sense of worthlessness and shame that may last a lifetime.
- Because we're selfish. When a child acts out in response to the pain of feeling unloved, parents tend not to recognize the pain of the **child** and admit that **they** (the parents) almost certainly contributed to that pain. Instead they focus on the behaviors of the child that are inconveniencing **them**. They look for someone to blame for **their** (the parents') pain.

As parents most of us hurt our children over and over—usually several times each day—and **because we don't recognize what we're doing**, we keep making the problem worse. Only when we recognize what we're doing can we stop it and initiate steps to begin the healing.

What about Rachel's mother? On the surface, she appeared to be quite different from her husband. While her husband dispensed conditional approval and disapproval mostly in a quiet way—with the exceptions of blowing up periodically at Rachel's brother—Rachel's mother felt entitled to control the entire world around her. So when the children didn't quickly and thoroughly comply with her commands, she expressed her criticism and anger at high volume. Rachel remembered her mother being tense and angry for most of her childhood.

But the differences between Rachel's parents were only superficial, because they were actually delivering the same core message—***I don't love you***—which had the same effect on Rachel.

We get distracted by details. So do most therapists, who tend to go on and on about what each parent did and how that caused various “issues” for their children. But the details don't matter much. Suppose I decide to kill you. Does it really matter whether I use a knife, a gun, or a rope? Dead is dead, regardless of the ***means*** by which it is delivered.

Similarly, it doesn't matter much ***how*** the ***I don't love you*** message is conveyed to child: by criticizing, hitting, bribing, flattering, or simply ignoring the child.

Rachel was taught by both parents that in order to win their approval—and to avoid their disapproval—she had to be a good girl. She had to avoid mistakes, which meant that as much as possible she had to control everything around her. Much as Anthony did while he was in Afghanistan, she learned skills that enabled her to ***survive*** in combat situations—in this case, emotional combat.

But then Rachel married Blake, and after the initial glow of falling in love had faded, Rachel continued to use with Blake the same skills she had learned for survival as a child. She was intolerant of mistakes in herself or others, so when she began to learn that Blake had quite a number of flaws—which were invisible while they were both blinded by romantic love—she was sorely disappointed. She began to criticize her husband, much as she had seen her mother do with everyone.

Blake didn't like being criticized—surprise!—so he reacted by withdrawing from Rachel, who fearfully reacted by criticizing his withdrawal. Blake withdrew even further, and the cycle worsened. Eventually Blake retreated to near solitude and to the temporary relief provided by pornography.

Rachel felt abandoned and responded with increasing irritation, anger, and resentment. She alternated between controlling and avoiding her husband, while vigorously controlling the behavior of her children, who hated being around her. She couldn't sleep and suffered from frequent headaches and backaches. Occasionally she thought she was happy, but with the slightest disruption in her routine she became angry.

Rachel's entire picture of the world was determined by the thousands of “little” traumas she experienced as child. She learned to see the world as an angry, empty, unloving, and frightening place. She responded by adopting a hyper-reactive and



defensive posture, which made sense in her childhood. Her vigilant efforts to earn approval and to avoid disapproval helped her to minimize the pain of her parents' unloving behaviors, but as an adult these behaviors caused nothing but pain—for herself, her husband, and her children.

Because Rachel's unproductive approach to life and relationships was caused by multiple traumas, and because her symptoms were so like those of typical post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) patients, I suggest that she suffered from a form of PTSD that I will name PCSD, or post-childhood stress disorder. In chapter 6 we'll explore more of the clinical details of PTSD, at which time the similarities of PTSD and PCSD will become even more apparent.

As I visited with Rachel several times, I just unconditionally accepted and loved her as she told the truth about HER behavior—her anger, her selfishness, and her critical judgments of others. Note that my approach to Rachel was quite different from typical therapy. I helped her see the truth about HER choices—as opposed to only listening to how she **felt** about the **things** that had **happened** to her. This created the opportunity for her to feel unconditionally accepted and loved **for who she really was**, which is the essence of Real Love.

Again, we'll be talking much more about how it looks to be unconditionally loved but allow this to spark a hope in you that there is an ingredient here that you may not have experienced, one that we can learn to find.

A month after seeing Rachel for the last time, she wrote to me:

Our marriage was over. My husband had made up his mind to walk away, and I was angry at him all the time. I was critical of how he treated me and the kids, and he reacted by being even more difficult or by withdrawing from me completely. We hadn't had sex in over a year.

Then you helped me see the truth about what I'd been doing, and how I was continuing with Blake the same patterns I'd learned as a child. Most important, you just cared about me, in a way I had never felt before. That love healed me, so the anger disappeared, and I quit blaming Blake for how I was feeling.

You once told me that marriage should be FUN, and I thought you were crazy. But you were right. Now that I feel loved, I don't have to control people all the time. I'm not angry. We used to avoid each other like a disease, but now Blake and I talk all the time. We're going on dates, like we used to do long ago. We can hardly stand to be apart. I can't tell you how different that is from just a month

ago. I used to think I'd never feel close to Blake again, but now he's so tender and genuine. I keep shaking my head at what has happened for us. And the kids can't stop smiling either.

Every day just keeps getting better and better!!! I think one of the most liberating and life changing things that is happening for me is *honesty*! I cannot believe how much I am talking. I'm admitting all the mistakes I've made with Blake, and he's doing the same thing with me. Blake actually *listens* to me now. He's more loving and patient than I have *ever* seen him. I never imagined feeling this close to him. It's kind of a miracle.

This is just a taste of what can happen when people identify what Real Love is, how the lack of it has traumatized them, and what they can do to find it.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

*The following resources will help you replace 'need and fear' with 'peace and confidence' in your personal life, your family life, and in all your relationships:*

- A Master Index <https://reallove.com/master-index/> from all the books, blogs, etc. Refer to it a lot.
- Sign up for our monthly newsletter <https://reallove.com/newsletter-signup/> if you haven't already.
- We have (free) conference calls <https://reallove.com/conference-calls/> several times a week, hosted by Certified Real Love Coaches. These are by telephone, not video. We don't keep records of who called and then bombard you with emails, or anything shady like that. The call dial-in number and the schedule are in that link.



## CHAPTER 4

# YOU AND PCSD

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## You and PCSD

*In any given moment, you're reacting to the amount of love you feel from everyone, past and present, not just from the person you're interacting with.*

**Take the quiz in this chapter to find out if you suffer from PCSD.**

What I'll be describing to you in the remainder of this guide is the most serious problem on the planet—while also being the least recognized. Earlier I referred to scurvy and its eventual cure with Vitamin C. It's important to realize that although Vitamin C is commonplace to us now—available to essentially everyone in all but the poorest nations—only two hundred years ago it occurred to **no one**, not a single person on earth, that hundreds of thousands of people were dying because of an insufficient supply of a molecule ten million times smaller than an average marble.

In the beginning of the process of discovering Vitamin C, in fact, people ignored the potential cures that presented themselves. As early as the late 1400s, legend has it that during one of Christopher Columbus's voyages, some Portuguese sailors acquired scurvy. Opposed to the idea of dying on board and having their bodies thrown overboard, they asked to be dropped off at one of the nearby islands. After eating the fresh fruits available there, they recovered completely. When Columbus's ships passed by several months later, the sailors on the island astonished their old crewmates by waving from the shore. The island was named Curacao, meaning Cure.

Apparently, someone learned from this experience and others like it, because a century later, in 1601, Captain James Lancaster of the British Navy took lemon juice with him when he left on an ocean voyage with three other ships. Although his crew—the only ones drinking the lemon juice—remained healthy, after three months scurvy began to appear in the crews of the other ships, and by the end of

the four-month journey, those men were so crippled by scurvy that they had to be assisted back to port by the men who had been drinking the lemon juice. Captain Lancaster reported this extraordinarily successful method for the prevention of scurvy to the British Admiralty, but they took no action to spread the information.

Not until 1795 did the British Admiralty finally order lemon juice for all the sailors, almost two hundred years from the time they received the first report that the treatment had been effective—three hundred years from the event on Curacao. In all that time—during which so many people died—almost no one could imagine that the cure was so simple. Even after British sailors began to carry citrus fruits on their ships, sailors from other countries made fun of them—hence the term still used today for Brits: *Limeys*.

Two centuries ago no one thought that the discovery of this molecule would eliminate one of the great ravagers of human health. Nor did we understand the shock wave that would spread through the world of physics when subatomic particles were discovered. But the discovery of both these “invisible” things nonetheless changed our world.

And so it is with Real Love and PCSD. Real Love is so important to our emotional health that we cannot live in a healthy way without it. The absence of Real Love is the scurvy of the soul. In that condition we feel traumatized in a very real way, even if we can't remember the specific instances of injury.

The pain of insufficient Real Love causes us to be overly sensitized to any potential threat, so then we respond with irritability, anger, avoidance, and more. We over-react to people in terribly unproductive ways, just as Anthony did to the people around him when he returned home from combat.

In any given negative interaction with another person—spouse, lover, child, parent, friend, co-worker—it is the longstanding presence or lack of Real Love in **your** life that has the greatest effect on how you feel, not the behavior of any one person in that moment. In any given moment, you're reacting to the amount of love you feel from everyone, past and present, not just from the person you're interacting with.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have difficulty maintaining close, intimate relationships?
- Do I easily get angry at other people and blame them for how I feel?
- Do I tend to over-react to inconveniences and injustices?

- Do I often feel alone?
- Do I tend to avoid people?
- Do I sometimes—or frequently—use alcohol to “take the edge off” the tension I feel?
- Do I have a strong need to be “right” and win arguments or discussions?
- Do I have a temper?
- Am I often mystified by the behavior of other people? Do I often wonder, “Why in the world did he/she/they do that?”
- Do I often have difficulty understanding why I feel as I do?
- Do people around me—spouse, lover, children, coworkers—sometimes seem to avoid me?
- Do my reactions to some situations—fear, pain, anger, withdrawal—sometimes seem out of proportion to the event itself?
- Do I use my intellect, physical appearance, competence, accomplishments, wit, money, or other assets to get other people to pay attention to me?
- Do I often feel hurt by what other people do to me? Or by what they fail to do for me?
- Do the people around me often seem intimidated or irritated when I interact with them?

If you answered **yes** to two or more of the above, it's quite likely that you suffer from some degree of PCSD. In the next chapters we'll explore to a much larger extent how we behave in the absence of Real Love, how this correlates to PTSD, and what we can do to find Real Love and heal the wounds we've endured for so long.

As you learn more about PCSD and Real Love, keep the following in mind:

- **No BLAME.** As we talk about the origin of PCSD, it's unavoidable that we'll talk about the mistakes made by parents. After all, it's a **childhood** trauma, so who else would be most responsible? The mailman? The first-grade teacher? No, PCSD has its primary origins in the misguided behavior of **parents**. But there is **no blaming** in this. It's just information that will enable us to take more productive steps to a solution.

