

# Case Study 3

## Matthew's Story



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Helen Mia Harris is a registered therapist but offers her insights and advice for guidance only. All dates, place names, titles and events in this account are factual. However, the names have been changed in order to protect privacy and respect patient confidentiality.

# Matthew's Story

## A Broken Marriage, Separation Anxiety and an Addiction to Online Dating



3 years ago, a shy, introverted 53 year old man named Matthew came to see me for grief counselling after his marriage of 18 years broke down.

His wife had left him, **but not for another man**. Instead, she'd decided to take up a PhD in Anthropology and Religious Studies that would require her to move to another part of the country.

She had been passionate about this for several years, but had waited until their 3 children had gone off to University and found their own path in life before she finally made the decision to leave and realise her own dreams.

**When I met Matthew, he was thin, with ashen skin and oily, unkempt hair.**

He described to me how life had become utterly unbearable without his wife by his side.

**Everything seemed without meaning or purpose.**

He described her absence in vivid detail and spoke about it as if it was a terrible nightmare that he was unable to wake from.

He was unable to make any sense of the devastation and loss, and he described his grief as a debilitating shadow that was steadily overpowering him, rendering him weak and worthless.

Matthew seemed distraught at the thought that he would never again share a bed with his wife, smell her hair, see her put her shoes on, make her a cup of tea or massage her back (he told me how Denise – his wife – had suffered from a severe arthritic condition in her spine for several years).

There was a protectiveness that he felt for his wife that I'd seen in many male clients who suffer from loss and separation. It's as if the purpose of his existence was to protect and provide for his family, and without them, he was no longer of any use. He was no longer able to experience any self-worth.

**This is a trait generally found in men who see their role as a provider, which then becomes the centre of their existence.**

When this role is removed, they see no purpose to life. In Matthew's case, if there is no one to either reciprocate or receive his love, there is no desire to exist.

My work tried to make sense of this, so that somehow Matthew could reconnect with "something in himself" and **validate his self-esteem**, which would enable him to live for himself, rather than simply being a provider for his wife and children.

In our sessions, I asked him to talk about his marriage over the last year, and whether he had any indication that his wife was planning to move away.

**Matthew explains that he knew nothing about this at all, and that he believed everything was okay between them...**

*"We got up in the morning and I took her a cup of tea. I went to work at 8am and was back by 6.30pm. We had dinner together with the kids if they were home, watched TV or read, went to bed like any other couple. Of course we were rarely intimate... After the birth of our third child Alice, Denise didn't feel like "that". She used to say that she loved me but it was now more like the love you'd feel for a friend.*



*I accepted that as we'd known each other since our teens, but never for one moment did I imagine that she would leave me. I just thought this was normal, nothing out of the ordinary. After all, when you've been married for 18 years "that" goes anyway. I still can't believe it. I can't accept it. I don't want to. The silence is stifling."*

**I was curious about his use of the phrase, "*the silence is stifling*".**

It was if the hollowness and fragility of his loss was experienced as if he were falling into a void. I knew that the therapeutic space had to contain him and help him to activate an increasing awareness of his own resourcefulness and a more coherent sense of self-regulation, whereby he could master his own sense of purpose and renewed individuality.

Matthew continues; *“Maybe that was it. Maybe I never showed her enough attention. If only I could do it all over again and let her know how much I loved her”*.

**In our sessions together I can feel how much he lives in regret...**

*“I should have been more attentive... I should have seen the signs... I should have been more forthcoming with my affection... I should have appreciated her more, helped her more, paid more interest, listened to her more.”*



Regret is perhaps the most fundamental part of grief. Matthew laments all the things he *wished* he'd done differently. He wishes he could turn back time.

**The question is, would this be the right thing to do?**

After all, when a separation like this happens, it's because the other person (in this case his wife Denise) needs something more. She needs to find fulfilment in life after being a wife for 18 years and a mother for 16 years.

