

# "I, THIS, AND US

How to Rebuild a  
Healthy Relationship  
PART II



MARCELLO DE SOUZA, PH.D

# **I, THIS, AND US**

## **How to Rebuild a Healthy Relationship PART II**

### **Strengthened Relationships: Navigating Between Toxic and Abusive Relationships and Transformation**

**MARCELLO DE SOUZA, PH.D**

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# **STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIPS: NAVIGATING BETWEEN TOXIC AND ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND TRANSFORMATION**

**MARCELLO DE SOUZA, PH.D**

The content of this Ebook is also presented in video format on the channel:

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# About the Author

I am Marcello de Souza, a restless mind with a trajectory of over 27 years dedicated to unraveling the mysteries of the human psyche and catalyzing growth in individuals and organizations. My mission is clear: to transcend the boundaries of cognitive behavioral development and orchestrate human excellence.

## FROM IT AND TELECOM TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

My professional journey began in the dynamic field of IT and Telecom, a solid foundation that paved the way for my future explorations into the human territory. Here, I discovered that true leadership flourishes at the intersection of operational efficiency and a profound understanding of human needs.

## A PASSION TRANSFORMED INTO PURPOSE

The passion for cognitive behavioral development not only refines my professional essence; it redefines it. Today, I operate beyond traditional technical capacities, emerging as a visionary who inspires deep and lasting change. My holistic approach integrates Management, Leadership, and the most advanced Behavioral Sciences and Neurosciences, establishing a new frontier of excellence and well-being for individuals and organizations.

## A MOSAIC OF TRANSFORMATIVE COMPETENCIES

At the forefront of my mission, I highlight my main roles:

- Senior Master Coach & Trainer
- Chief Happiness Officer
- Leader Coach Trainer
- Expert in Language & Behavioral Development
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapist (CBT/ACT)
- Hypnotherapist and Systemic Psychic Constellator
- Speaker, Presenter, Professor, Writer, and Researcher
- Consultant & Mentor
- Organizational Environment Designer

## A LEGACY OF KNOWLEDGE AND TRANSFORMATION

In addition to qualifications that include four postgraduate degrees, a doctorate, and a myriad of international certifications, I have been shaping the landscape of human development with every lecture, book, training, and coaching session I conduct. I share innovative insights that not only enlighten but also transform.

## BOOKS THAT INSPIRE GENERATIONS

Author of several influential Ebooks and books such as "The Coaching Secret", "The Map Is Not the Territory, You Are the Territory", and the anticipated "The Diet Society", my writing seeks to challenge the status quo and equip people with the tools necessary to lead their lives with purpose and passion.

## AN INVITATION TO TRANSFORMATION

Come with me to explore the limitless possibilities that human behavioral development offers. Whether to evolve in your career, enhance your leadership, or transform your organization, I am here to guide you on this path of fulfillment and success.

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# 04

## **DON'T GIVE UP ON PEOPLE, BET ON THEM**

"We no longer seek to repair human bonds; we simply exchange them. Unlike swapping shoes, people, whether on social media or loved ones for others, we replace the pain of wear and tear with the allure of novelty.

By no longer distinguishing people from objects, we are deluded, trading someone in the instant hope of becoming more interesting, without realizing that the mirror still reflects the drama of this relentless pursuit of emptiness caused by our own vanity."

(Marcello de Souza)

# Introduction

Welcome to the second part of the trilogy 'Me, This, and Us - How to Rebuild a Healthy Relationship,' entitled 'Strengthened Relationships: Navigating Between Toxic and Abusive Relationships and Transformation.' After diving into the waters of authenticity and self-awareness in the first volume, we now turn our attention to the challenge of toxic and abusive dynamics that dim the light of healthy relationships.

This segment serves as a beacon for those amidst the mists of codependency, toxicity, and abuse, illuminating the path to transformation and strengthening of human bonds. Through this reading, you will be guided in identifying harmful patterns, understanding the delicate line between behaviors that erode mutual respect and those that, although difficult, contribute to joint growth.

In this volume, we reveal how toxicity and abuse take root and manifest, and how codependency intertwines in this plot, obscuring the potential for balanced relationships. We will discuss the transformation of these dynamics, highlighting the importance of acceptance and tolerance, and above all, reflecting on one's own affections as a means of healing and deep understanding.



The challenge is to recognize that toxicity, often, is a cry for help, a reflection of deep wounds that cry out for attention. This part of the trilogy not only illuminates the dark aspects of human relationships but also celebrates the human capacity for change, encouraging the rewriting of personal stories from relationships marked by pain to narratives of support, understanding, and genuine love.

I invite you to dive into this exploration, challenging yourself to see beyond appearances, question the established, and embrace opportunities for transformation. Let us together turn adversities into pillars for stronger, more understanding, and, above all, loving relationships.

By the end of this reading, I hope you feel equipped not only to navigate but also to transform and strengthen your relationships. May this part be an invitation to action: reflect, apply the discussed strategies, and share your transformational journeys. Together, we can build more authentic and healthy connections.

Welcome to this process of navigation, transformation, and strengthening of your relationships.

# Chapter 1

## BET ON RELATIONSHIPS

I know it may seem very strange in today's times, but if you've made it this far, I'm sure it will make sense to you after reading this chapter. In fact, I can categorically say that it is not new that we are gradually becoming accustomed to simply giving up on people, and today affirming that we should not give up, but rather bet on them, may indeed seem crazy, but it's not.

To understand the proposal, it is necessary to first understand the first chapter in light of the clear perception that there are numerous factors that define a person's thoughts and behavior, just as it cannot be denied that we live in an immediate world that makes us increasingly rush, losing the opportunity to perceive what is really happening with us, with others, and with the world around us.

In this uninterrupted relationship with this world that has a growing urgency, essentially the word "living" seems to always come with the impression that its synonym is lack of time. There's a lack of time for the affection given by relationships.



Without time, everything is now based on practicality. So why waste time reflecting through self-analysis on every experience lived, seeking to know more about who we are, why we are who we are, what we can be, and what we can do to become better people, if there are manuals available capable of explaining and determining everything we need to do to justify our lives and thus find the longed-for happiness.

It's no wonder, faced with so much shallow literature that makes us believe that everything has become an object. The car, the house, the beloved pet, as well as the people around us, it doesn't matter. As objects, everything becomes simpler because whenever something no longer serves us, we simply discard it and look for another to replace it. There is no responsibility, and thus, in this post-modern madness, relationships with the world, for the most part, become superficial, just like human values that are increasingly being distorted.

When human relationships begin to be shaped more by "having" than by "being," we enter a theater of appearances where people are judged not by their essence, but by their possessions and the image they project. This scenario leads to a weakening of authentic bonds, where value is determined by quantitative comparison, immersing us in a collective norm of competition and superficiality.

Individuality and assertiveness are often mistaken for arrogance, propagated by self-help manuals that promise magical formulas for happiness. These guides offer not the path to genuine self-awareness, but a range of theories that serve more as temporary balms for our insecurities and internal dilemmas. They seduce us with instant solutions that, far from confronting us with our true needs and desires, encourage us to adopt ready-made answers that merely mask the emptiness, avoiding the necessary dive into our own depths. Instead of alleviating our guilt and disillusionments with superficial solutions, the invitation is for an introspective journey, where we confront our vulnerabilities and transform our relationships from a more authentic understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

Of course, this may serve for a moment, but not for life's reasons. Perhaps it's not without reason that people are so distrustful of each other. So distant and so unhappy in a world that is also increasingly mentally ill.