- **No EXCUSES.** As I introduce the concept of PCSD, I haven't the slightest intent to **excuse** our behavior. Even if I do have PCSD, I don't get to use that to justify my mistakes: "Oh, I couldn't help being unkind, controlling, or whatever, because I wasn't sufficiently loved as a child. It's not my fault."
- **UNDERSTANDING.** My entire goal in presenting the concept of PCSD is to help us **understand** where our unproductive behaviors come from. It's difficult enough being afraid, angry, or alone, but when we add to these feelings the confusion that results from not knowing WHY we feel that way, that's often more than we can bear. When we don't understand our feelings, we then tend to blame ourselves or to blame whatever interaction we just had with a spouse, lover, child, or coworker. With an understanding of PCSD, we know that our feelings are a result of a lifetime of mini-traumas, and then we're no longer confused. We no longer blame the inconvenience of the moment. We can begin to address the real problem and begin to achieve long-term solutions.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

I highly recommend that you learn a great deal more about the process of receiving and giving Real Love® by reading, viewing, or listening to the following:

[\*Real Love and Freedom for the Soul—Breaking the Chains of Victimhood\*](#)

Learn how to eliminate anger and achieve a level of peace and freedom.

[\*Real Love: The Truth About Finding Unconditional Love and Fulfilling Relationships\*](#)

Learn the real causes of personal pain and confusion.  
Available online in paperback and Kindle from Amazon.  
Audiobook narrated by Greg Baer available from Audible.



## CHAPTER 5

# THE NATURE OF PCSD

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CHAPTER  
5

# The Effects of Not Getting the Real Love We Need: The Nature of PCSD

*Human studies have proven that children are literally molded by love.*

**When children don't receive enough love at an early age, they often have difficulty connecting with people for the rest of their lives.**

Post-**traumatic** stress disorder (PTSD) is a result of our inability to smoothly integrate the experience and memories of a trauma into the whole of who we are. PTSD **resets** our brain and beliefs, changing us from what we **were** to what we are **now**.

Post-**childhood** stress disorder (PCSD) differs from PTSD in that the series of traumas occurs early enough in life that there is no meaningful past—no “what we were”—so PCSD is not a **reset** of what we were. It's a **PRESET**, or possibly the original setting, that determines—for most of us—what we'll be for the rest of our lives. PCSD is the establishment of a set of beliefs—and a condition of our brain and nervous system—that is distorted and harmful, which makes genuine happiness difficult, if not impossible (at least without re-education).

## The Pivotal Place of Childhood

As I talk about the effects that our childhoods have on our development and lifelong happiness, I recognize that an infant's mind is not simply a blank slate upon which experience is written—the *tabula rasa* proposed by John Locke in the seventeenth century. There are, for example, genetic factors that have a significant influence on who we are. In this guide, however, I choose mostly to ignore these factors, not because they're unimportant but because there is little we can **do** about

them—we can't choose or modify the DNA we inherit. I will focus on the perspectives, thought processes, feelings, memories, and behaviors that we acquire while we are children, because a greater understanding of these influences will give us the ability to make different choices that will enrich our lives. In other words, I choose to focus on the factors in our lives that we are most able to change.

In 1985 the political scientist Robert Jervis said, "Once you have a belief, it influences how you perceive all other relevant information." We perceive every experience through a lens made of beliefs, perspectives, and expectations, which in turn is formed primarily by our experiences.

Our first experiences, however—the ones in childhood—are perceived through a lens held up by **other people**, because at that point we haven't yet formed a lens of our own. That borrowed lens—the one created by the perspectives of others—is enormously influential, because how we see the world through it tends to determine how we build a lens for ourselves.

In order to illustrate the concept of this early lens, imagine that you're two years old, and as you're playing in the backyard, a large barking dog runs toward you through the open gate. You know what dogs are—from picture books and television—but you've never seen a real one. Because this experience is new and loud—not to mention those flashing teeth, which don't appear soft and cuddly—your initial reaction is fear.

But now—as the dog gets closer—let's suppose that there are two ways this experience might continue:

A. Your mother is just a few feet away. She's been around dogs all her life and is quite comfortable with them. Moreover, she knows this particular dog, who, despite his large size, is just a loud and rambunctious pup. Calling the dog to her side, she lavishes him with attention and then guides you through an introduction, where you stroke his coat and touch his nose, teeth, and tongue.

OR

B. Your mother is just a few feet away. All her life she was taught that dogs bite people and give them diseases. So when she sees the dog, she screams, snatches you off the ground, hurting your arm, and runs into the house. Then she carries on for an hour about how you both "could have been killed" and how "somebody" was inexcusably negligent in leaving the gate open.

What conclusions will you draw from this experience? It depends almost entirely on whether you have the “early, borrowed lens” of Mother A or Mother B. Without meaning to, each mother **defines** the concept of **dog** for you. If you are the child of Mother A, you will conclude that dogs are great companions, and the next time you encounter one, almost certainly you will welcome it, because you will see it through the lens of this first, positive experience.

Again, I am mindful of the influence of genetics—that some children are born, for example, with an innate tendency toward fearfulness—but on the whole, most children with positive early dog experiences tend to have positive attitudes toward dogs. If the initial lens portrays dogs as good, the child tends to see each subsequent “dog event” in a positive way: the barking is perceived as an invitation to connect, the fur is soft, the teeth are fun to play with, the nose and tongue are wet and exciting to touch.

But what if you are handed the lens provided by Mother B? You will **not** conclude that dogs are a good thing, and upon your next canine encounter, you will almost certainly be wary, if not hysterical—following Mother’s example. The initial lens portrayed all dogs—not just the first one—as **dangerous**, so you will see every subsequent “dog event” through that lens: the barking is perceived as threatening, the fur is filthy, the teeth are deadly, the nose and tongue are disgusting carriers of disease.

Parents occupy a position of unspeakable influence. The lens they hold up for children tends to **define the world**. What child, upon seeing his mother’s initial fearful reaction to a dog—or anything else—would say to her, “Get a grip, sweetie. Don’t you think you’re overreacting a bit here?” Rarely do parents realize the power of the role they play in their children’s lives. Parents are not just *God-like* to a child. To a child, parents ARE god. They define and create the world around their children.

Because this concept of early influence in a child’s life is so important, allow me to restate it in another way. As children we **learn** what the world is like, what other people are like, what **we** are like, and what our relationship is to the world and the people in it. What we learn unavoidably and profoundly affects every subsequent experience we have. In any given moment, therefore—when we were children and now as adults—we are reacting NOT only to the people or situations we are facing in that moment. We are reacting to our **interpretations** or **perspectives** of these people and events, and our interpretations are largely determined by the people and events and attitudes we’ve experienced earlier.

In other words, our past tends to determine how we perceive the present, and as children, our attitudes are mostly determined by what we learn from our **parents**, as well as other adults: grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, and more. I also recognize that peers have some influence, but they in turn were taught their values mostly by parents and other adults, so I will refer little to the influence of peers.

The belief that our early perceptions tend to determine our later perceptions is supported by a large body of research in social psychology. In one simple study, for example, a group of people was shown the following sequence of words as a description of a person they had not met:

*John is intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious.*

Another group of people was shown a second sequence of descriptive words:

*John is envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent.*

Notice that the listed qualities are exactly the same, except that in the first series the two positive words are placed first. People were influenced **most** by what they read **first**, so that the first group (reading from **intelligent** to **envious**) had more positive feelings toward John than the second group (reading from **envious** to **intelligent**).

In another study students first exposed to the scent of an all-purpose cleaner were quicker to identify cleaning-related words in a long list of words. People exposed to a given color were more likely later to choose clothing and food of that color.

A similar effect was seen with many initial influences. We tend to internalize what we experience first, and childhood certainly qualifies as a first experience. Clinical research has confirmed the importance of the experiences—especially the loving ones—we have as infants and children. In the early 1960s, Harry Harlow published groundbreaking studies that demonstrated that when baby rhesus monkeys were separated early on from their mothers, they eventually become neurotic and physically ill.

Since then human studies have proven that children are literally molded by love. It changes their brain chemistry, and when they don't receive enough of it at an early age, they often have difficulty connecting with people for the rest of their lives.



## CHAPTER 6

# THE WOUND

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# The Wound

*In Post-Childhood Stress Disorder, the trauma is our entire childhood.*

**In this chapter we will talk about the effects of disapproval and how they make genuine happiness impossible.**

When I say that childhood is the lens through which all subsequent experiences are interpreted—and that what we learned as children largely determines what we believe and how we behave as adults—am I saying that from childhood we march on a predetermined course for the rest of our lives? Not at all, or there would be no reason to write this report.

I'm saying that if the lens of childhood is formed in a healthy way, we will interpret our adult experiences more accurately and be much more likely to find happiness individually and in relationships. If the lens of childhood is distorted or darkened with impurities, however, it will be much more difficult—impossible for most people—to see people and events as they really are, and happiness will then be much harder to find.

The clarity and health of this childhood lens—as well as the introduction of impurities that distort it—are largely determined by the supply of the one ingredient most essential to a child's emotional and spiritual health: Real Love.

Working for the World Health Organization (WHO), psychiatrist Dr. John Bowlby studied children all over the world as they were affected by disasters and extreme neglect, and he concluded that it was not the physical disasters or wars that most affected them. He said that "intimate attachments to other human beings are the hub around which a person's life revolves . . . From these intimate attachments people draw strength and enjoyment of life." He concluded that children deprived of this intimacy responded to difficult circumstances in a far less healthy way.

A number of experiments have demonstrated our need for loving connections. When people were excluded from a group—even for short periods of time—they became more likely to engage in self-defeating behaviors, to perform badly on aptitude tests, to lose control of healthy eating habits, to say unkind things to others, and even to deliver various forms of punishment to others.

When we don't have enough unconditional love—the one element in life most essential to happiness—the end result is PAIN. We might use other descriptive phrases for feeling unloved—upset, fearful, abandoned, angry, lonely, criticized, frustrated, and so on—but the bottom line is pain. Not feeling loved simply **hurts**, and in the long run it doesn't matter much **how** that pain is delivered.

Imagine that you're sitting in a room down the hall from me, and with the use of a webcam I'm listening to you and watching your head and torso. I'm also informed that you're tied by your legs—which I can't see—to the chair, which in turn is bolted to the floor. Suddenly you begin screaming, twisting your body, and bouncing up and down in your chair, while your face is contorted by terrible expressions. Finally I make out that you're screaming, "He's stabbing me in the leg."

What should I do at this point? I could write down my guesses about the identity of the "he" who is stabbing you. Or I might create a list of possible objects being used to stab you: a screwdriver, knife, hot poker, piece of broken glass. But at this point would any of that really matter? The simple fact is that you're being stabbed, and you're in pain. I could describe the various ways that you're expressing your pain—bobbing head, loud vocalizations, furrowed brow, lips dancing in every direction, twisting of the thorax, flexing at the waist—but again, all these details are relatively meaningless compared to the central issue: your pain.