**To me, the separation seems more to do with what she wants for *herself* rather than what Matthew has been unable to give to her.**

At this point, however, Matthew is unable to see that Denise is a **separate person** with her own aspirations, goals and dreams. Her decision to carve out a new path is because she believed this would fulfil her, and nothing that Matthew could do would fundamentally change this.

Of course, this makes it no less painful for Matthew.

In “reality” he could see that no one has the power to quash another's desire for fulfilment and self-development. Yet in his “irrational” mind he was completely overpowered by chronic rejection, loss and hostility towards Denise's decision.

He felt she had acted irresponsibly, irreversibly damaging the family unit and the chances of them enjoying a long and happy future together.

The core factor in Matthew's grief was one of complete and utter rejection. He found it impossible to be alone and couldn't bear his own company. This was all part of the "**stifling silence**" he described.



The loss of his wife had catapulted him into a deep sorrow. He was experiencing love withdrawal and felt it so sharply that he felt he could no longer survive without her close by.

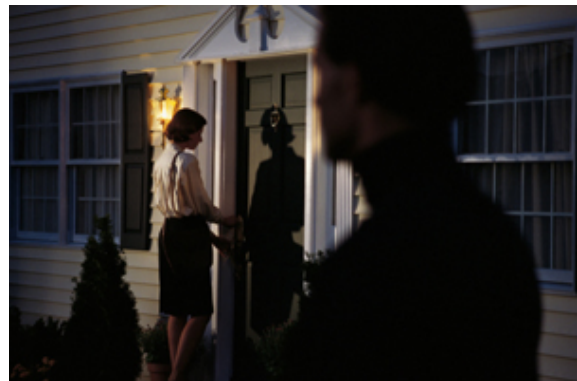
*"I don't exist now, I don't know who I am anymore", he said to me. "Denise was my wife, my soul mate. The one. About a year ago we were planning our retirement together. If she had gone off with another man it would have been easier I think, but to do this? Just for an education?"*

**Matthew was clearly bewildered at Denise's decision to leave the marriage for reasons of personal development.**

Yet I believe that if she had left for another man, it would have been just as difficult for him to cope with as Matthew had no sense of self-regulation without Denise. She was the rock and the centre of the family unit.

He described the lengths that he would go to in order to try convince her to come back home; phoning her several times a day, begging her for forgiveness for taking her for granted for 18 years.

If he knew she was nearby at a friend's house, **he would hide the car one block away and watch her.**



One day he drove 200 miles just to see what the University campus looked like, so that he'd have a picture in his mind of exactly where she was.

Matthew stayed in a hotel overnight to watch her walking through the main gates; *"just for one glimpse of her"* he explains, *"Just to see her for one fleeting moment. Anything just to feel closer to her, even from a distance."*



Professor of Psychology E. Mark Cummings who teaches at the University of Notre Dame introduced the notion of attachment, whereby the child uses the primary caregiver as **a secure base from which to explore, and when necessary, as a haven of safety and a source of comfort.**



John Bowlby, meanwhile, a British psychiatrist, said that it is not uncommon when facing loss, rejection, love addiction or separation that one individual that depended on their partner to be a secure emotional base will be fraught with **“separation distress in the absence of the attachment figure.”**

Matthew goes onto describe how he would drive for miles to see Denise, (his secure attachment figure) for a fleeting moment at the University gates to re-experience security, even for a moment, in order to alleviate his symptoms of love withdrawal.

For Matthew, Denise had become a **safe haven**, the security blanket that he had relied upon ever since his mother had passed away in the mid-1990s.

## Matthew’s Parents

Matthew’s mother suffered throughout her life with bipolar affective disorder and lost her husband in a car accident when Matthew was just four. Her mental illness would mean that she experienced long periods of depression followed by extreme elevated highs known as “mania”.

People who suffer from bipolar disorder often have long bouts of crying, sadness and melancholia. They also frequently display a negative outlook on life, make very little eye contact and are often emotionally distant.

