

LOOSING YOURSELF IN LOVE

By Ginger Blume, Ph.D.

When you're in love, do you lose yourself and find that you are obsessed with the other person? Are your thoughts so focused on your lover that you forget to notice your own needs and feelings? We've all heard the song, "all you need is love," but like anything that is good, too much of a good thing turns bad. Popular culture romanticizes love as the ultimate high. Yet, being intuitively plugged into your loved one's life with compulsive and obsessive thinking can be damaging to your own sense of self.

How to maintain your individual identity while in love with another person is key to psychological health. It is natural to tune into your loved one's feelings, but if you overdo this, you begin to blur the boundaries between yourself and another. Once this happens, the other person becomes the center of your universe. For instance, an occasional thought such as "I wonder if he needs a new shirt – they're on sale today," or "Maybe I should bring her a sandwich at work," are natural and thoughtful things to do. But, if you find that the majority of your thoughts are focused on what your loved one needs or wants, then you're probably obsessed with your loved one and have begun to lose yourself in the process. Remember the old song, "I've got you under my skin." That is what I'm describing in this article.

Obsessive love can occur in many types of relationships, such as between spouses, between parents and children, etc. Obsessive love is usually associated with anxiety and it actually becomes a "repellent for love." It tends to close in on the other person and it undermines true love that is based on mutual trust.

If you need to know exactly where your partner is at all times and what s/he is doing and with whom, you are too focused on your partner. As your worries about the other person increase, you slowly collapse into the other person's identity. Eventually, you stop growing as an individual and become under-developed as a person.

When boundaries are blurred between you and your loved one, you may be experiencing their emotions and their stresses, in addition to your own! Their pain becomes your pain. Their health problems become your illnesses. People who are obsessed with a loved one, have a natural gift of intuitively sympathizing with others. However, when this is overdone, there is a true identity fusion with the loved one. What they need to learn is how to acknowledge another person's needs/pain/etc., without having to "take on" and/or solve the loved one's problems. Oftentimes, cognitive-behavioral therapy strategies help people examine faulty thinking strategies that are linked to this type of emotional pain.

People who "over-give" are easy targets for people who are natural "takers." Sometimes, this over-giving is unconsciously motivated out of a need to be in control. Sometimes, it is an attempt to avoid disappointment with other people. While the attempted solution of over-giving doesn't work, the giver continues compulsive giving, like a frightened person

who believes they just have to “try harder.” It is important for the compulsive giver to psychologically step back and examine how her/his behavior is affecting her/his life.

People who feel unloveable often falsely believe they must pay a high fee for others to love them. Our original sense of self worth is formed in early developmental years when ideally, the infant feels all of his/her needs are important to their primary care taker (usually the mother). Without this early experience of unconditional love, a person’s sense of self-worth will suffer. When childhood needs were not sufficiently met, there will usually be a negative impact on how that individual will behave in an adult love relationship. These comments are not to focus on blame, but rather, to help you understand some of the root causes of low self-esteem so you can choose to make improvements in your adult life. Through conscious choice, you can choose to treat yourself as a valuable human being and take better care of yourself in any relationship.

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