In this sense, what I want to propose as a reflection is that instead of giving up on people, we should bet on them. After all, as we saw in the first chapter, we may want to find answers and justify much of ourselves, but we cannot absolve ourselves of all our choices that have brought us to this point and that make us who we are and relate in the way we are relating. We cannot deny our freedom and never our own responsibility for the life we are building for ourselves.

If you want to discover how your life is going right now, the quality of what you are making of your life, just reflect on how your relationships are going. As relational beings, what qualifies our existence is how healthy we are in our human relationships. It's in relationships that the affections lie, and hence the response we give to the world about ourselves.

It's not about how many people we have around us, it's not about the car, the boat, the house, not what you can buy or the power gained in your job. It's not about likes, followers, and the spectacle you produce to be recognized. All of this is important, all of this represents much of our trials, and to a certain extent, brings us joy, and there's nothing wrong with that.

Now, what truly qualifies our life is certainly in our sincere relationships. Affectionate ones. Because even everything we achieve only has meaning when we have someone to share it with. Nothing is fun when we individualize our own life. Isn't that true?



Human matter exists for the sake of relationships. We are relational beings, we need others to live, without others we can't even recognize ourselves. The fact is that we can become better people through these relationships in which we learn through experiences what is best for ourselves. The extent to which we relate is the extent to which we modify our lives. Individuality breeds selfishness, and selfishness in turn brings truths and certainties to the surface, reinforcing beliefs and creating paradigms worthy of a saddening life, an unhappy life.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF LUCAS: FROM EXECUTIVE TO COMMUNITY MENTOR

This reminds me of a client whom I'll call Lucas. An executive on the rise in a large corporation, with all the symbols of material success at his fingertips: a luxury car, a spacious house, and frequent international travels. For years, he measured his worth by his possessions and professional achievements, but despite all his "success," he began experiencing depression day after day. One night, while working late in the empty office, he called me: "Is this all there is to life?"

That's when we decided to change the strategy of the process and make a drastic change. He started volunteering on a local community project, initially just to fill his free time more meaningfully. However, what began as a pastime quickly turned into a passion. Lucas discovered a joy he had never felt before, not from material achievements, but from human connection and the positive impact he could have on people's lives.

Over time, he made the difficult decision to leave behind the privileges to dedicate himself to community work in his spare time. He began to divide his time, becoming a mentor to at-risk youth, using his experience to guide them in building better futures for themselves. Lucas found a purpose that transcended anything money could buy.

His new journey did not come without challenges, but each difficulty was overcome by the gratitude and love he received from those he helped. Lucas built deep and meaningful relationships, enriching his life in ways he had never imagined.

## ETHICS AND AUTHENTICITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

To relate is not merely to be with the other person, but to present ourselves fully so that people can recognize all the parts that make us up. It's about being vulnerable, removing the masks so that the other person can be certain of who we are by our values, our virtues, and our principles, without being afraid to also show our imperfections. This is what is called the ethics of relationships, making sure that the other person expects nothing more than what we can truly offer. It's about knowing how to listen, as well as knowing when to speak.

Human relationships are a process of giving, empathy, and continuous learning. Accepting the other person as they are, just as we accept ourselves, allows us to recognize our own limits. Being in a relationship means dedicating ourselves to making a difference. It's about how much we forgive ourselves and forgive others, looking each other in the eyes, and not giving up because we understand that we are neither better nor worse than anyone else.

A relationship is about preserving life in the little things, in the small gestures, in the delicacy of good intentions.

To allow a relationship, we must first understand that nothing is eternal, and that we are all here in this unique and exclusive moment seeking to survive in the best possible way. Everything we are today is the result of our experiences. My experience is not your life experience. We are unique in everything, but it is in relationships that the plurality of being human resides.



For a healthy relationship, we need to first understand that life is about freedom. Freedom is not an option, as Sartre said. Precisely because it's not an option, if we've come this far, it's because we've chosen, and if we've chosen, it's because at the moment of choice, we decided on what represents the most value to us. That's the dynamic of life. We are constituted of choices, and each choice represents another instant of experience to make other decisions. In this sense, we can then say that we are the result of our experiences, and it is through them that we will recognize what we should do in the next moment.

No moment of life will repeat itself. Nothing in life repeats, everything is new and virginal, precisely because everything is as it should be. After all, each moment of life is a representation of the world we create for ourselves through our experiences. We cannot create another world other than the one we previously experienced; in other words, it's not the world that makes us act, but the interpretation of the world we have based on what we have already experienced in life. Don't be mistaken, this is an unconscious action; the brain always makes its bets for the next moment based on what it already knows and what is inside it.

If we are the result of our experiences, and it is through them that we build our reality, this also applies to each relationship. Perhaps the greatest misconception in life is to think that the answers to who we are and what we are, as well as the solution to what we want to be, lie in the relationship.

Different from that, relationships give us the opportunity to see the world through the experiences of others, and thereby create more experiential content for our own lives. After all, every relationship is a continuous learning process that allows us to see much more and go beyond the capacity created by ourselves.



## MIRRORS AND MASKS

I hope that now you are able to understand in depth what has already been discussed in the first chapter, that is, that when we are in a relationship and we start to judge, criticize, and see flaws in the other person, it is not actually a relationship, but rather a self-evaluation, a self-criticism of ourselves, since we are talking about our experiences, talking about ourselves, and what we are seeing is a reflection of what we are. We cannot be the other person, only ourselves, and what the other person represents to us is within us. We do not create anything out of nothing, we need to have a foundation, an internal basis based on our beliefs and truths in order to point the finger at the other person and say what is right and what is wrong. In the dynamics of human beings, it is much easier to say about the other person what belongs to us.

The complexity of human nature challenges the understanding of our own being, marked by the difficulty in accepting the multiplicity that resides within us. We do not harbor a single "self," but rather a sufficient quantity to represent ourselves according to the identities present with each intention of presenting ourselves to the world and thus be recognized in the manner we hope to be — forged at the core of an intricate system that blends our genetic heritage with the real, sculpted by childhood experiences, and the ideal, shaped by the lessons learned throughout life from the perspective idealized by everything we are not yet. It is this reluctance to embrace our entirety that drives us to construct alternative realities, to adopt masks in the desperate quest for recognition and acceptance. But it is precisely these masks that distance us from reality with and in others, often because they demand that we present ourselves in our totality, vulnerable, revealing the aspects that we most fear facing in ourselves. The fear of exposure is deeply personal, a spectrum that governs decisions and is the architect of countless disillusionments along life's journey.

Every choice we make is instantaneous, reflecting the confluence of distinct perspectives between ourselves and others. We live anchored in the moment, building our reality based solely on what we know thus far, with no possibility of adding to or subtracting from our arsenal of experiences. As time advances, we look back to times past, through a new lens, enriched by teachings and learnings that were previously unknown to us. Thus, if there is a constant truth in our existence, it is that the past cannot be relived, neither by us nor by others; everything boils down to an illusion seen through the prism of the present. Recognizing this temporal fluidity and the transience of our perceptions is to accept the continuous evolution of being, understanding that each moment is unique and unrepeatable, a tapestry woven with threads of memories, choices, and revelations that, together, form the mosaic of human life.

Of course, if we gather everything described here, we quickly realize that we often leave much of our relationships due to the dynamics of life, sometimes out of fear of encountering the worst in ourselves, as well as feeling powerless or guilty for not having made better decisions. But none of this matters for life. There is no way to materialize anything from the past or the future; there is only one moment to live, and it happens now. Therefore, we cannot judge, blame, lament, or even seek justification, after all, what does it matter.