Once I focus on what matters most, I'm motivated to leap from my chair, run down the hall, and do whatever I can to stop the physical assault. As we describe human behavior, there is a strong tendency for nearly all of us—therapists included—to focus on irrelevant details. We talk about **how** the wound was delivered—verbal abuse, sexual abuse, physical trauma—and by whom. We talk about the various **reactions** that people have to pain such as withdrawal, anger, and addictions, among others. But in the process of this dissection and analysis, we often ignore the primary wound and how to treat it.

Over the years I have counseled with a great number of individuals, couples, and groups who have been affected by just about any experience you could imagine, and it has become obvious that **THE primary wound** affecting almost all of us is the

lack of Real Love—a conclusion that surprised me initially. That wound is so **painful** that it tends to dominate the lens through which we see everything else. We also react to the pain in a broad spectrum of ways. We must not be distracted, however, either by the delivery of the injury or by the details of how we respond to the pain.

Years ago an experiment was performed where two rats were placed in a cage, the floor of which delivered electric shocks. The instant the rats felt the shock, they attacked each other. If only one rat was shocked, he immediately attacked the other rat. This experiment was repeated with a long list of animals—from squirrel monkeys to crayfish—with the same results. Animals in pain also attacked animals of other species, stuffed dolls, and even tennis balls.

Like these animals, we human beings tend to respond immediately and dramatically to pain, and rarely do we respond in ways that contribute to our well-being. It has been my experience, in fact, that our responses to pain resemble a kind of temporary insanity.

Imagine, for example, that we record the incident where you are being stabbed in the leg, and I show the recording to a group. The camera shot is from mid-chest to the top of your head, so viewers can't see the stabbing, only your reactions to it. And there is no sound in the recording. Pointing to your behavior, I could easily convince the group that you were a raving lunatic. Our responses to emotional pain look just as insane.

In Chapter One I mentioned that many of us have symptoms quite similar to those of Anthony, the young war veteran. The symptoms are similar because we're all responding to pain. The origin of the pain may be different, but the pain itself is felt with remarkable similarity among us all.

### **Could It Really Be That Simple?**

As I describe the seriousness and prevalence of The Primary Wound—the lack of Real Love in our lives—many people, especially parents, resist this idea. They can't imagine that children could be this sensitive to expressions of disapproval, or that disapproval could have such a profoundly destructive effect. Let's address both objections, first our **sensitivity** to disapproval.

In Chapter Two I suggested that you try an experiment, where you express disapproval at a child—or anyone else, for that matter—and observe the results. That experiment alone should convince you of our sensitivity to disapproval, but psychological research has also been done on this subject.



In one study teachers were videotaped as they talked about students for whom they held high or low expectations. Viewers—both children and adults—then heard or watched random *10-second clips* of either the teacher’s voice or the teacher’s face, and from that tiny snippet of input they could recognize whether the student being talked about was a good student or a poor one, as well as how much the teacher liked the student.

We are very sensitive indeed to the facial expressions, tones of voice, body movements, and so on that convey emotions or beliefs. Our sensitivity is even greater when these communications involve disapproval.

Second, the **effect** of disapproval. Surveys have revealed that people of all ages are most distressed by experiences where they feel criticized, excluded, demeaned, and ridiculed—all synonyms for not feeling loved. It’s no surprise, then, that the experiences we treasure most in the long run are those where we feel connected to—and accepted by—other people. In short, Real Love is truly what we want most, and the absence of it causes the greatest trauma.

### **The Diseased Whole**

With PTSD we can’t integrate the trauma and its memories into the whole of who we are, so we make an effort to compartmentalize the trauma and dissociate from it. In PCSD, by contrast, the ongoing trauma of our childhood **becomes the whole of who we are**.

In post-**traumatic** stress disorder, the trauma is a single event—or sometimes series of events—that we can’t fit into our past experience. In post-**childhood** stress disorder, the trauma is our entire childhood, which then becomes a “diseased whole” that we blindly define as normal. Because that whole is painful, however, our rational mind tries to dissociate from the pain caused by our childhood—even though we don’t consciously understand that we’re trying to do that. We spend the rest of our lives trying to dissociate from a pain whose origins we do not understand, and the process is both confusing and agonizing.

Once that initial pathologic pattern is in place, we have a real problem. We no longer even question whether life could be different from how we view it: unloving and hurtful. Then when we encounter individual unloving experiences, we easily **integrate them into our diseased whole**—which is also unloving—rather than questioning the unloving character of each experience. Remember that Rachel—from Chapter Three—simply accepted that her childhood (the diseased whole) was

normal, so every subsequent unloving experience also seemed unremarkable, except that she did feel the pain that resulted from these experiences.

Not only do we try to fit each experience into our diseased pattern, but our unhealthy pattern constructs the lens—as described earlier—through which we see every subsequent event. With that pathologic lens in place, we judge unloving, selfish, and unhealthy behaviors to be normal. Even worse, we **seek out** these behaviors, because we are most familiar with them, and these new experiences serve both to reinforce the diseased lens and to convince us that it's normal. Feeling unloved can become a horrifyingly negative self-fulfilling process.

So if the vast majority of us have not received or given sufficient Real Love—if that condition has become “normal”—why should we be concerned? Why not just accept it and move on? Because in the absence of enough Real Love, the whole of who we are cannot be healthy or happy, just as we learned that sailors couldn't be healthy in the absence of Vitamin C, no matter how much they ate of everything else.

Without enough Real Love, the pain becomes so intense and incessant that we can no longer separate who we are from our reactions to pain. Once the pattern of unloving behaviors becomes consistent enough to form a whole, we invite and perpetuate emotional sickness, which easily fits into the whole. In short, everything fits, but it doesn't work. The puzzle falls together, but it doesn't produce happiness.

So if our lifelong experiences have not been unconditionally loving, what happens if we then encounter a healthy, loving experience? In **PTSD we can't integrate the trauma** into a healthier whole. In PCSD, the whole is already sick, so we **can't integrate healthy experiences** into that whole. How ironic that in PCSD we actually dissociate from what we need most.

When children are repeatedly traumatized  
by the simple lack of Real Love,  
they experience the profound “I don't love you” wound,  
after which—during childhood and later as adults—  
they display a broad variety of beliefs and behaviors  
—PCSD—  
that make genuine happiness impossible.



## CHAPTER 7

# PCSD MADE SIMPLE

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## PCSD Made Simple

*People with PCSD are bleeding and blind, and in that condition how could they possibly be happy.*

**Using a real-life example, I will show you in this chapter how PCSD occurs.**

At this point we can pose a working definition of PCSD. First, recall the simple definition of post-traumatic stress syndrome: a condition where people experience a broad array of physical and emotional symptoms after enduring an obviously traumatic event. PCSD, on the other hand, is a condition where children are repeatedly traumatized by the simple lack of Real Love, which creates the profound ***I don't love you*** wound, after which the child—and later the adult—displays a broad variety of beliefs and behaviors that make happiness impossible.

Another simple and useful way to view PCSD is to consider that it involves

- a wound, which is inflicted by the lack of essential Real Love. This wound is every bit as real and destructive to the soul as a knife wound to the body.
- a cognitive—intellectual—distortion, where you see yourself, other people, and the entire world through a lens that is not true.

In short, people with PCSD are bleeding and blind, and in that condition how could they possibly be happy?

### **TAYLOR**

Allow me to introduce to you a man named Taylor who will illustrate many of the principles we've discussed to this point. As you read about Taylor, I encourage you to identify with any elements that you might share with him or with his parents. I cannot begin to tell you how common his story is. The *details* might differ among

us—age, sex, addictions, the particular style of parenting—but the overall pattern is so common among us that we don't even identify it as a problem. **Very few** parents have any notion of what unconditional love is, so without meaning to they inflict the ***I don't love you*** wound on their children over and over, every day of their children's lives. But because these wounds happen so often, they are accepted as normal.

Taylor, age 32, was sent to me by his parents, who said that he needed to be "straightened out." From the age of 14 he had met the criteria for alcoholism, and for the past several years he'd also become addicted to a variety of other drugs. He'd been through inpatient drug rehab and counseling a couple of times, but his sobriety had continued for only short periods. Recently his wife had filed for divorce and threatened to cut him off from any association with his young son.

I began to tell Taylor that most people who are unhappy are missing Real Love from their lives, usually from the time they were children. He interrupted to assure me that his parents had always loved him.

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"Because they told me so," he replied.

In order to discover what "love" meant in this family, I met on several occasions with Taylor, his parents, and his siblings. Sure enough, both his parents assured me that they had "always" loved him. But a single word may hold vastly different meanings for different people.

When I was a child, for example, one house we lived in was enormous, with a huge backyard that had two levels separated by a big slope. At least that's how I remembered it. When I went back to visit that house more than thirty years later, however, I was shocked to discover that the house wasn't large at all. And the "big hill" that separated the two levels was no more than a bump, less than two feet high. How different my notion of "big" had become.

So let's look at the love of Taylor's parents and discover whether it was genuinely big or really just a small bump—or even an illusion.

<u>The Claim</u>	<u>The Truth</u>
Mother: "I always supported him."	She often attended church and school activities with Taylor—activities she approved of—but she rarely attended his athletic events. She didn't even want to <b>hear</b> about his activities—riding motorcycles, for example—that failed to meet her standards of acceptability.
Taylor: "She was always there for me."	See above. Mother had trained him to believe that "always being there for him" meant that she attended the events she approved of and did the things for him that <i>she</i> enjoyed doing.
Mother: "I was always positive with my children."	In public she was a model of cheerfulness, but behind closed doors she freely berated her children, including Taylor, for every mistake they made—and she found plenty of them.
Mother: "We taught love in our family."	Mother would not tolerate conflict of any kind, so her family learned to hide them. No one could speak unkind words in her presence, so they just argued and fought where she couldn't see or hear it. She taught her children that they "should be" loving, but she never showed them what that would look like in real situations.
Mother: "I was always a good mother."	She frequently told Taylor and others what a great mother she was, and she was baffled that he could have turned out as he did—a "failure," in her words—in the face of that great parenting.
Father: "I taught my children to fear God and live godly lives."	He often quoted Bible passages to belittle Taylor, and he talked about God's intolerance of Taylor's "sins" in such a way that Taylor quit attending church as soon as he was old enough not to be physically afraid of his father. Taylor also abandoned any belief in God, viewing God as an extension of his father's qualities.

<u>The Claim</u>	<u>The Truth</u>
Father: "I accept Taylor no matter what."	When Taylor behaved exactly as his father demanded, Father was accepting—if the absence of obvious criticism qualifies as acceptance. But when Taylor strayed from the narrowly prescribed path, his father blew up at him and spoke very harshly.
Father: "I loved him enough to teach him how he should live—to tell him what kind of person he needed to be."	Using guilt and shame, Father tried to control everything Taylor did.