Because of his mother’s inability to soothe and comfort her children it came as no surprise to me that Matthew saw in Denise a **“safe haven”**, a secure base to take refuge from the emotional deprivation of his early childhood.



John Bowlby used the term **“maternal deprivation”** to refer to the separation



or loss of the mother, as well as a failure to develop an attachment between the mother and child.

This is certainly something that Matthew experienced, due to his mother's Bipolar disorder coupled with her own grief at the loss of her husband.



Furthermore, Jaques Lacan, a post-Freudian psychoanalyst, defined the “**mirror phase**” whereby the child's first recognition of itself is in the mirror of the mother's look.

For Matthew, it would have meant that his primary care giver was unable to offer him a sense of his own identity due to his mother's inability to “look back” at her child, which would create a sense of loss, **and an enduring need to search for completeness in a significant other.**

D.W. Winnicott, meanwhile, saw mirroring occurring in the “loving gaze” of the mother, the gaze of the “good-enough mother”, a confirmation of the varying moods that the newborn child is presenting to her.



Again, it was no surprise to me that the dissolution of Matthew's marriage would render him vulnerable to emotional trauma as all recognition of himself as a person had been rejected.

**Matthew went on to explain what happened after the 200 mile journey to the University...**

*“I felt on edge, agitated, weak and I couldn't stop myself from texting, emailing and phoning her, pleading for her to come back. I knew that was the last thing she wanted to hear as she'd told me I had to let go, and let her do what she'd wanted to do for years. She told me to find a hobby or something that could occupy me but nothing else interested me. Deep down I want what's best for her though. She'd been reading these books every evening... Maybe she knew then that she was going to leave me... Maybe she'd been planning it for months?”*

Now Matthew's grief visibly turns to anger. I ask him how much difference it would have made to him if Denise had told him in advance what she was thinking.



He explains; *“It would have changed everything, just to know that I meant enough to her to tell me. To show that she cared about what we had shared together over all these years, and our children, too.”*

For Matthew, the attachment bond had been broken very abruptly, and he felt that the emotional security he’d shared for over 18 years had been severed, throwing him into a debilitating state of anxiety, confusion and even betrayal.

More often than not, couples **“fall out of sync”** with one another because they don’t feel a secure emotional attachment, a sense of togetherness, or they don’t feel safe enough to speak to one another for fear of disappointing their partner.

**The question was, what really happened to their communication, prior to her leaving?**

If I could touch upon this, I felt as though Matthew could start to make sense of the “disappearance”, and the disbelief which kept him locked in a vortex of grief, despair, anger and sadness.

I asked him to describe what their communication was like, and whether they spoke about their individual ambitions and goals.



To my surprise, he said; *“Well she used to go on about something she’d read in a book about different tribes in Papua New Guinea or other far off tribal areas. She talked about doing a placement in a place like that. She became preoccupied with these books and how she would love to go there. I just felt we were living in two different worlds. She wasn’t the woman I married. She was different somehow, but I thought nothing of it.”*

**For Matthew, the secure connection had started to disappear.**

He didn’t feel as close to her as in the past, when they were like “two kids playing together.”

*“We got on so well”, he told me. “But she began to change after the birth of our third child. That’s when she wanted to sleep in separate bedrooms. She said it was because she’d be up a lot in the night but there was no way I was going to have that.”*

Denise sensed that Matthew wasn't at all interested in the Papua New Guinea idea, as that represented her leaving him – not so much geographically, but the fact that their shared sense of secure attachment had been broken.

As a result, they began to occupy two very different places, something that I describe as **“Living Alone Together”**.

Of course, Denise wasn't there to tell her side of the story, but it started to become a lot clearer and as I got closer to Matthew's broken attachment bond with Denise whilst they were together...