What truly matters is understanding that we are all in an evolutionary process, and each person carries within themselves a worldview formed by beliefs that are the results of their own lived experiences. As life goes on, other experiences are formed, and many beliefs are reinterpreted and strengthened. Therefore, realize that learning from life is continuous. What I mean is that all human beings are in an evolutionary process. We all grow at every moment, each at their own pace and subjectivity of what constitutes a good and happy life.

### **DON'T GIVE UP ON PEOPLE, INVEST IN THEM**

For all these reasons, I reaffirm the initial phrase, don't give up on people, invest in them. Perhaps that person we judge so much, criticize, or even saddened us, may, like us, be in an evolutionary process, seeking their best, and the experiences they have lived during this time may have made them a much better person. Or perhaps today, with the time we have lived and our new experiences, we too are capable of realizing that much of what we used to judge or criticize in others no longer makes sense, and we no longer see the person in the same way.

May these words serve as an invitation for each of us to self-recognize: when judging, criticizing, or condemning others, we may be reflecting our own unresolved issues. Assuming responsibility for our self-awareness and internal growth is crucial. True healing only occurs when the characteristics that we used to criticize in others cease to bother us and begin to make sense within ourselves, as an integral part of our journey of understanding and personal acceptance. In this process, we all experience the fullness of learning from life, embracing it moment by moment.

To conclude, never forget that we are all worthy of imperfections, and it is through them that we become better people, just as each of us deserves our own evolution. We need to relearn not to give up so easily on things and especially on people, and realize how much of what bothers us in others belongs to us, and that is indeed a process of evolution in the most integral sense of self-healing!

Thus, amidst the reality of life, we understand that human relationships are a magnificent stage, where each actor brings with them a unique narrative. Not giving up on people is, in fact, a commitment to our own evolution. By investing in each other, we not only accept the diversity of paths but also recognize the opportunity to enrich our own storyline. In a world that often urges us to abandon, persistence in relationships becomes the ultimate expression of our humanity. The continuous learning provided by encounters challenges us to overcome limits, to question prejudices, and to discover the extraordinary in the simplicity of each interaction.

May we carry with us the certainty that, by not giving up on people, we are not only investing in their journeys but also cultivating the fertile soil from which the rare flowers of mutual understanding and unconditional acceptance blossom. May betting on relationships be our tribute to the grandeur of the human experience. And thus, as we look back, may we contemplate a life punctuated not only by individual achievements but by an intricate mosaic of connections that have indelibly transformed the course of our existence. May each relationship be a unique symphony, played by the singular instruments of each person we encounter along the way.



In this life's concert, may the final note resonate as a harmonious melody, worthy of a journey marked by the courage to never give up, but rather to bet, believe, and above all, love. May this be how our story is written, and may each page be deserving of a complex and beautiful evaluation of life, for relationships are the light that illuminates the shadows of our limited perception. By not giving up on people, we open the doors of the prisons we create for ourselves, emerging into the vastness of mutual understanding. True happiness lies in virtue and friendship, fundamental pillars of genuine relationships.

## LET'S PRACTICE

### POWERFUL QUESTIONS

- **Relational Inventory:**

- Think of a relationship that has challenged your patience or understanding. What lessons can you extract from this experience?
- How has this relationship helped shape who you are today?

- **The Other's Perspective:**

- Choose a person with whom you have difficulties. Try to write about a recent conflict from their perspective.
- What does this change in perspective reveal about your own behaviors and assumptions?

- **Commitment to Growth:**

- Identify an area of your relational life that you would like to improve. What concrete actions can you take to promote this growth?
- Set small, measurable goals to achieve this improvement.

- **Gratitude in Relationships:**

- Daily, identify and write down three aspects for which you are grateful in your relationships. How does gratitude influence your perception of the people around you?
- At the end of the week, reflect on how the practice of gratitude has affected your emotional well-being and your relationships.

These exercises and questions are designed to provoke introspection and encourage a deep exploration of yourself and how you relate to others. The intention is to offer an initial path to self-discovery, fostering richer and more meaningful relationships.

## ENCOURAGEMENT TO COMMITMENT

For truly absorbing the lessons of this e-book and seeing tangible changes in your relationships and self-perception, I invite you to commit to completing the exercises proposed earlier. Personal commitment is the first step to transformation. Therefore, I suggest a challenge: dedicate yourself to practicing these exercises for at least 30 days.

- Why 30 Days?
  - Consistency is key to developing new habits and perspectives. Thirty days is a sufficient period to begin observing significant changes in your attitudes and behaviors, without being so long as to seem unattainable.
- How to Commit?
  - Set Clear Goals: Write down specifically what you hope to achieve with each exercise. Be realistic but challenging.
  - Create a Reflection Diary: Set aside a notebook or digital file to jot down your daily experiences with the exercises. This not only aids in reflection and tracking progress but also serves as a reminder of your commitment.
  - Establish a Regular Schedule: Determine a time of day to dedicate yourself to the exercises. Routine helps in forming a habit.
  - Share Your Commitment: Talk about your 30-day challenge with a friend, family member, or partner. They can offer support and even join you in the challenge, creating a shared experience.
  - Reflect Weekly: At the end of each week, set aside time to reflect on the week's experiences, the challenges faced, and the lessons learned. This may include revisiting the reflection diary and planning adjustments for the following week.



## AFTER 30 DAYS

- Upon completing the 30-day challenge, take a deep reflection on the changes observed in your relationships and within yourself. Which exercises were most impactful? Are there changes you would like to maintain long-term? How can you incorporate these practices into your daily routine?

Remember, the journey of self-discovery and improvement in relationships is ongoing. These 30 days are just the beginning. I hope you find valuable tools in these exercises to enrich your relationships and your understanding of yourself. May this be the first step of many on your journey to living a more connected and meaningful life.

## TRANSFORMATION AND LIGHT

From the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge, each of us travels our own path, our moment.

Relationships that heal, that teach us to love, are beacons that guide us, help us navigate.

Make this moment a poetry, born from dialogue and reflection, as a tribute to the complexity of human interaction, an invitation to look within and around with compassion, recognizing in each of us, an eternal quest for connection.

May the words thought and felt be woven and inspire hearts and minds, to recognize in relationships, the most precious gifts.

And may, in this unfolding moment, page by page, we find together, the essence of life, its magic and its fate.

(Marcello de Souza)



# Capítulo 2

## MARIONETTES OF TIME

In a whisper, the wind tells secrets,  
Of invisible threads intertwining destinies.  
We are dancing marionettes under stars,  
Guided by hands of time and space.  
No longer masters of wandering ships,  
But navigators in predetermined seas.  
Our free will, a sail in the wind,  
Illuminated by the flame of knowledge, extinguishes.  
Brief existence, wise experience of ages, unveils the veil,  
Revealing the web woven in our essence.  
"We are not free," echoes in echo chambers,  
But in chains, we find our freedom.  
Life's dance, a choreography of causes,  
Invites us to understand, not to control.  
On the riverbanks of time, we reflect,  
Upon the waters that flow, unstoppable.  
Wisdom resides not in mastering the currents,  
But in navigating their waves with grace.  
In each choice, an echo of infinities,  
In each step, the shadow of a thousand ancestors.  
So, what are we?  
Asks the wind.  
Marionettes, wise, or simply human?  
In the web of existence, every thread matters,  
Every moment, an opportunity to love, learn, be.