After we had been meeting regularly for a month—Taylor’s longest period of sobriety and responsibility in ten years—Taylor called one day to say that his parents had come into his room and awakened him in the middle of the night. They told him that they had raised him “better than this,” adding that he had ruined his life and theirs. “You’re killing your mother,” his father said, “and I haven’t slept in weeks.” They blamed him for all the unhappiness in the family, adding that they could no longer put up with it. “You say you love us,” they said, “but we don’t believe you anymore. You just keep screwing up. We did a great job of raising you, so how could you have turned out like this?”

“I have lived with them saying that kind of stuff all my life,” Taylor said to me, “so in the past I just didn’t think anything of it. But now for the first time I’m recognizing what they’ve been saying and doing. I just hadn’t seen how unloving it is. I don’t think I *wanted* to see it.”

The more we talked about the characteristics of unconditional love, the more he recognized that he’d never felt it at home. It is worth noting here that my goal was not to convince Taylor of anything about his past, only to help him compare his childhood to a truly loving standard, after which he could come to his own conclusions. Only with the truth can we begin to make meaningful changes in our lives.

As Taylor learned more, and as he felt accepted, he began to remember more of the details of his childhood. He recalled that he used to come up with any excuse to stay out of the house—playing in the woods, busying himself with sports, whatever—just so he didn't have to be around his parents. When Taylor and I first began to talk, he didn't remember any of this. He didn't remember avoiding his parents, because that behavior didn't fit with what his parents had said about loving him. When events don't fit with what we know, we tend to compartmentalize and forget them

### **The Great Lie**

Taylor had been taught to blindly accept his parents' definition of love, which included the following traits:

- Conditional. His parents “loved” him only when he was behaving as they demanded.
- Intermittent, unreliable, random. At times they were truly tender toward him, but he learned that those feelings could vanish in an instant. Their kindness came and went like good luck in Las Vegas.
- Expensive. In return for the love he received, he had to give his parents respect, obedience, and gratitude. It was a lot of work.

Although Taylor completely accepted his parents' notion of love, it created an enormous cognitive-emotional dissonance, or conflict, within him. Children all over the world deal with this conflict every day—and it's quite upsetting—so let's examine how it happens.

First the cognitive, or intellectual, part of the conflict. When children hear the words, “I love you” from their parents, they accept completely that their parents are speaking the truth, because parents are that powerful in their children's lives.

So when Taylor's mother angrily berated him, he didn't see that behavior as a contradiction of her previous verbal claims to love him. Rather, he found her anger **consistent** with the definition of love that she had declared on many other occasions with her behavior (conditional, unreliable, expensive).

A young child doesn't think, “Mother tells me she loves me, BUT then she behaves in unloving ways. Mother's words and behavior do not match.” Instead the child thinks—mostly unconsciously—“Mother tells me she loves me. That must be true, because Mother would not lie—lying is bad. AND she yells at me, criticizes me, and



gets mad at me. So, accepting the truth that she loves me, her behavior—including the anger—must be a PART of love.”

Parents teach their children a false definition of love—part of that first lens we spoke of earlier—and children accept it as true. This teaching of a lie—and its acceptance—has unspeakably tragic consequences, because then the child spends the rest of his life trying to accomplish impossible or harmful goals:

- She tries to find this love that has been defined for her, this love that is so familiar to her.
- Once she finds this love, she tries to create happiness from it, which is impossible.
- She tries to BE this kind of loving, which can only be frustrating to her and to the people she has relationships with.

The second bullet above illustrates how a child resolves the cognitive contradiction between the words and behavior of love, but we human beings are not solely cognitive creatures. Every time a parent is angry—which includes everything from rage to quiet exasperation—the child **feels** unhappy. This unhappy **feeling** is then in conflict with what the child has been **told** is love. No matter how well parents convince a child with **words** that their love includes impatience and irritation—an **intellectual deception**—they cannot pull off a complete **emotional** deception.

On the one hand, then, a child hears the words “I love you,” but that intellectual message is starkly contradicted by what the child **feels**. The child **feels** the **I don't love you** message conveyed by the anger, even if he can't put it into words. In the face of this terrible contradiction children tend to make—quite unconsciously—one or both of the following conclusions:

- “Love is supposed to feel terrible. It's full of disappointment, irritation, and pain. So why would I ever want anything to do with love—either as a child or as an adult?” (A great many people avoid “love” for this reason.)
- “Love is good, and I believe the many people who say that love is associated with good feelings. But **I** don't have these positive feelings, so something must be tragically wrong with ME. If ‘good’ people feel happy when they have love, I must be a ‘bad’ person.”

This conflict between the words and the feelings of love is deadly for a child. When Taylor was four years old, and his mother stood over him spewing disapproval, there was no possibility that Taylor could have said, “Mother, let's stop here and

think for a moment. You seem to be blaming me for your anger—certainly your words and behavior communicate that—but is that true? Am I really responsible for your anger, or is it possible that you are inappropriately venting your overall frustration—about Dad, about the way you were raised by your parents, about the overall direction of your life—at me?”

As I talk to adults, they frequently ask some variation on this question: “I know my parents love me, so why do I feel this tension when I’m around them? Why do they talk to me like they often do? Why do they treat me like \_\_\_\_\_? Why am I not happier?” Unconsciously these people have been burdened by these contradictions most of their lives.

These questions are crazy-making, because we can’t see any possible resolution to the conflicts represented by these questions. It never occurs to us that the problem lies in the very definition of **love** that we were taught from the beginning. It never occurs to us that our parents’ notion of love—which we swallowed whole—might be dead wrong.

And if we get the definition of **love**—which is the foundation of everything else in happiness and in relationships—wrong from the beginning, how could we hope to get anything else right? Until we get the definition of love right—where the words match the behaviors—we can never properly identify or treat the wounds that have flowed from our lack of understanding.

Imagine a battle where every soldier was shot in the stomach. Having a stomach wound would then become the **norm**. Now imagine that the battlefield doctors accept this new norm, so they pronounce every soldier with a stomach wound healthy, and they offer no treatment. As absurd as this sounds, that’s what has happened with children all over the world. The very element essential to their health was mislabeled, so then the wounds that resulted from the lack of it could not be properly diagnosed.

I reemphasize that in general parents do not recognize their role in wounding their children. They have never **known** the definition of love, so their failure to teach Real Love to their children is far from intentional. Nor have most parents ever **felt** Real Love, so they could hardly pass on what they don’t have.

Some parents faintly recognize that there **is** something wrong with disappointment and anger directed at their children—they can see the effect of these behaviors in their children’s faces—but then they justify themselves with clever excuses like, “I’m

angry at your behavior but not at you.” I assure you, however, that no child can make that distinction, and they are wounded despite this cognitive and emotional sleight of hand.

Not only did Taylor’s parents deceive him—unintentionally, to be sure—about love, but they distorted his notion of the entire world. He was taught that

- learning is good, but mistakes are bad. Parents and others don’t realize that mistakes are simply part of learning. In many cases, our efforts to avoid making mistakes are actually misguided, because some things can only be learned by taking chances and screwing up. The more we try not to make mistakes, the more afraid we become, and the less we learn.
- love is earned. If you want people to like you, you have to do what they want.
- saying something fervently and with apparent sincerity makes it true, despite all evidence to the contrary. His parents talked about their love and the excellence of their parenting, but these claims didn’t fit with how Taylor felt.

### **The Response to Pain**

In the absence of Real Love, Taylor’s primary sensation was pain, and he did what he could to diminish it. As a child his initial response to his parents’ pressure to be perfect was to pour his entire soul into the realization of their expectations. He wanted to make them happy, so he got all A’s in school, excelled as an athlete, and so on, and if he did ALL that, he enjoyed moments of temporary and conditional acceptance.

But eventually he discovered—as most children do—that being perfect was just too much work. The parental expectations never stopped, and the conditional acceptance didn’t make him truly happy anyway.

So he quit trying to get all A’s and settled for an average academic performance. He partially made up for the lack of approval in this area with his athletic successes and his enjoyment of social associations, particularly with women. He used his good looks, athletic ability, and charm to attract one beautiful woman, Shelby—the homecoming queen—to marry him. With the conditional approval and sex she provided, he felt pretty good for a few months.

But when that initial “glow” began to wear off, she began to find fault with him, just as his mother and father always had. He could feel his life begin the descent into hell. He and Shelby frequently got into arguments, but he had no idea how to work

out these conflicts, because in his parents' home, conflict had never been allowed. Everyone always had to "be nice," and if there were disagreements, Mother and Father simply imposed their will. They just dictated the terms of peace, so things were never "worked out," which left Taylor crippled in his attempts to participate in a relationship.

In Chapter One we met Anthony, the young war veteran. Sometimes when he heard a loud noise he would drop to the floor and cower like a child. Why? "Because he was not reacting only to the loud noise in the present. He was reacting to the present noise, AND to all the traumatic events he saw in war that were connected to loud noises, AND to every other painful experience in his entire life. This is important to understand about those who have PTSD: in any given moment, **they're responding to a lifetime of pain.**"

The same is true in PCSD. Each time Shelby criticized Taylor, he felt not only the pain of that one moment of disapproval but also the pain of a **lifetime of disapproval**, and it was more than he could take. So he detached from her, withdrawing into his own world. The emotional detachment wasn't enough—partly because she clung to him and aggressively pursued him with her demands and disapproval—so he withdrew physically also. He spent a lot of extra time at work and goofed around with his friends. His drinking and drug use steadily increased, giving him an additional layer of pain relief. Gradually he disappeared from his marriage and from life.

In all this Taylor didn't have the slightest idea that he was reacting to the pain of disapproval from Shelby **and** the pain of all those years with his parents. So, without an understanding of the problem, how could he possibly have found what he really needed—the unconditional love of others? He could only do what he had learned as a child—to earn approval and avoid disapproval—and it was working very poorly. Taylor was bleeding and blind—the simple definition of PCSD mentioned a few pages ago—and in that condition he could only be miserable.

## **AN ADDITIONAL RESOURCE**

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## CHAPTER 8

# WHY THE WOUND IS HIDDEN

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# Why the Wound is Hidden

*We interpret every experience in the present through the lens created by and influenced by childhood traumas.*

**In this chapter you will learn the many factors that hide our PCSD wounds.**

After presenting a seminar one day, I was approached by a woman who said, “You’re telling me that nearly the entire world is suffering from a lack of love?”

“Yes,” I said.

“That’s pretty bold of you, isn’t it?”

“Might be *bold*, but not *untrue* or presumptuous. Just take a look at the world. How are we doing?”

She shrugged and said, “Good point.”

Open a newspaper anywhere in the world, and you will find evidence that people have no idea how to love each other: war, kidnapping, rampant dishonesty, alcohol abuse and drug addiction, failing marriages and families. Not long ago in a Midwestern town the back door of an armored car opened, spilling two million dollars in cash onto the road. Dozens of motorists leapt from their cars to gather up the bills, but only \$100,000 was returned—one dollar in twenty! And \$57,000 of that was returned by one man. Deep down in our souls there is something wrong, and we’re not identifying it.