He goes on to say; *“Sometimes I felt her steely contempt towards me. I didn't know why. I just thought she was having a lot of bad days. She'd become angry and the silences went on for days. She did mention a long time ago that I undermined her if people came to dinner... that I talked down to her.”*

**I ask Matthew if he agreed with that, and if so, why he did it...**

*“She was a different person when people were round for dinner. She came to life, and became the woman I married. She'd be laughing and joking and everyone loved her, but with me, she was distant, unhappy, and sometimes I felt that she didn't even like me, let alone love me.”*

**I could hear clearly now that Matthew felt unappreciated, dismissed and unloved.**

Perhaps Denise felt exactly the same. Perhaps she withdrew, and in turn Matthew felt shut out and unable to reach Denise, just as she felt unable to reach him.

**Slowly and surely, Matthew starts to make sense of how this “breakdown” happened between them.**

The closer we get to what really happened between Matthew and Denise on a deeper, more profound level, the more Matthew's traumatic symptoms of loss and abandonment begin to calm.

During our last few sessions, I tried to help him further understand the severity of his symptoms, and the sharp edge of grief and sadness began to subside. He was no longer unable to eat, sleep or keep his life together.

But then things took a turn for the worse...

## Matthew Discovers Online Dating



After 5 months of therapy, Matthew told me that he'd joined an online dating site, revealing that he didn't want to go through life without love; that living alone was still extremely difficult.

I could understand this as he'd never been alone. From the age of 17 he'd gone from one relationship to another, until he finally met Denise in his early 20s.

I was relieved to know that he'd found the strength to love again. I just wanted him to make sure that it was healthy love, and not "hungry" love, and that he wouldn't be searching for completeness in the other person, **thus maintaining the chronic rejection cycle.**

By this stage, Matthew felt much more empowered and saw his loss as something that had transformed him for the better.

He could now speak to his wife as a friend and was happy that she had found self-fulfilment. It seemed as though he no longer saw her as someone who had deserted him.

Perhaps the most significant realization for Matthew was that his relationship had been deteriorating for many years. There were definitely signs of distance and disconnection but he had failed to see just how much they were **"living alone together"**.

Yet perhaps even if had seen this, he would have been unable to leave anyway, as a state of co-dependency had already bound him and Denise together like two Siamese twins joined at the hip – a situation which can lead to people becoming fused and enmeshed in a relationship of numbness and silence with an ability to ever imagine being without that person.

As he spoke to me, I felt happy that he had joined an online dating site. He seemed so excited because he'd been receiving so many positive responses to his profile.

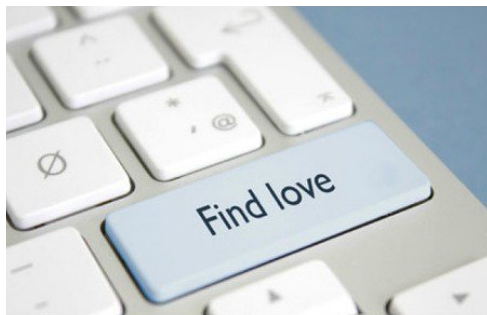


He explained that women seemed to respond to him and that it was making a huge difference to his self-confidence, as he'd barely left the house since the separation.

Matthew looked well, too. His skin looked warmer and less ashen; he'd put on some weight and had taken up running. He looked healthier and happier.

**But nothing prepared me for what happened when I next saw him...**

## **Matthew Had Now Become ADDICTED to Online Dating**



Six months had passed, and Matthew wanted to see me again.

He arrived and sat in the leather chair directly opposite me and was visibly distressed.

He looked completely different in every way, too. His hair, which was once a greying brown colour, was now a very dark auburn shade, which seemed such a contrast against his fair skin.

He had grown a neatly shaven beard which was also dyed to match the colour of his hair.

He was dressed in a trendy suede beige jacket with a smart polo jumper underneath, blue jeans and brogue maroon shoes that were highly polished creating a glistening shine.