(Marcello de Souza)



## **TOXIC RELATIONSHIP CAN OR CANNOT BECOME HEALTHY AGAIN?**

Navigating the turbulent waters of a toxic relationship is a challenge that impacts not only our physical and psychological well-being but also the essence of our connection with the world and ourselves. The marks left by toxic relationships are deep, and their transformation into abuse can represent a dark path, where violence finds fertile ground to grow. This complexity is accentuated in a social context where the speed and disposability of relationships seem to be the norm, amplifying loneliness and psychological issues.

When exploring the distinction between toxic and abusive relationships, it is essential to recognize that while every abusive relationship carries toxicity, not all toxicity crosses the line into abuse. The confusion and misuse of the term "toxic relationship" reflect a broader misunderstanding of relational dynamics and the need for deeper and more comprehensive approaches to resolve conflicts and heal emotional wounds. A thorough analysis, transcending labels and seeking the root of behavioral and psychological issues, becomes indispensable for the reconstruction of healthy and respectful relationships.



Differentiating an abusive relationship from a toxic one is more than a semantic issue; it's about understanding the nature of human interactions in their complexity, without reducing them to aspects of sexuality, gender identity, or other social markers. Toxic relationships can manifest in various contexts - among couples, at work, within families, or among friends - and involve both verbal and non-verbal aggression, both in-person and digital - all potentially diminishing the self-esteem and well-being of the other, negatively affecting emotions and feelings, and impacting the life and physical and mental health of the victim.

Popular wisdom reminds us of the importance of facing our pains directly, as in the adapted metaphor: "Pull out the thorn that is hurting your foot once and for all... Insist on continuing like this and there will come a time when you will not be able to take a single step forward with your life." This reflection echoes the call to action present in our study of human relationships: the urgent need to address and heal the toxicities that prevent us from moving forward.

The possibility of transforming a toxic relationship back into a healthy one lies not only in recognizing the toxicity and the willingness to change but also in the ability to understand and apply the principles of mutual understanding, respect, and continuous growth that underpin all deep and meaningful human interactions.

In our journey through the complex spectrum of human relationships, we encounter dynamics that can both enrich and wear down the fabric of our existence. Among these, toxic and abusive relationships stand out for the profound negative impact they exert on individuals, marking them in ways that can endure for a lifetime.

Understanding the nature of these relationships and recognizing the warning signs is not only crucial for protecting individual well-being but also fundamental for preserving the quality of our interpersonal connections.





## **RELATIONSHIPS VS. ABUSIVE: A CRITICAL DISTINCTION**

Toxic individuals, although often not driven by a conscious intention to harm, can create an environment of negativity and emotional drainage. Their actions, stemming, for example, from denial, codependency, jealousy, or narcissism, can undermine self-esteem and distort the other's perception of self-worth, becoming obstacles to personal and professional growth. This toxicity, though devastating, often stems from a lack of self-awareness and imprisonment within one's own shadows and emotional imbalances.

In contrast, abusive relationships bear the mark of intentionality. The abusive individual, aware of the harm they inflict, operates from a desire for control and domination. This abuse transcends mere toxicity by involving tactics of intimidation, humiliation, and isolation, often escalating to physical violence. The scars left by such relationships run deep, contributing to a spectrum of psychological traumas, from anxiety and depression to post-traumatic stress disorder, and even leading to suicide.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNITION AND INTERVENTION**

Identifying the precursor signs that differentiate a potentially toxic relationship from an abusive one is vital for early intervention and seeking help. The persistence of behaviors such as excessive jealousy, attempts to socially isolate the partner, and verbal or physical violence are clear indicators that the relationship is crossing the threshold into abuse. In such circumstances, it is imperative to recognize that both toxicity and abuse pose serious risks to mental and physical health, requiring immediate action.

## **PATHS TO CHANGE**

Confronting and transforming toxic or abusive relationships requires courage, support, and often professional assistance. It is crucial to remember that psychological violence is as harmful as physical violence and should not be interpreted as a manifestation of weakness on the part of the victim but rather as a sign that the perpetrator needs urgent treatment, aware that it is not you who will be able to offer help to this type of person. The distinction between toxic and abusive relationships not only clarifies the severity of each situation but also illuminates the path to effective intervention and the rebuilding of a life based on mutual respect, understanding, and care.



## **UNDERSTANDING THE NUANCES BETWEEN TOXICITY AND ABUSE**

The difference between toxic and abusive individuals lies not only in their actions but also in their motivations and the depth of the impact caused on the victims. Both types are masters in the art of manipulation and can be extremely harmful, but while toxic individuals often act from harmful behavioral patterns sometimes unintentionally, abusive ones demonstrate a pattern of intentionally harmful and controlling behavior.

Toxic individuals can drain your energy through constant criticism, negativity, jealousy, or selfishness, often without being fully aware of the harm they are causing. On the other hand, abusers, armed with a keen understanding of how to manipulate and control, can cross dangerous lines, even inflicting deep physical and psychological harm.

## ASSESSING THE DEGREE OF TOXICITY

Understanding when a relationship has become toxic or abusive is crucial for your emotional and physical health. Reflecting on the impact these relationships have on your daily life is an important step in recognizing the need for change. Ask yourself: does the relationship constantly make me feel diminished? How often have I found myself crying or feeling undervalued because of interactions with this person?

These are clear manifestations of toxicity that, if not addressed, can lead to a state of emotional dependence, where the victim finds themselves increasingly trapped in the partner's web of manipulations. This reminds me of a quote that says: "I realized our relationship was bad when I counted how many nights I went to bed crying because of you. It was almost every night." This resonates deeply with those who have experienced the pain of being in a toxic relationship, illustrating the painful reality of feeling trapped in a self-destructive dynamic.

## **ACTION AND REFLECTION**

Faced with these toxic and abusive realities, it's vital to recognize that you have the power and the right to seek a healthier and more respectful environment. Reflecting on the nature of your relationships and the behavioral patterns involved can help elucidate paths to recovery and the building of more positive and enriching relationships.

Identifying and understanding the toxic or abusive nature of a relationship is just the first step. The journey towards healing and personal empowerment requires courage, support, and often professional guidance. Remember, acknowledging the need for change is a demonstration of strength, not weakness. Moreover, for abusive relationships in particular, support should include safety plans and legal assistance when necessary.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF TOXICITY IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Living with toxic people presents complex challenges, often rooted in life stories marked by disturbing experiences since childhood, many resulting from dysfunctional family environments or even victims of abuse, bullying, or violence.

We all carry scars, both physical and mental, that shape our behavior and perception of the world. These scars are the result of a blend of experiences - some enriching, others profoundly painful.

It's crucial to recognize that the narrative of our life doesn't begin at the moment of a friendship or romance. From the maternal womb to the present day, we are constantly learning and evolving, impacted by a continuum of experiences that affect our ability to interact with the world around us. The "self" we present in our relationships is the product of this journey, expressed through behaviors, thoughts, and emotions that reflect the integrity of our experiences.

This recognition dispels romantic illusions and reveals the true humanity of the other - a complex tapestry of qualities and flaws. How we react to uncovering the reality of the other - and to confronting our own - significantly depends on our personal history, social context, and family dynamics. These factors underpin our ability to confront and adapt to the truth of our relationships.

## **THE REALITY BEYOND ILLUSIONS**

Over time, the initial idealization in any type of relationship gives way to a more realistic and nuanced understanding of the other person. This process of discovery can be challenging but is essential for growth and deepening bonds. How we handle these revelations largely depends on our own emotional development and the support structures we have in our lives.