How could something this pervasive and this destructive remain unknown to us? We’ll get to that in a moment, but don’t fall for the superficial logic that if a thing isn’t generally known, it couldn’t be true. For many years it was generally accepted

that the sun orbited the earth and that the earth was flat, but that general acceptance did not make those beliefs true. The simplest scientific observations reversed all those centuries of ignorance. After Columbus set foot in the New World just one time, the maps of the earth were forever changed.

So it is with hundreds of thousands of people who have come to an understanding of Real Love and observed its power in their lives. They'll never be the same.

Now back to the question: Why is Real Love not widely known, and why do we not recognize the effect of its absence, including PCSD? Why is the wound of PCSD hidden? There are several reasons, among them:

- The effects of not having sufficient Real Love are quiet and gradual, so identification of the trauma is often not perceived.
- There is a large disparity between the magnitude of precipitating events (the action) and their consequences (the reaction).
- We are generally confused about the relationship between the **effect of** an action and the **intention behind** that action.
- The general condition of the world is unloving, so any specific unloving act doesn't stand out.
- We don't remember our childhoods well or accurately.

### **Quiet and Gradual Trauma**

Most children are not beaten or sexually abused. No, it's much quieter than that. Children are wounded by the steady absence of what they need most, and the effect is just as great as if they had been more directly traumatized. If you want to kill a young sapling, you don't have to chop it down. Just withhold water and sunlight, and it will wither and die. So too with children and the withholding of Real Love. The effects are quiet and gradual but no less deadly than those of much more visible events.

### **Disparity between the precipitating events (the action) and their consequences (the reaction)**

Although we may not be able to name them or mathematically describe them, we all have a working familiarity with Newton's Laws of Motion. We know, for example, that if we exert twenty-five pounds of upward force to a twenty-three-pound bag of groceries, we'll be able to lift it immediately from the ground. If, however, we exert twenty-five pounds of effort to lift a one-hundred-pound weight, nothing will

happen, and even if we exert that twenty-five-pound effort a thousand times, the net effect will still be nothing—although by then we might be sweating.

But the laws that govern human beings—with their beliefs, perspectives, feelings, and behaviors—aren't nearly as exact as Newton's. Human beings are more complicated than weights. If a parent is unkind to a child, for example, we may not see the full effect of that action immediately, although the child **always feels** some effect. The child may not even be consciously aware of the effect, but the ***I don't love you*** wound is always felt.

With enough of these wounds—however “minor” each one might seem in the moment—the pain and fear increase to the point that the child becomes hypersensitized to any painful event, much as trauma hypersensitizes PTSD patients. Then, one day at school, such a child is pushed by a bully. This single event seems minor, but it's yet another ***I don't love you*** wound, and it interacts with and is magnified by the effects of all previous bullying episodes and all the previous wounds received from parents, siblings, and others.

Suddenly—or so it seems—the child's limit for pain and fear is exceeded, so he goes home, finds his father's hunting rifle, returns to school, and kills eight children and two teachers. Then we're all surprised. We wonder what's wrong with the school, or gun laws, or “today's society.” We simply can't imagine that the real cause lies in all the “little” events that preceded this seemingly exaggerated reaction—all the little events that nobody noticed. We can't imagine that this child suffers from a form of PTSD—PCSD.

Other responses may not be so dramatic. You say something to your spouse that seems quite innocent to you, but she blows up, and you are baffled. So you ask, “What did I do?” It's not about you. She's reacting to a lifetime of being traumatized by the ***I don't love you*** message—delivered by her parents and many others—so now it takes very little, even nothing sometimes, to push her over the edge. In almost all cases where we react with intense emotional energy to an event, we're reacting to all the traumas of childhood that nobody noticed at the time, and to the traumas that have continued since childhood.

We just can't seem to get our heads around the disproportionate effect that seemingly minor events can have. We believe that human interactions, overall, should follow rational guidelines, like the basic laws of physical motion. We believe that big reactions require big causes, and we're puzzled when that is not the case. Years ago, for example, I was a high school student in Indiana, where it seemed that



everyone closely followed the running of the Indianapolis 500 auto race. In 1967, for the first time in the history of the race, the team led by Parnelli Jones placed a turbine engine—an aircraft engine—in their car, which gave them a considerable advantage in power. None of the other drivers could keep up with Jones, and when the race was 98% completed, it appeared that nothing could stop him from claiming victory. But then, with less than ten miles of the 500-mile race remaining, a six-dollar bearing in the engine failed, and Jones couldn't finish.

People could not stop talking about how a multi-million-dollar operation could be halted by “just” a six-dollar bearing. They found it unsettling because, again, we need the cause to be as “big” as the end result. People could have accepted Jones's loss more easily if, say, his engine had exploded, or all four wheels had fallen off. It bothered them that a six-dollar bearing had resulted in a million-dollar consequence.

When attempting to understand emotional responses, we routinely display this need for the “bigness” of cause and effect to match up. If an emotional end result—fear, pain, anger—is big, we **need** the cause to be big also, so the emotions will make sense to us. This need is so great that we tend to disregard or deny any potential cause that **doesn't** match the event. In the example above, for example, where your spouse became angry, your thoughts would likely have involved some variation on, “But **I only** said . . .” You would have attempted to prove that your behavior **could not have been the cause** of her reaction by pointing out that your behavior was minor, while her reaction was much bigger. The cause and reaction didn't match, so you couldn't have been the cause.

Ironically, it turns out that emotional reactions and causes usually DO match, but we simply don't correctly identify the causes. We become confused by **proximity**—by the **closeness** of events, both in time and space. With physical events, proximity usually is an excellent way to identify cause. If my jaw suddenly hurts, for example, an immediate search for events close by—both in time and space—will likely yield the cause. Sure enough, your fist hit my face (proximity in space) a fraction of a second (proximity in time) before my jaw pain, so it's highly likely that your fist is the cause of my pain.

But proximity is often a most unreliable way to judge the causes of emotional pain. When your spouse blew up, she naturally looked for a cause, and the closest candidates were you and what you had just said to her. But she didn't realize that she was already hypersensitized to any injury—real or imagined—by a lifetime of people who failed to genuinely care about her. She was suffering from PCSD.

What you said to her might have made a small contribution to her reaction—you might have spoken with a slightly negative tone, for example—but your contribution was actually irrelevant. Her reaction was still primarily determined by people and events long past and forgotten. This is much like Anthony's cowering on the floor in reaction to loud noises—like the falling of plates. It could be superficially tempting to think that he had a hypersensitivity to plates, but it was really a reaction to a great number of traumatic events from his past. Anthony suffered from PTSD, your wife from PCSD, and the similarities are striking.

Rarely do we realize that the unspeakable pain, anger, and confusion we're experiencing in the present are caused by the "little" things that happened to us long ago, which seemed so inconsequential at the time. To a child, however, little moments of not feeling loved—the scowls, the unkind tones of voice, the harsh words—can plant seeds whose full harvest of poison may not be experienced for many years.

### **We Are Generally Confused about the Relationship Between the EFFECT OF an Action and the INTENTION BEHIND that Action.**

Imagine that your son spills milk across the dining room table and onto your lap. You are not happy about this, and you communicate your displeasure abundantly to him. With his eyes wide in a charming display of innocent martyrdom, he says, "But I didn't *mean* to." He says this because we've all learned that unintentional accidents are accepted much more easily than intentional crimes.

If heavy rains loosen the soil, resulting in a mudslide that buries a bus filled with children, we're all quite sad at the news. But what if a bus filled with children goes off a cliff, and we learn that the accident was due to the manufacturer's intentional use of a substandard hydraulic brake line that would save twenty cents per bus? Now we're angry. In both cases, a busload of children dies, but our reaction is quite different in the second instance because of the element of *intention*. Malice makes all the difference to us. Hence our vigorous clinging to the "I didn't mean to" defense. We actually hope deep down that if we didn't mean to do a thing, maybe it didn't quite happen—not fully.

Parents don't *mean* to hurt their children. No parent gets up in the morning and says, "You know, I'm feeling pretty loving today, but I still have a choice. I *could* share that love with my children and help them to build lives on a foundation of love and happiness. But no, I think I'll keep it to myself and virtually guarantee that they'll be miserable individually and in relationships for the rest of their lives."

Parents fail to love their children only because they don't have it to give. They were not unconditionally loved themselves.

Although we don't mean to hurt our children, we still do it, and our children don't really care about the reasons. No young child **cares** whether her parents were raised with sufficient Real Love. Children simply are not in a place to understand that. For children it's all about whether they have what they need, or they don't. So our knowing that we didn't mean to hurt them can eliminate **our guilt**, but it doesn't change **their pain**. Before we can help them, we must begin to acknowledge the wounds we've caused.

### **General Condition of World is Unloving**

I mentioned earlier that to assess the condition of the world generally, we need only to look around. Marriages are falling apart, children rebel against their parents, children kill each other in school, countries are at war, and there is a pervasive cloud of fear and mistrust almost everywhere. In this atmosphere it simply is not remarkable when children are the victims of criticism, anger, and neglect. These comparatively "minor" wounds disappear in the background noise of the disappointment, anger, and resentment that is all around us.

The lack of Real Love in the world is a condition so prevalent that many of us can't even recognize the moments of Real Love that occur. We have discussed how in PTSD we can't integrate the trauma into who we are, but ironically in PCSD all our **traumas** become **who we are**, so now we can't integrate **Real Love** into the traumatic and painful whole of who we are. Real Love doesn't even make sense to us. On countless occasions when I've described Real Love to people, they've said, "Come on. That's a myth. What you're describing can't exist." They say this because they've never seen it and can't even imagine it.

### **Childhood Memories**

I cannot count how many times people have told me that their parents loved them, only to state later—after learning what unconditional love looks and feels like—that their childhoods were not a loving experience. I estimate, in fact, that most people believe they were unconditionally loved as children. But in well over 90% of all cases, the behavior of the people who claim a loving childhood is simply not compatible with that belief. Their **behavior** betrays them. Their broad array of Getting and Protecting Behaviors—along with their overall unhappiness—loudly testifies that they could not have received sufficient Real Love.

For years I worked in emergency rooms—treating everything from the flu to gunshot wounds—and one night a young man came in with his face flayed open, obviously a victim of a knife fight. He also had enough alcohol pouring from his breath that you could have become intoxicated just by standing close by.

I asked him what happened, and he said, “I don’t know.”

“I believe you,” I said. “How much did you have to drink?”

“Two beers.”

I can’t count how many times I’ve heard that answer from people who were so drunk they didn’t know what planet they were on. In their defense, after a certain point they may **remember** drinking only two beers, but their behavior nonetheless betrays them. The way they’re acting undeniably proves that what they’re saying is not true, and this is similar to what I see in people who claim they were loved. Their claim is just not supported by the way their lives are going.