I found it hard to believe that this was the same man that sat in front of me suffering from chronic grief and sadness several months back. **His entire look had completely changed.**

### **So why had Matthew come back?**

Quite simply, he was unable to be alone, which unfortunately led to a set of devastating consequences.

**For brevity, the timeline below is outlined in bullet point format...**

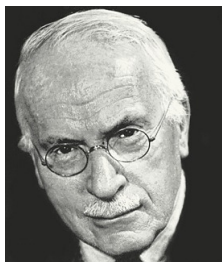
- ✓ Matthew meets 26 women over a period of 6 months. Some of them he dates a few times, while others would reject him at the first meeting, which leads to Matthew re-experiencing rejection
- ✓ Due to Matthew's caring and thoughtful nature, even if he knew in the first meeting that there was no spark, he finds it impossible to hurt someone's feelings. So rather than be honest and end it quickly, he would often continue to see the women. This becomes very important later on.
- ✓ Matthew spends all his waking hours searching online for "the one". He becomes familiar with every social networking site so that he can be online or ready to answer the phone at any given time. This in itself becomes an addiction that begins to take over his life.
- ✓ Finally he meets a woman that he feels "chemistry" with. They chat for hours by phone or Skype before meeting in person. She sends him several photographs of herself, and without even meeting her, Matthew becomes obsessed with settling down and having a future together. Already he feels that he's falling in love, and if she fails to phone him at the exact time she stated, he is fraught with anxiety and loss.
- ✓ He quickly becomes fixated on her photos and spends hours looking at her. It feels right, as if he's known her forever.
- ✓ He takes her photos everywhere he goes and becomes a hostage to his mobile phone, constantly checking it and waiting for it to ring. He looks her workplace up online and travels miles across London to see if he can get a glimpse of her coming out of work (she has no idea this is happening).
- ✓ The woman finally makes contact and they arrange to meet for a drink. Matthew is elated and explains to me that it feels as though all the grief and loss he experienced in the breakup of his marriage has disappeared, which reinforces his unequivocal love for this new found friend.
- ✓ They meet and get along well, with the woman oblivious to the fact that he has already been to her workplace and watched her from afar prior to their meeting.
- ✓ They are together for two months and the relationship is intense. The woman wants Matthew to divorce his wife of 18 years, but Matthew hasn't

banked on this happening. He isn't ready to do that, and explains to his girlfriend that he will need time.

- ✓ The woman wants a future with Matthew and finds it difficult that he visits his 3 children every week. She begins to feel jealous that Matthew is still very attached to his wife and family.
- ✓ Suddenly, Matthew is the one that feels overwhelmed with her demands and expectations, and ironically he begins to feel smothered and engulfed. (It is not unusual that a person who suffers from love addiction can be engulfed and overwhelmed when the other person demands too much from them. This is due to the fact that love addiction **requires complete unavailability**, giving them a false sense of desire and longing. Once this is attained fully, the love addict has no further attraction to aspire to, the conquest is over and reality steps in. The realisation that this person "WANTS ME" leads to shame and guilt and the love addict can no longer respond in a mutual, loving way.)
- ✓ Matthew realises that he can't give her what she wants, but due to Matthew being unable to reject someone, the love addict quickly shifts into a **Love Avoidant**. As this continues, the woman rejects him first, throwing him into a familiar dark place where he is overcome with loss, grief and rejection once again.
- ✓ Within one week of the relationship ending, Matthew is back online due to his inability to be alone. He quickly meets another woman but she explains that she wants a "companion", not an intense relationship. She also tells Matthew that he is a little older than she anticipated and that she prefers men with dark hair, a beard and muscles.
- ✓ Within a week, Matthew has changed his entire physical appearance to suit her expectations, and joins a gym.
- ✓ She explains to Matthew that she will only see him when she is free. This unavailability and rejection triggers the most overwhelming sense of despair.
- ✓ He tries to keep to her strict requirements, and in between them meeting up, he becomes a slave to his emotional life; unable to function, longing and yearning for the next meeting.