Recognizing shared humanity - imperfections included - is the first step in building more authentic and resilient relationships. Instead of reacting with judgment or rejection, we can choose empathy, understanding, and a willingness to grow together. This is the path to genuine relationships where mutual acceptance and support thrive, allowing us to face reality in a more constructive and loving way.

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE PAST ON PRESENT RELATIONSHIPS

Life is filled with unexpected events and challenges that deeply affect us, shaping the way we relate to the world around us. From everyday stress to unforeseen circumstances, how we navigate these situations is largely shaped by our life experiences. Individuals who have had positive experiences and consistent emotional support since childhood may find healthier ways to face adversities and build meaningful relationships.

On the other hand, those who have faced hardships, traumas, or dysfunctional family environments may react to life situations in less adaptive ways, sometimes exhibiting toxic behaviors. This doesn't mean that these individuals are doomed to repeat negative patterns indefinitely. Rather, recognizing the origin of these reactions can be the first step toward change and healing.

## **ACCEPTANCE VS. TOLERANCE**

Genuine acceptance of someone, with all their complexities and imperfections, is the foundation for healthy and profound relationships. However, often what we believe to be acceptance may actually be mere tolerance, or worse, an attempt to mold the other person to fit our expectations. The quote "When you say you accept someone as they are, do you really accept or do you tolerate? Do you accept or want to shape them?" challenges us to reflect on the nature of our acceptance and the impact it has on our relationships.

## **TOWARDS POSITIVE CHANGE**

Understanding the difference between truly accepting someone and merely tolerating them is essential for cultivating authentic and enriching relationships. This process begins with self-reflection and a willingness to confront and heal past wounds. Change is possible, and with conscious effort, support, and, in some cases, professional guidance, we can learn to form connections based on mutual acceptance, respect, and love.



## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "BEING" AND "FEELING" TOXIC**

A vital distinction in any discussion about toxicity in relationships is understanding the difference between "being toxic" and "feeling toxic." "Feeling toxic" can be a temporary state, reflecting moments of immaturity, fear, or vulnerability in the face of life's adversities. These individuals, often perceived as toxic, may actually be grappling with their own insecurities, using masks as defense mechanisms to hide their vulnerabilities. Their defensive behavior — pointing out flaws, criticizing, imposing opinions — may be a sign of internal struggle for self-acceptance and self-love, not necessarily indicating a character flaw.

## **SUPPORT AND UNDERSTANDING FOR THOSE "FEELING" TOXIC**

Recognizing when someone is "feeling" toxic is crucial for addressing the situation with compassion and understanding that these individuals can greatly benefit from emotional support and psychological help. Their actions often serve as cries for help, expressing the need to learn to navigate their emotions and insecurities in a healthier way. Temporary toxicity is a manifestation of deep internal challenges, often rooted but not necessarily solely linked to unresolved childhood experiences. We can become toxic due to various daily factors and external stressors that build pressure on our ability to effectively manage emotions.

These may include work issues, financial difficulties, health issues, or even social pressure and unrealistic expectations. In this context, it is essential to create an environment that promotes understanding and patience, encouraging the individual to seek constructive ways to deal with their feelings and behaviors.

Offering a safe space where these individuals can express their vulnerabilities without judgment is a fundamental step in their recovery. This entails actively listening, validating their feelings, and, when appropriate, referring them to trained mental health professionals who can provide the necessary support to address and overcome these challenges. The goal is to help them develop healthier coping strategies, strengthening their emotional resilience and improving their ability to socialize positively.

By adopting an approach that values understanding and support, we can not only assist those who "are" toxic in finding paths to meaningful change but also contribute to the creation of healthier and more enriching interpersonal relationships for all involved.

Reaching out and offering support, rather than judgment, can be the first step toward positive transformations.

## **RECOGNIZING HUMANITY BEYOND TOXICITY**

Understanding the difference between "being" and "feeling" toxic helps us avoid premature condemnations and recognize the potential for growth and change in all of us. Often, a person's qualities may be overshadowed by temporary toxic behaviors, challenging us to look beyond the surface. This does not negate individual responsibility for harmful behaviors but underscores the importance of an empathetic and supportive approach to change.

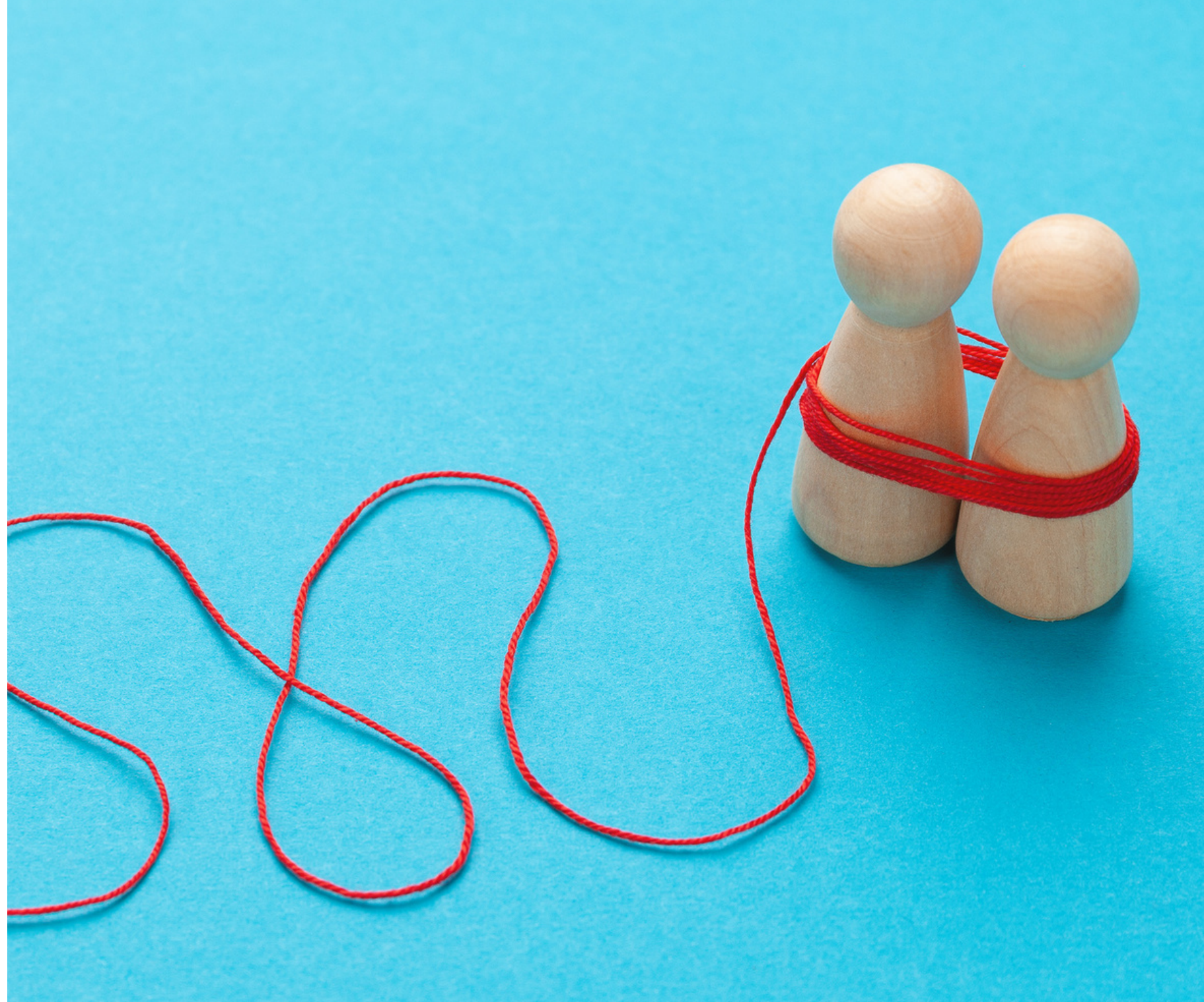


## **REFLECTION ON OUR OWN PERCEPTIONS**

As we confront toxicity in relationships, we are also invited to reflect on our own perceptions and expectations. Questioning whether we are projecting ideals of perfectionism or expecting an unrealistic idealization of the other can pave the way for a deeper understanding and acceptance of human imperfections as part of the shared experience of growth.