Are people lying, then, when they claim they were loved? Not usually. In most cases they really do not remember the painful experiences of their childhoods. Why is that? Let’s consider what we know about memory and the factors that affect it:

- Memory is a reconstructive process, not just the simple retrieval of data.
- It is influenced by the memories of other events.
- Memory is influenced and distorted over time.
- It is possible to believe strongly in memories that are inaccurate.
- Memories can strongly influence the way we see events in the present, as well as how we feel about them and respond to them.

So our memories of childhood are highly suspect, being influenced by the following:

- The beliefs we had at the time, which were mostly established by our parents. Children tend to remember what their parents TELL them to remember. Taylor’s parents told him that they loved him, so he altered his memories to fit what he was told. In most cases he simply eliminated the unloving memories, because they didn’t fit with what his parents told him. In one study children were told once a week for 10 weeks something like, “Think real hard now, tell me if you can remember ever going to the hospital with the mousetrap on your finger?” When later interviewed by another adult, 58% of the kids told false and even detailed stories about this fictitious event.

- And this level of influence was achieved by random experimenters who were unknown to the child. Imagine how suggestible children are when influenced by the inexpressibly dominant figure of a parent.
- The time interval from the event to the recall of the event. Childhood is a long way from the present for most of us.
- The uniqueness of the experience. If a child experiences disapproval routinely, it becomes unremarkable—normal—and less likely to be recalled.
- The sensory “bigness” of an event. A disapproving tone of voice or disgusted facial expression just doesn’t qualify as major sensory input, so these individual events would tend not to be remembered. But the overall *feelings* of not being loved nonetheless have an enormous cumulative effect over a lifetime.
- How we believe things *should be*. Our parents told us they loved us, and we *want* to believe it. What does it say about us if our own parents didn’t love us? So we tend to suppress memories that don’t fit with our notion of how things should be.

An additional factor that influences memory—one we have not discussed to this point—is that we tend to remember our feelings and beliefs from the past as being consistent with how we feel and believe now. When people change their opinion on a political issue, for example, they tend to remember always believing as they do now. When dating couples are asked to state what they thought about their romantic partners two months before, they tend to remember that they felt then as they feel now. When patients are asked about their headaches, the amount of pain they are feeling at the moment tends to strongly influence how much pain they remember feeling the previous day. When widows and widowers are asked how much grief they felt when their spouse died five years earlier, their memories are influenced by the amount of grief they currently feel.

In short, we remember the past as a continuation of the present. So when an adult is asked to remember his childhood, he tends to recall it from his present emotional and intellectual state. If he feels in control as an adult, he will tend not to remember feeling helpless and afraid as a child. This can seriously distort our memories of childhood. Because of all these factors and more, our memories can be pretty unreliable. Of the first 130 convictions overturned by DNA evidence in recent years, for example, 78% of the wrongful convictions hinged largely on eyewitness testimony. People don’t remember well under stress. In one study, 141 college students witnessed a staged assault on their professor. Seven weeks later

60% of the witnesses chose an innocent person as the assailant. In another study, 500 soldiers at military survival schools were subjected to food and sleep deprivation, along with intense confrontational interrogation. **One day** after their release from the camp, only 30% could correctly identify the intimidating interrogators from a 15-person lineup.

So it's not surprising that we tend not to remember much of the pain of our childhoods. For many people their entire childhood is a blank. When I first talked to Taylor, he really did remember his parents' being loving. I then taught him about Real Love, and as he understood what was possible—and as he **felt** unconditionally accepted—he began to see and remember his childhood in a new way. I did not suggest to him any of the events or patterns he recalled. With new information, he was able to create a much healthier framework that enabled him to integrate his childhood in a way that made more sense and was far less painful.

Despite our frequent inability to recall the painful details of our childhoods, remember that we nonetheless **feel the effect** of all those unloving experiences. In fact, we interpret every experience in the present through the lens created by and influenced by those childhood traumas.

## **AN ADDITIONAL RESOURCE**

Parenthood is potentially the most challenging and rewarding relationship in life. Don't make the mistake which most people do, which is to learn about parenting by trial and error.

Learn what you can do to help your children grow up loved, loving, and responsible as you watch the video streaming series *The Ridiculously Effective Parenting*.

Training—Learn and Master a "[Practical Process to Parenting](#)" and Raise Cooperative, Confident, Creative Children.

Available on [RealLoveParents.com](http://RealLoveParents.com) and [RealLove.com](http://RealLove.com)



## CHAPTER 9

# THE WOUND OF HELPLESSNESS

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# The Wound of Helplessness

*With our expectations and choices, we make it impossible to feel loved.*

**In this chapter we will talk about the Laws of Choice and Expectation and how they contribute to the wound of helplessness children and adults feel.**

We've reviewed the nature of ***The Primary Wound*** in the lives of almost all of us—that we were injured uncounted times by the ***I don't love you*** message from parents and others, which was almost invariably communicated unintentionally. There are other factors that influence the severity of this wound, one of which we'll discuss here.

One factor that contributes to the development and severity of PTSD is a lack of control. If you're holding both hands in front of you, preparing to defend yourself, but the "other guy" still manages to penetrate your defense and hit you with a fist, that's painful enough, but it's much worse if you're tied to a post while somebody hits you with a fist. We hate feeling helpless, and in childhood that is the condition we suffer almost without interruption. Children are smaller, less experienced, weaker, and otherwise susceptible to being controlled. People don't like being out of control.

Studies have demonstrated that in situations where we have control over our choices, we're much happier. When nursing home patients, for example, were given control of decisions like the visiting schedules of volunteers who came to see them—or even the care and feeding of houseplants in their rooms—they lived longer and took fewer medications, and they were happier, healthier, and more active. If their choices were then removed, these benefits disappeared, followed by an increased death rate.



In another experiment people were asked to perform mental tasks in the presence of a distracting noise. People who were given control over a switch to turn off the noise had improved performance, ***even though they rarely bothered to use it.*** Simply having control over the noise was enough to substantially counteract its distracting effect.

Kennon Sheldon of the University of Missouri did three large studies where subjects were asked to recall their most satisfying recent events, and to describe what made the events feel so good. The dominant theme was that people are happiest—they have a greater sense of autonomy, competency, and self-esteem—when they can make their own choices.

We all enjoy having a ***choice*** in what we do and in what happens to us. I suggest, in fact, that it is our choices that define us—and determine our happiness—much more powerfully than anything that ***happens*** to us, good or bad. Studies have proven, for example—much to the surprise of those gathering the data—that in the long run, being paralyzed by an accident and winning the lottery have similar effects on lasting happiness: none. When bad things happen to us, if we feel like we have options, we're buoyed up by hope. If we feel like our options are exhausted, or if other people have taken charge of our decisions, that's when we're really miserable.

We all have the hope once expressed by Ernest William Henley,

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

## **The Law of Choice**

This need to make our own choices is so important that it is recognized in one of the [Laws of Happiness](#). I refer to the Law of Choice, which states that ***we all have the right to choose what we say and do.*** Without that right, we would become mindless objects in the hands of whoever made our choices for us—no better than a piece of furniture or lump of clay. Unless we make our own decisions—including those that are wrong—we cannot learn and grow. While love is the greatest power in the universe, the Law of Choice is the single most important principle.

We jealously protect our own right to choose—many wars have been fought for that very purpose—but often we do not as vigorously defend that right for others. In fact, we frequently interfere with the choices of others when their choices inconvenience us. With our behavior, we demonstrate that we believe the Law of Choice should read as follows: “I always have the right to choose what I say and do, and . . .”

- “other people have the same right as long as they do what I want.”
- “others have that right unless they get in my way or hurt me.”
- “everyone else has that right unless he or she happens to be my son/daughter/spouse.”

Recognizing the importance of making our own choices, we can now understand how severely we can damage children as we take their choices from them. Children begin their lives with a non-choice—their very birth and the choice of their parents—and that lack of control tends to continue for a long time. We tell them how and when to dress, comb their hair, bathe, eat, use the bathroom, walk, talk, and just about everything else. Regrettably, as they get older and can make more choices, most parents tend to continue their reign—and rein—of control.

Most parents believe that children resist listening, hate responsibility, and fight against the standards of behavior they’re taught. This has not been my experience. What frightens children most—and therefore leads to their anger and resistance—is being controlled. They all seem to have a very sensitive detector that notifies them when the Law of Choice is being violated. In most children this detector begins to fire rapidly at a young age—hence the “Terrible Twos.”

I am not saying we should never tell our children what to do. There are many occasions when that’s exactly what they need, especially when they’re young. A parent would be foolish, for example, to allow a two-year-old to decide for himself whether he will play in the middle of the highway, or drink cleaning solvent, or play with explosives.

As parents we have a strong tendency, however, to abuse these “exceptions.” Most of us control our children far too much and far too long. Despite the potential dangers of making their own choices, children must learn to choose for themselves as early as possible. That’s how they learn and grow. So we would be wise to remember that when we control our children, we risk violating the Law of Choice and wounding our children.

To learn a great deal more about how to love and teach children while not irresponsibly giving them too much choice or controlling them with excessive restriction of their choices, read the book [\*Real Love in Parenting\*](#).

### **The Law of Expectations**

A natural corollary to the Law of Choice is the Law of Expectations, which states that we never have the right to expect anyone to do anything for us. If we understand that other people really do get to make their own choices and mistakes—the Law of Choice—how could we possibly expect them to change their choices to please us?

Regrettably, we expect people to make the choices we want all the time—especially our children. Consider how often we do this:

- Whenever we're disappointed in the behavior of other people, we're saying that they haven't met our expectations for their choices. We're saying that we wish they'd make choices more like the ones *we* would make.
- Whenever we're angry, it's always because people have failed to meet our expectations. Without expectations, anger is pretty much impossible. You wouldn't get angry if the mailman didn't give you a kiss in the morning, but you might if your spouse didn't. The difference? Expectations. You have no expectations of the mailman.
- When we have given people our time, labor, or other resources, we tend to expect something in return.
- On special occasions—Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries—most of us have powerful expectations of those around us.

Expectations hang like an ever-present sword over our heads. If we don't fulfill them, we know that other people will be disappointed and irritated, and we hate that threat. When we were children, our parents expected us to give them respect, obedience, gratitude, and more. There were so many expectations that we **knew** we couldn't live up to all of them. We felt trapped and helpless. In adulthood the expectations of others re-create that helpless feeling we had in childhood, along with all the feelings of fear, worthlessness, and being alone—classic PCSD.

Expectations are also traumatic when **we** have expectations of others. Imagine that I expect you to give me a dozen roses on my birthday, but you give me only nine. What will I be thinking of? Only the three I didn't get, which ruins the potential joy of receiving the nine you gave me—just as surely as though I had thrown them in the garbage. On the other hand, if I expected nothing from you, if you gave me even a

single rose, I'd be delighted. I'd feel like you really cared about me. We regularly ruin our interactions with other people as we expect attention, affection, approval, gratitude, and more. With our expectations—violating the Laws of Choice and Expectations—we actually make it impossible to feel loved, which worsens our PCSD.