## **DEMYSTIFYING PERFECTION IN RELATIONSHIPS**

In a world dominated by appearances and the relentless pursuit of perfect happiness, many fall into the trap of believing in stereotypes of ideal relationships, distant from the complex and imperfect reality of our lives. This quest for perfection distances us from who we truly are, creating unrealistic expectations about what others can offer us. Amidst this dynamic, I reinforce the call not to give up on people, but rather to invest in them, understanding this choice as an antidote to the objectification of relationships. This perspective challenges the logic of disposability that permeates our society, where it is easier to switch partners like objects, fleeing from ourselves and the inherent imperfections in any human relationship.



This mindset not only promotes a distorted view of what it means to be in a healthy relationship but also encourages the objectification of others, reducing complex human relationships to mere transactions based on personal interests.

The tendency to abandon rather than invest, to swap instead of repair, reflects a form of toxicity that undermines the authenticity and depth of our connections. In this context, the challenge I pose of "not giving up on the person, betting on them" emerges as a mature invitation to embrace imperfection, cultivating deeper and more meaningful relationships grounded in mutual understanding, acceptance of imperfections, and genuine commitment to one another.

By reflecting on this, I seek to highlight the importance of resisting the tendency to treat relationships as disposable, encouraging a more humane and committed stance that recognizes the value of others and the richness that imperfections bring to our lives. This not only enriches our own existence but also strengthens the fabric of human relationships, promoting a more connected and empathetic world.



After all, it's always worth remembering here the natural tendency to project onto others the solution to our problems, or worse, to try to mold them into our own image, is a form of toxicity that undermines the authenticity and depth of our connections and is so common in today's world, not surprisingly, that frustration and discontent become recurring feelings in many relationships. Instead of cultivating mutual understanding and acceptance of imperfections, we end up establishing a scenario where conditional love prevails, based more on idealized expectations than on shared reality.

Therefore, instead of chasing the illusion of perfect relationships, we should seek authenticity and genuine connection. This means embracing imperfections, openly discussing our expectations and needs, and working together to build a relationship based on true understanding and acceptance. By doing so, we not only enrich our own lives but also contribute to the creation of a more empathetic and connected society, where human relationships are valued for their essence, not for their appearance of perfection.

## LET'S PRACTICE

The following exercises are tools to begin the process of recognizing, understanding, and eventually transforming toxic or abusive dynamics in your relationships. The goal is to promote greater self-awareness and empowerment, enabling you to seek healthier and more respectful relationships.

### EXERCISE 1: REFLECTION DIARY

Keep a diary for a few weeks, recording your feelings and significant interactions. Look for patterns in how certain interactions affect your emotional state.

- Ask yourself:
  - "Did this interaction make me feel valued and understood?"
  - "Were there times when I felt like my identity or feelings were disregarded or invalidated?"

### EXERCISE 2: SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

- Answer these questions honestly:
  - "Do I often compromise my own needs or values to satisfy others?"
  - "Do I feel responsible for the happiness or emotional well-being of my partner/friend/family member in a one-sided way?"
- "Are there signs that I am being manipulated or controlled?"
  - "Do I notice tendencies in myself to want to control or change the other person?"

### EXERCISE 3: BOUNDARY ANALYSIS

- Reflect on the boundaries within your relationships. Identify if:
  - You have difficulty saying "no" or establishing healthy boundaries.
  - You feel guilty for prioritizing your own needs.
  - Your boundaries are frequently disrespected by others.

### EXERCISE 4: PATTERN RECOGNITION

- Identify if there are recurring patterns in your relationships indicating toxicity or abuse, such as:
  - Cycles of behavior where there is an alternation between moments of intense happiness and periods of conflict or sadness.
  - Tendencies to justify the toxic or abusive behavior of the other person.
  - Feeling constantly anxious, depressed, or having low self-esteem.

### EXERCISE 5: ACTION PLANNING

- Based on your reflections and previous analyses, develop an action plan that may include:
  - Seeking professional support, such as therapy.
  - Participating in support groups to share experiences and strategies.
  - Establishing a plan to strengthen your self-esteem and regain your emotional independence.

## EXERCISE 6: POSITIVE VISUALIZATION

- Practice visualization by imagining yourself in healthy and respectful relationships. Ask yourself:
  - How do I feel in these relationships?
  - What qualities do I value in myself and others?
  - How can I contribute to the health and balance of these relationships?





# Chapter 3

## CODEPENDENCY: THE HIDDEN WEB IN RELATIONSHIPS

As we delve into the complexity of human relationships, we encounter a phenomenon as common as it is challenging: codependency. This chapter is dedicated to unraveling the nuances of codependency, a pattern of relationship in which one person becomes excessively dependent on the emotional needs or well-being of another, thereby losing their own identity and the ability to meet their individual needs. This dynamic not only compromises the autonomy and personal growth of the codependent individual but also jeopardizes the emotional health of both partners, turning the relationship into a vicious cycle of dependency and dissatisfaction.

Recognizing codependency as a form of toxic relationship is essential to demystify the idea that love or unconditional dedication justifies the loss of one's identity or the sacrifice of personal autonomy.

Often, we conceal under the veil of concern and care patterns of behavior that perpetuate dependency and inequality in relationships, ignoring the devastating consequences for the emotional health and dignity of all involved.



In this chapter, we will explore the origin of codependency, its signs and symptoms, and how this pattern manifests in different types of relationships. Additionally, we will discuss effective strategies for overcoming codependency, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, establishing healthy boundaries, and developing a balanced and reciprocal relationship. By facing this challenge, we not only free ourselves from the bonds of codependency but also pave the way for healthier, authentic, and fulfilling relationships.

## **INTRODUCTION TO CODEPENDENCY**

Codependency is a behavioral disorder in which a person becomes excessively reliant on the emotional needs or well-being of another individual, often sacrificing their own needs, desires, and well-being in the process. This behavior may stem from a deeply ingrained need to care for or control another person, often as a way to find self-worth or avoid abandonment.

While codependency is most commonly associated with romantic relationships, it can equally manifest in family dynamics, friendships, and even in the workplace. It can arise in any type of relationship where an individual feels compelled to "rescue" or "save" another person, often someone facing difficulties such as substance dependency, mental health issues, or self-destructive behaviors.

Codependency is not limited to negative contexts; it can be well-intentioned yet ineffective, toxic, and harmful. Beneath this pattern often lie deep-seated issues of self-esteem, fear of rejection or abandonment, and a desperate search for love and approval.

## EXPLANATION OF CODEPENDENCY

Codependency can be understood as a complex emotional and behavioral condition. It manifests through a series of signs and symptoms that profoundly affect the dynamics of relationships and personal well-being. The main indicators of codependency include:

- **Difficulty Establishing Healthy Boundaries:** Codependents often find themselves unable to say "no" or set clear boundaries with others. This can lead to situations where their own needs and desires are constantly set aside to accommodate those of others. For example, a codependent person may continuously sacrifice their time, energy, and even financial resources to help someone, even if it means neglecting their own needs or commitments.
- **Assuming Responsibilities for Others' Problems:** A common characteristic of codependency is the tendency to take responsibility for others' problems, choices, and consequences of their behaviors. This is evident when, for example, a codependent person makes excuses or tries to "fix" situations caused by another person's self-destructive or irresponsible behaviors, such as substance abuse or neglect of their own responsibilities.

- **Constant Search for Approval and Validation:** Codependent individuals often measure their own worth based on the approval and acceptance of others. They may find themselves in an incessant cycle of seeking external validation, leading to compulsive people-pleasing behaviors. For example, a codependent person may change their opinions, sacrifice their own interests, or behave in ways to please others, all in hopes of being loved or accepted.

These behaviors not only perpetuate the cycle of codependency but can also lead to a profound sense of emptiness, low self-esteem, and in some cases, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Understanding these signs and symptoms is the critical first step to recognizing codependency in oneself or others, and beginning the path towards healthier relationships and a strengthened sense of self.

## THE DANGERS OF CODEPENDENCY

Codependency, with its roots intertwined in relational dynamics, carries substantial and often harmful impacts for both the codependent individual and those around them. Its dangers manifest in various dimensions of life, deeply affecting the emotional, psychological, and even physical well-being of those involved.

- **Loss of Self-Identity:** One of the most significant consequences of codependency is the gradual erosion of one's own identity. Codependent individuals often define themselves through their relationships with others, losing sight of their own desires, needs, and values. This phenomenon can be exemplified when someone abandons their hobbies, interests, and even personal ambitions to dedicate themselves entirely to meeting the needs of another person, forgetting who they are outside of the relational context.
- **Compromised Self-Esteem:** The incessant pursuit of external approval and validation can deteriorate self-esteem. Codependent individuals may begin to believe that their worth as a person is directly proportional to their usefulness to others, making them susceptible to constant doubts about their own value and contributing to maintaining an image of themselves as fundamentally flawed.
- **Remaining in Abusive or Dysfunctional Relationships:** Due to intense fear of abandonment and the belief that they must always take care of others, codependent individuals are particularly vulnerable to staying in abusive or highly dysfunctional relationships. This persistence is often justified by a distorted belief that they can "fix" or change the other person, even in the face of harmful or neglectful treatment.

- **Cycle of Harmful Behaviors:** Codependency feeds into a vicious cycle where the fear of loneliness and the need to be needed perpetuate self-destructive behaviors. This dynamic can exacerbate stress, anxiety, and lead to physical and mental health problems. The ongoing effort to maintain harmony and avoid conflicts at all costs can lead to issues such as depression, anxiety disorders, sleep problems, and a variety of physical health issues resulting from chronic stress and neglect of one's own needs.

Understanding these dangers is essential for recognizing codependent patterns and initiating the healing process. By addressing codependency, the possibility of rebuilding self-esteem, rediscovering personal identity, and forming relationships based on mutual respect, autonomy, and genuine love, rather than need and fear, is opened.



## A NATUREZA TÓXICA DA CODEPENDÊNCIA

Codependency transcends mere relational difficulty, constituting itself as a pattern of toxic and deeply harmful behavior that undermines the quality and health of affective relationships. This dynamic not only harms the individual immersed in it but also distorts the nature of the relationship, often making it fertile ground for abuse and manipulation.

- **Bilateral Harm:** Central to the toxic nature of codependency is the idea that, although it may seem like a form of care and devotion, it is fundamentally harmful to both parties involved. The codependent individual, by neglecting their own needs, values, and well-being, compromises their mental and emotional health. At the same time, the partner, often placed on the pedestal of receiving this "care," is deprived of the opportunity to grow, change, and address their own issues, thus perpetuating cycles of dependence and dysfunction.
- **Relational Imbalance and Harmfulness:** The lack of autonomy and excessive dependence, central characteristics of codependency, give rise to profoundly imbalanced relationships. In such dynamics, the well-being and needs of one partner are constantly sacrificed or neglected for the sake of the other, leading to a vicious cycle where the health of the relationship is compromised. This inequality not only impedes personal growth and the development of authenticity in both individuals but also establishes a dangerous precedent of unilateral sacrifice, where one partner becomes excessively dominant, and the other, excessively submissive.



Understanding codependency as a toxic behavior is fundamental for its overcoming. Recognizing the need for autonomy, the importance of establishing healthy boundaries, and the ability to promote mutual growth are crucial steps to transform codependent relationships into healthy and balanced ones. Transitioning from codependency to a dynamic of healthy interdependence requires work, awareness, and often the support of mental health professionals, but it is a journey worth taking for the well-being of all involved.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF HELP AND SUPPORT

Recognizing codependent patterns in our behaviors is just the first step toward meaningful and lasting change. To dismantle these complex webs of emotional dependency and build healthier, more balanced relationships, seeking professional help is crucial. This support can come in various forms, including individual therapy, couples therapy, or support groups focused on overcoming codependency. Each of these approaches offers valuable insights, adaptive strategies, and a safe space to explore and understand the origins, manifestations, and consequences of codependency in our lives.

- **Individual Therapy:** Individual therapy provides an intimate and personalized space where the individual can delve into the depths of their codependent behavior, investigate its roots, and develop strategies to establish healthy boundaries, cultivate self-esteem, and learn to value independence and self-care.
- **Couples Therapy:** For couples involved in codependent dynamics, couples therapy can be an invaluable tool. In this context, both partners can explore together how codependency affects their relationship, working collaboratively to identify harmful patterns, improve communication, and foster a relationship based on equality, mutual respect, and support.

- **Support Groups:** Support groups offer a community of individuals facing similar challenges, providing a platform for empathy, understanding, and mutual encouragement. In these groups, sharing experiences, successes, and challenges can be a powerful source of motivation and hope, showing that overcoming is possible and that no one is alone on this journey.

I strongly encourage you that if you recognize codependent patterns in yourself or in your relationships, do not hesitate to seek out these resources. The journey towards healthier and more balanced relationships is challenging, but with the right support, it is a journey full of growth, self-discovery, and ultimately, liberation.

Remember that change begins with recognizing the need for help and with a commitment to yourself to seek a healthier path for you and for those you love.

It is no coincidence that the decision to address codependency before delving into the chapter "Me, This, and Us: How to Rebuild a Healthy Relationship" was not random. It is essential for us to understand how imbalanced relationships and emotional dependencies can lead us away from harmonious coexistence and hinder the development of genuine and satisfying relationships.

Overcoming codependency paves the way for cultivating relationships based on mutuality, mutual respect, and individuality, allowing both the "Me" and the "Us" to flourish healthily. For this reason, I encourage you to reflect on your own journey, considering the possibility of codependency in your relationships and the impact it has on your ability to form meaningful connections.

## REFLECTION AND SELF-ANALYSIS EXERCISES:

- **Relationship Inventory:** List your most significant relationships and evaluate each of them in terms of emotional dependence. Is there a healthy balance between giving and receiving?
- **Codependency Self-Assessment:** Reflect on behaviors that may indicate codependency, such as difficulty saying no, prioritizing others' needs over your own, or feeling responsible for another person's happiness. How many of these behaviors do you recognize in yourself?
- **Setting Boundaries:** Think about recent situations where you felt your boundaries were not respected. How can you communicate your needs more clearly in the future?
- **Gratitude and Autonomy Journal:** Keep a diary where you daily record three things you are grateful for and three actions you took independently, reinforcing your autonomy.
- **Future Visualization:** Imagine yourself in a healthy and balanced relationship. What qualities and behaviors are part of this scenario? How can you begin to incorporate these elements into your life now?