## **Conformity**

As parents we tend to underestimate how powerfully our children feel a compulsion to do what we tell them to do—even while they often resent our controlling them. We all have a tendency, in fact, to “go along” with the opinions and wishes of the people around us.

Many years ago Solomon Asch did a study where students were asked to participate in an experiment on “visual acuity.” The test was simple: They were shown a single line on the left and then asked to identify which of the three lines on the right was the same length as the line on the left. When answering the question with no one else present, every student (subject) answered correctly. But then each subject was given another set of lines, and this time seven other students in the room answered aloud before the subject. Unknown to the subject, every student was instructed to intentionally give the wrong answer, choosing a line on the right that was obviously different in length from the line on the left.

When faced with that peer pressure, one-third of the test subjects agreed with the group, denying the direct evidence of their own eyes. And this conformity occurred when subjects were faced with a meaningless comparison of lines, where no one overtly tried to convince the subjects to change their minds. Imagine the effect on a child when a parent—all-powerful in the child's eyes—states the truth of a principle that is questionable.

In Stanley Milgram's famous experiments, the Subjects were given the task of teaching a simple mental task to a Learner in the next room. Each time the Learner gave a wrong answer, an Administrator—in the same room as the Subject—instructed the Subject to administer a shock to the Learner. Unknown to the Subjects, the Learners were never really shocked but were responding at each step in ways that were outlined on a written script.

With each wrong answer, the shocks gradually increased in intensity—in 15-volt steps. Even though the Learners begged to be released at 150 volts and began screaming at 270 volts, 65% of the Subjects continued to administer shocks all the

way to 450 volts—*twelve* steps beyond the screaming point for the Learners and well past the place labeled “danger: severe shock” on the dial used to increase the voltage.

It is astonishing that people were willing to administer what they thought were potentially lethal doses of electricity to other people, all because they were told to do so by an administrator with no more authority than his wearing an official-looking white lab coat. And these subjects were all adults.

So imagine the pressure experienced by a **child** when a parent—occupying the position of God in that child’s life—gives instructions or states an opinion. Children are in a position where not only are their direct choices severely limited by their parents, but they can’t control the supply of Real Love that is essential to their emotional and spiritual health. When this double blow of helplessness is added to the Primary Wound of not getting enough Real Love, the resultant wounds are far deeper.

### **Repetition**

One manifestation of the wound of helplessness felt by our children is the repetition of hurtful events in their lives, most notably the ***I don’t love you*** message, which is delivered so many times and in so many ways. Knowing that this wound ***will*** be coming, again and again, confirms the lack of control children feel and fills them with dread.

### **Additional Resource:**

If you are looking for your ‘perfect partner’, [Real Love in Dating](#) will help you build a foundation to help you understand yourself and the people you date.



## CHAPTER 10

# **BUT DON'T PARENTS SOMETIMES LOVE THEIR CHILDREN?**

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CHAPTER  
10

## But Don't Parents Sometimes Love Their Children?

*A child believes what he is taught by his parents, however unintentionally that teaching may have happened.*

**Once we realize the negative ways that parents have affected most of us, this becomes valuable *information*, not for blaming but for healing.**

As most parents learn about the importance of Real Love and then learn that they have not loved their children as unconditionally as they had thought, they tend to react with disbelief, defensiveness, even horror. This reaction is understandable, since no parent is eager to admit that he failed to love his own children. We can tolerate being called stupid, irresponsible, and ugly, but we cannot suffer being called a bad parent. If we admit our failings as parents, we must admit that we ***hurt our own children***, and that's a pill far too big for most of us to swallow.

If we wish to ever heal our children with love, however, we **MUST** acknowledge the truth about our parenting. Many parents ask—partially in an attempt to learn something and also to justify themselves—“But I couldn't have been ***that*** bad, could I? Sure, there were times that I was angry, but that doesn't mean I didn't ever love my children, does it?”

Let me be very clear, because this is such an important question. In the moments that we are angry—to include all the code words, like frustrated, annoyed, impatient, exasperated, irritated, disgusted, disappointed—we are thinking of ***ourselves***. We're being selfish. There's no sense sugarcoating it, nor am I condemning it. I'm simply ***describing*** our selfishness, so we can then begin to choose differently. In the moments we're angry, we're selfish and incapable of unconditionally loving our children ***in those moments***. These occasions don't make us evil, just selfish, a characteristic we can learn to change.

On the whole we parents did not experience Real Love from **our** parents either. We heard all those expressions of disappointment and irritation instead, so most of us don't even know what unconditional love **looks** like. Given that condition, how could we possibly **give** it to our children?

Despite our relative disability regarding Real Love, is it possible that we nonetheless have moments when we **are** unconditionally loving toward our kids? Sure. It turns out that we all have an innate desire to be loving. Love is the natural condition of the universe—really—and we just get confused by our neediness and fears.

To illustrate, look at the reactions of people when someone brings a newborn into the room. We ooooh and ahhh and make baby noises while we giggle with delight from head to foot. Why do we do that? Because to some extent we really are loving that child.

But now a question: Do we behave the same way toward a teenager, who is multiply pierced, smoking a cigarette, and just daring the world with his facial expression to cross him? No, we don't. What's the difference? Why can we easily love a newborn but not a snotty teenager? The answer is simple: our capacity to love.

Nearly all of us have *some* capacity to love unconditionally, and it can actually be quantified in a rough way. Let's say that you have 5 units of love. You can spend it in any way you choose, but it can also be taken from you or drained away from you. In comes a newborn—who is cute and quiet and making no demands—and you pour that 5 units of love all over her. It's easy. But then a teenager enters the room, and it would take at least 10 units of love in order for you to fully accept and love this kid. He's rebellious and difficult, and without your realizing it, he drains all 5 of your units out onto the floor and steps on them. That's when you become impatient and irritated with him.

And this is what happens between parents and children. All parents **want** to love their children, but they're handicapped:

- They have seen very few examples of Real Love.
- With little supply of Real Love, it's quite difficult for them to give it to their children.
- Even though they've felt some Real Love, they have essentially no understanding of it, so they can't intentionally re-create it and give it consistently.



With those limitations, it's very easy for a parent's supply of Real Love to run out, and that becomes problematic for the child. To illustrate the effect on a child when a parent runs out of love, imagine that when you and I meet for the first time, we only have ten minutes to spend together. For the first nine minutes, our conversation is delightful, and you feel warmly accepted by me. But during the last minute, I scream at you and chase you around the room with a butcher knife.

What is the overall effect? Do the positive and negative experiences average out? Do you remember only our first nine minutes together and feel loved and safe with me? Of course not. The effects of fear and pain are overwhelming. Fear trumps pleasure almost every time, so until a child—or an adult—is utterly convinced that he or she is loved unconditionally, even a small amount of doubt or fear is sufficient to destroy the effect of many moments of acceptance and safety. Moreover, when parents are irritated and otherwise **conditionally** loving, they're teaching their children a false notion of **love**, adding to the confusion—as we discussed earlier in this section.

So yes, parents do sometimes offer Real Love, but the perception of the child is clouded by his fear of the moments when his parents have emptied out and responded to the child in unloving ways. Children also experience the negative effect of **unpredictability**. We like to have order in our world. Chaos is frightening, because we tend to fear what we don't understand and can't control.

In one study two groups of people received electric shocks. Group A received 20 high-voltage shocks. Group B experienced 3 high-voltage shocks and 17 low-voltage shocks, randomly arranged. Participants in both groups were warned three seconds before each shock. Even though Group B (3 high- and 17 low-voltage shocks) received much less overall voltage than Group A, Group B hated the unpredictability of the shocks, so they displayed faster heart rates, more sweating, and more fear than Group A.

Similarly, when parents are intermittently loving, with disapproval scattered throughout moments of acceptance, children intensely dislike the unpredictability of it.

### **One Parent Being Loving "By Comparison"**

Because the effects of a parent's unloving behaviors can be so negative, on many occasions the **less** unloving parent can seem, by comparison, to actually be loving, when that is really not the case.

Just the other day I talked with a woman, Sybil, who described her mother as a real harpy, who tore into her husband and children with fangs and claws. Sybil told me that her father was quite different—loving, supportive, kind—but further questions revealed that he was simply much quieter than his wife. In order to keep peace, he always gave in to his wife’s tirades, but he had no idea how to be a loving parent. He didn’t spend time with Sybil, nor did he listen to her or teach her about love and relationships. Compared to Sybil’s mother, though, he was *far less* angry, blaming, and controlling, and because Sybil didn’t know what Real Love looked like, her father’s behavior passed for “loving.” So, although it was nice that her father was less abusive, he still didn’t give her the Real Love she needed, and her PCSD was guaranteed.

### **OTHER FACTORS**

I mentioned earlier that there are factors other than parenting that influence the thinking and emotions of any child. Genetics plays a significant role, influencing the size and interconnectedness of the various parts of the brain, the quantities and interplay of neurotransmitters, and more.

Hormones also have an effect on how we feel and behave. Just ask any woman who is pregnant or experiencing pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). Studies have demonstrated that boys and men with high testosterone levels are more prone to delinquency, hard drug use, and aggressive responses to provocation. Not only does testosterone affect behavior, but behavior in turn influences hormone levels. One experiment discovered that after men handle a gun, their testosterone levels rise, and the more their testosterone rises the more punishment they’re willing to impose on each other in experimental settings. Testosterone levels also rise in fans when their team wins a soccer match.

I mention these other effects on children only to indicate an awareness of them, but I reemphasize that the primary cause of unhappiness in children and adults is the lack of Real Love. Fortunately, we can also take steps to eliminate this causal factor, thereby bringing great happiness to ourselves and those around us.

### **CONTINUED EFFECT**

Many people have a difficult time understanding just how difficult it is for us to function in a healthy way as adults if we didn’t get Real Love as children. “Oh, come on,” they say, “all that happened so long ago. You can’t blame everything on your childhood. Just get over it and move on.”

A child's need for Real Love is just as critical as his or her need for air, water, and food. Deprived of Real Love—mired in PCSD—children **cannot** be as emotionally healthy and strong as children who are loved. If that deficiency is not corrected, they **will** leave childhood in a relatively crippled condition. These children will then become adults who might look normal on the outside—even appearing to function well in some aspects of life—but they're empty, wounded, and unable to find genuine happiness. They can't just "get over" the absence of the Real Love essential to their emotional and spiritual health.

Consider the case of Taylor from Chapter 7 and just one element of his marriage: the arguments he and Shelby used to have. Shelby often

- told him that he had lied to her from the beginning. She said that how he presented himself when they were dating was quite different from what he became.
- said she was very disappointed in him as a man and as a husband.
- said that her unhappiness was all his fault.
- blew up at him, blaming him for a variety of things.
- accused him of never loving her.

Because of the way Taylor was raised, he had no Real Love to give, demanded love from Shelby that she didn't have, and had no tools for resolving the conflicts that inevitably result when two people are simultaneously demanding love from each other. Severely handicapped by his PCSD, he could not function in a loving relationship. Her attacks also worsened his lifelong feelings of worthlessness. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Taylor's lack of Real Love—combined with the same lack in Shelby—doomed his marriage from the very beginning. Two people with PCSD cannot create a healthy relationship.

### **Earthquake Preparation**

On October 17, 1989, 7 million people in the San Francisco Bay area were shaken by an earthquake measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale, resulting in the deaths of about 65. Months earlier a quake of lesser severity occurred in the northwest region of Armenia, then in the Soviet Union. Although this quake was less violent, and less than one million people lived in the affected area, more than 25,000 people died—including 50% of the inhabitants in the three towns closest to the epicenter. Why was it that quakes of similar magnitude killed one of 100,000 residents in the affected zone in northern California but killed about one in 34 in the Armenian

quake zone? In short, why was the Armenian quake 3000 times more deadly than the quake in California? Simple: infrastructure.

In the San Francisco area, building codes after 1939 had required steadily increasing structural integrity for new buildings and for the reinforcement of old ones. In Armenia, on the other hand, the primary goal was to erect buildings as inexpensively as possible, with little regard for strength or safety. Most buildings were constructed of simple masonry that lacked reinforcing steel, and even the multi-story buildings contained far less reinforcement than was required for minimal structural stability.

Immediately after the Armenian earthquake, some people still blamed the quake for the many deaths, but that perspective was flawed and could only have led to a similar disaster in the future. In time people looked deeper and saw that the deaths were caused by faulty construction—notably the lack of structural steel.

Similarly, our unhappiness in the present—our irritability, fear, and pain—is not caused by the individual events that confront us: the unkind words, the lies, the demands, the disagreements. Our unhappiness—our post-childhood stress disorder—is caused by years of our not being reinforced by the Real Love essential to the health of our souls.

Prior to the quakes, nobody thought of the Armenian buildings as unsound. They stood for many years, in fact, through rain and snow and human use. They appeared to be quite solid. It was not recognized that with the laying of each brick or concrete block a future death was being guaranteed. No one saw that the buildings, which appeared to be safe on the outside—after all, people lived and worked in them every day—were riddled with fatal weaknesses.

We human beings are not unlike these buildings. We may look normal on the outside, but when we're stressed by the inevitable conflicts that arise from interacting with each other, our walls and roofs often crack and even collapse. We fail to recognize that in childhood each experience was like a brick being laid, a joist positioned, a stud fastened in place.

With Real Love the foundation and walls are carefully engineered and reinforced with the materials that make the building strong and resistant to stress. Without Real Love, bricks and mortar are still laid, but the work is defective. The weakness of each individual brick or piece of lumber may not be apparent as it's put in place. The building may even stand for a time, but with the stress of personal

earthquakes—marriage, children, job difficulties—the soul flies apart, and the resultant pain can seem unbearable.

We must engineer our individual happiness and the strength of our relationships with greater care. We must use materials that will withstand stress. And when we choose poorly, we must have the courage to tear out the old and replace it with what we really need.

## **ABOUT THE PERPETRATORS**

Even though I have addressed this subject in a number of ways to this point, it is essential that we do not leave this section without underlining the role of perpetrators in PCSD. In PTSD, there is usually a clear villain: a rapist, a terrorist, an attacker, a war, a drunk driver, or even a hurricane or tornado. In post-childhood stress disorder we also have clear causes for our pain—usually the lack of Real Love from parents, other family members, or teachers—but it would not be productive to think of parents and others as perpetrators.

The word perpetrator almost always implies malicious intent, as in the case of a rapist, for example. Newspaper headlines declare, “Police seek perpetrator in Green Street sexual assault,” and everyone pictures a man with malignant features, prominent fangs, and an evil stare, drooling from both corners of his mouth.

We would make a tragic mistake, however, if we labeled as perpetrators those who failed to love us in childhood. We tend to do what we’ve been taught, so the reason that parents fail to love their children is that they were not unconditionally loved either. How can we give what we don’t have? How can we exercise a skill we were never taught?

So what’s the bottom line here regarding parents? Am I saying that all the problems of our lives and in relationships can be blamed on our parents? No, but almost. I am saying that how we SEE the world—our beliefs and perspectives—DOES largely determine how we behave and feel. And where do these beliefs and perspectives come from? Although other factors must be considered—notably genetics and the influence of society—our first sets of beliefs, the way we see the world, are not a matter of choice. We don’t make up these initial perspectives on our own. No two-year-old independently determines how the world is. He believes what he is **taught** by his parents, however unintentionally that teaching may have happened.

Once we realize the powerfully negative ways that parents have affected most of us, this becomes valuable **information**, not for blaming but for healing. Now we can

stop blaming people inappropriately in the present for how we feel and behave—you realize that your anger at any given person has less to do with them than with your being sensitized by a great many unkind experiences in the past—and we can begin to find the Real Love that heals all wounds, past and present.

## HOPE

In Chapter One I said that “my entire goal in presenting the concept of PCSD is to help us ***understand*** where our unproductive behaviors come from,” because only then can we meaningfully and consistently eliminate them. When I first met Taylor, for example, he had already proven completely resistant to help from counselors, church leaders, parents, inpatient treatment, and twelve-step groups. Although these people were sincere in their efforts to help him, they could not help him understand the real source of his pain. Instead they tried to control his symptoms—his behavior—which led only to more confusion and pain.

As Taylor understood the nature of his PCSD, he no longer felt confused by the direction his life had taken. His life made sense. Gradually he lost his feelings of worthlessness, as well as his anger at his wife. No more blaming or excuses or guilt. He acquired a HOPE that he could find a level of happiness he’d never known. Hope is a great motivator, and when we combine that with Real Love, the world becomes a different place.

## AN ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

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## CHAPTER 11

# The Treatment of PCSD

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# The Treatment of PCSD

*PCSD is caused by a wound and a lie.*

**In this chapter I will discuss a short summary of treating PCSD.**

Now that we've gained a significant—if admittedly imperfect—understanding of post-childhood stress disorder, it's time to entertain and nourish a ray of hope that there is a great deal we can do to correct the damage done by this serious and exceptionally widespread problem. More lives are affected, and more happiness destroyed by PCSD than by all the other mental health disorders combined, but now we can begin the process of healing.

## THE TWO PILLARS OF TREATMENT

As we have discussed, a great many factors contribute to the development and perpetuation of PCSD, but we can summarize the disorder as a malfunction in two major areas: first, a wound of—for lack of a better word—the soul; and second, an intellectual distortion in the way we see the world and the people in it, including ourselves. In short, PCSD is caused by a wound and a lie, which then continue to characterize the expression of the disorder.

When parents fail to love a child unconditionally,

- an actual **wound**—emotional, spiritual, and psychological—is inflicted. The child is literally robbed of his life's blood, as surely as if it had been drained from him. The child's Ability to Thrive under Stress (ATS) is severely impaired, and because this deadly depletion occurs during the most formative periods of life, the effect is magnified. We all know that if a child is deprived of important vitamins and minerals, the physical effect is worse over the long term than if the same deprivation occurred during adulthood. Similarly,



when we don't have what we really need emotionally as children, we continue to build the foundations of our lives, but we do it with defective materials, and a house with a diseased foundation cannot endure.

- the child is literally **taught**—although the parents don't do this intentionally—that the world is harsh, unloving, critical, angry, violent, and hopeless. The child learns that people are a source of pain, that people cannot be trusted, and that the only real goal in life is to survive by the use of Imitation Love and Getting and Protecting Behaviors. The child learns to see the world in a terribly distorted way, using the lens that was handed to him by his parents. This **cognitive** or intellectual misperception—this lie—almost always continues throughout life, making happiness utterly impossible in adulthood—unless there is a drastic re-education.

In short, if we suffer from any degree of PCSD—as nearly all of us do—we are bleeding and blind, but we can find happiness and can help others do the same, if we address these two problems:

- We need to find a source of Real Love that is sufficient and reliable enough that our emotional and spiritual wounds can heal.
- We have to learn to see and speak the truth about ourselves and others. This requires a change in the way we see almost everything—the drastic re-education I just referred to.

These are the two pillars of PCSD treatment, and it turns out these two efforts are closely interrelated. You can't really employ one to full effect without the other.

We all want to learn about the treatment of PCSD, for at least two reasons:

- For ourselves. Why should we settle for mere survival—consuming and trading Imitation Love, with its certain disappointment—when we could thrive instead? Why settle for “getting along” when it's possible to soar and experience inexpressible joy? Why should we accept feeling *okay*—which is just the relative absence of crises—when we could be creative, powerful, and genuinely happy?
- To help those we love: family, friends, coworkers. If nearly all of us suffer from some degree of PCSD, we must understand this disorder if we are to understand, interact with, and help the people we care about.



## CHAPTER 12

# What to Do Next

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CHAPTER  
12

You've completed *The Ultimate Guide to Understanding Your Stress*, which means you are part of an exclusive group of people who understand the real causes of personal pain and confusion, along with the real reasons you have relationship problems.

Simply by applying the understanding you have gained in this Guide you will already be able to eliminate these conditions.

### **So, what's next?**

The foundations you've laid as you've gone through this Guide are solid—they'll help you understand yourself, your stress, and your relationships. You'll start making headway to finding unconditional love and fulfilling relationships

We can say with utmost confidence you'll likely see improved reactions in yourself and those close to you.

But the wonderful thing about Real Love is that there's no limit to what you can achieve. Your next step is to develop your Real Love skills so that peace and confidence will replace your fear and confusion.

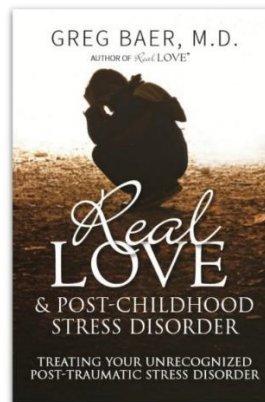
That's how you achieve real peace: creating and living a life based on Real Love principles.

### **Ready To Level Up?**

If you want to start implementing the principles you've learned in this guide along with the skills to execute them, you're going to want to read or listen to [\*Real Love and Post-Childhood Stress Disorder, Treating Your Unrecognized Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.\*](#)

In the *Real Love and Post-Childhood Stress Disorder* you'll learn:

- ✓ The Symptoms of PCSD
- ✓ An Introduction to ATS: The Ability to Thrive Under Stress
- ✓ The Treatment of PCSD
- ✓ Responding to PCSD in others
- ✓ How to create the life-giving opportunities you need to actually feel Real Love from other people.
- ✓ How to change the way you feel and behave forever.



Digital versions available here:

On Audible: [Real Love & Post-Childhood Stress Disorder](#)

On Kindle: [Real Love & Post-Childhood Stress Disorder](#)

If you would like to speak with a Real Love Coach, contact us here:

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With Real Love as your guide, you can begin to heal the wounds of your past and create rewarding and fulfilling relationships in every area of your life.

With Real Love, nothing else matters;  
Without it, nothing else is enough.

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