By dedicating time to these exercises, you not only gain clarity about your own codependency but also take important steps toward your personal development and building healthier relationships. Remember, the journey to overcoming codependency is a continuous process of learning and growth. If necessary, seek the support of a professional to assist you on this journey.

By addressing codependency before the chapter on rebuilding healthy relationships, I provide a solid foundation for understanding the challenges and growth opportunities that relationships present. Through self-awareness, commitment to self-care, and seeking professional support, it is possible to transcend codependent patterns and cultivate relationships that uplift and enrich us. May the journey toward healthier and more authentic relationships begin now, strengthened by deep self-understanding and the desire to live a full and truly connected life.

## **IMPORTANT - IN SEARCH OF NECESSARY CHANGES**

If you find yourself in a scenario where dealing with a toxic or abusive person is part of your daily life, it is crucial to recognize that there are paths and strategies to handle this reality, whether by seeking to transform the dynamics of this relationship or, when necessary, distancing yourself to preserve your well-being. Understanding that you are not alone and that there are practical steps and specific strategies that can be followed is the first step to initiate this change.

It is also worth noting that understanding the complexity of human relationships, it is vital to highlight a truth that is often difficult to accept: "We do not change people. Do not deceive yourself with this!" It is a common misconception to believe that we can fundamentally alter who someone is, especially when it comes to serious behavioral deviations.

Such issues require intervention from qualified experts in the field, who deeply understand the nature of these challenges. It is important to recognize that, in many cases, these behavioral deviations may not have a cure, requiring specialized management and monitoring to improve the quality of life of the affected person and those who live with them. This recognition not only protects your emotional well-being but also guides the search for more realistic and healthy solutions for all involved.

In this regard, we propose a guide that seeks to offer tangible support and guidance for those navigating this difficult territory, seeking a healthier life and more positive relationships.

## IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES AND SPECIFIC STEPS:

- **Recognition:** The first step is to recognize that the relationship is toxic or abusive, which is already a significant stage.
- **Information:** Seeking information about the characteristics of toxic and abusive relationships can help better understand the situation.
- **Planning:** Developing an exit plan, which may include financial, housing, and emotional support aspects.
- **Seeking Support:** Seeking professional help, such as therapy, and emotional support, through friends, family, or support groups.

## TYPES OF USEFUL SUPPORT:

- **Therapy:** Therapists specialized in abuse and toxic relationships can offer the necessary support to process experiences and plan for the future.
- **Support Groups:** Participating in support groups, both in-person and online, where it is possible to share experiences and strategies with people facing similar challenges. Support groups specifically for abuse survivors can also provide a space for understanding and sharing experiences.
- **Hotlines:** Using specific hotlines for domestic violence and abuse, which can offer immediate advice and resources. In Brazil, some of the main hotlines for domestic violence and abuse issues include:
  - **Disque 180:** This is the national hotline for reporting violence against women. It offers 24-hour service and allows victims of violence to receive guidance, support, and referrals to appropriate services.



- **Disque 100:** This is the national hotline for reporting human rights violations. It covers various types of violence, including domestic violence, child abuse, sexual exploitation, among others. Like Disque 180, it provides 24-hour service and ensures the anonymity of reports.
- **Delegacias Especializadas de Atendimento à Mulher (DEAM):** These police stations are specialized in assisting women victims of domestic and family violence. They are located in various Brazilian cities and offer legal, psychological, and social support to victims.
- **Centros de Referência de Atendimento à Mulher (CRAM):** CRAMs are specialized service units that provide psychological support, legal guidance, and social assistance to women experiencing violence. They are present in several cities across the country.

It is important to emphasize that these hotlines and specialized services are available to provide support, guidance, and appropriate referrals to victims of domestic violence and abuse, thus promoting access to a network of protection and comprehensive assistance.

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## Connect and Explore Further

If this e-book has sparked in you a greater interest in the transformative power of organizational environmental design, environmental social psychology, or neuroscience applied to workplace well-being, I invite you to delve more deeply into this journey with me.

I, Marcello de Souza, have dedicated my life to exploring the intersections between cognitive behavioral and organizational development, always seeking innovative ways to apply this knowledge to improve the lives of individuals and organizations.

## WHERE TO FIND ME?

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- YouTube: Here, I share lectures, interviews, workshops, and various educational videos that shed light on current and relevant topics in the field of behavioral psychology and human development, visit: [www.youtube.com/@marcellodesouza\\_oficial](http://www.youtube.com/@marcellodesouza_oficial)
- Official Website: Where you can access my entire portfolio, courses, and information on how I can personally assist you or your organization, visit [www.marcellodesouza.com](http://www.marcellodesouza.com)
- Blog: For insights and reflections on personal and professional development, visit [www.marcellodesouza.com.br](http://www.marcellodesouza.com.br)
- Company: For coaching and organizational development services, visit [www.coachingevoce.com.br](http://www.coachingevoce.com.br).

If you felt a connection with the content of this e-book and believe in the transformative potential that applied knowledge can bring, do not hesitate to get in touch. I am here to support your journey of personal and professional growth, offering consultancy, coaching, and customized training that meet your needs or those of your organization.

This is just the beginning. Together, we can explore new frontiers of knowledge and apply them in ways that truly make a difference in the world. I appreciate you accompanying me this far and look forward to continuing this journey together.

Marcello de Souza - Transforming knowledge into action for a better future.

## FABRIC OF EXISTENCE

In the weave of existence, we thread strands of Self, That, Us,  
In a delicate dance, where being reveals and hides.  
The Self, a deep longing to be and belong,  
In the relentless quest for essence and truth.

That, a mirror where we reflect shadows and light,  
Challenges that, like rivers, shape our path.  
In the depths of silence, That whispers,  
Awakening the Self to the dance of transformation.

Us, intertwined souls, a fabric of dreams,  
Where union reveals more than the sum of its parts.  
In this sacred encounter, the Self and the That merge,  
The Us is born, a flourishing garden of possibilities.

But when storms obscure the way,  
And the Us is lost in the mist of disunity,  
It is in the heart of the Self that the flame persists,  
Illuminating the That, reigniting hope.

In rebuilding bridges between Self, That, Us,  
Lies the key to a safe harbor.  
With patience, understanding, and renewed love,  
Wounds heal, strengthening the union.

Accepting the Self, in its wholeness and imperfection,  
Understanding the That, in its complexity and challenge,  
Nurturing the Us, with respect, affection, and admiration,  
Is the path to rebuilding a healthy relationship.

In this journey, we learn to dance under the stars,  
To navigate turbulent seas with skill and courage.  
In the end, we discover that true love,  
Resides in the harmony between Self, That, Us – together, yet whole.

Thus, in the tapestry of time, each thread matters,  
Stories of ruptures, encounters, and rebirths.  
In the eternal cycle of building, destroying, and creating anew,  
The beauty of the relationship reveals itself, eternally new, eternally  
ancient.

And in the whisper of the wind, in the calm after the storm,  
The poetry of existence teaches us the most valuable lesson:  
That in the heart of the Self, in the wisdom of the That, in the union of  
the Us,  
Lies the strength to love, learn, be – together, in the infinite dance of  
life.

(Marcello de Souza)