- ✓ He takes up weight lifting and running to keep him looking youthful in the hope that she will want him more, but she never contacts Matthew again.
- ✓ The more the woman rejects him, the further into depression and helplessness Matthew falls.
- ✓ Ironically, her unresponsiveness and distance was a complete match/hook for Matthew's love addiction. He explains it as something malignant inside of him that he wishes to be removed.
- ✓ Matthew falls into a deep depression and speaks of feeling like a slave to this other woman – like a puppet on a string where she has all the control. Yet he explains that right from the very beginning, she did tell him that she *only* wanted a “companion.”
- ✓ What makes this worse for Matthew is that he had *literally* become her slave too, as sexually she enjoyed having this kind of power over him, only to send him away when it was all over.
- ✓ 6 months on, Matthew calls me for an appointment. He knows that he must understand why these events are happening to him, and his financial situation is worsening because he's been taking so much time off work.
- ✓ Matthew tells me that he won't be using online dating in the future, and that now, more than ever, he knows he has to get his life back together.
- ✓ Finally, he explains that he has been having a reoccurring dream. He wakes up believing that it's really happening – and then can't get back to sleep again.



Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1960) a psychoanalyst based in Switzerland believed that the primary way to gain knowledge was through the existence of the unconscious mind.

Jung is one of the contemporary contributors to symbolisation and dream analysis.

**Dreams therefore are the window of the unconscious mind;** they serve to achieve wholeness and are often the key to a problem that one might be facing in their waking life.

# The Dream of the Lost Suitcase



Matthew is walking naked through a barren landscape, and has been walking for many miles in his Brogues without food or water.

**He has lost his suitcase with all his personal belongings**, including photographs of his mother when she was young, and photos of his wife Denise on their wedding day.

He knows that if he finds his suitcase he'll be safe, and then he can change his shoes from his maroon Brogues back to some soft sleepers which were also in the case.

It's dusk and there is no sign of life, except for a high pitched sound that blends into a reverberating gong like a Tibetan bowl.

The sound is close to silence but it comforts him. He no longer feels alone and lies in a foetal position to rest. As he rests on the earth he touches his stomach, where there seems to be an abscess that's swelling.

**It's itchy so he keeps scratching at it.**

Somehow he knows that he has to burst it. He reaches in, **and finally the key to the suitcase is in his left hand.**

He is elated that he has the key and suddenly he looks ahead and the barren landscape becomes a vast dry wheat field. He reaches to touch the soaring wheat and as he does so he sees his suitcase, takes the key and opens it.

He puts on his sleepers as his feet feel bruised and blistered, and then looks at the photograph of his mother. As he looks deeper, the photo comes to life and his mother cossets him in her arms.

He awakens as if it's real and feels strangely soothed, as if he has gone back in time.

**I ask Matthew if he feels any associations to the dream...**

He explains that it felt like the “malignant thing” that he spoke about in a previous session had finally burst, and out of the abscess came the key to his suitcase.

**This suggests that something so fundamentally deep in Matthew longed to be expressed and “released” into the open.**

And he wants to find the courage to stand on his own two feet in the comfort of the soft sleepers that he finds in his lost suitcase.



**The loss of the suitcase represents our past experience that we carry with us everywhere.**

This psychological damage was triggered by the dissolution of his marriage to Denise.

Yet the wound of this loss goes back to his earlier experience of not being “mirrored” by his mother, as she too was fraught with the grief and loss of her late husband and her own struggle with bipolar disorder.

Matthew had taken his traumatic loss and fear of being alone from one relationship to another, **and now the dream indicates that he has to move forward and let go of the past** – to no longer project all his yearning and longing for completeness onto every woman he meets.

He speaks about feeling cosseted by his mother in the wheat fields. Even though it was a dream, he says; *“it felt so vivid. Her eyes looked straight into me, no longer distracted by her manic outbreaks caused by her illness.”*

**His fear of being alone, dissolving into a vortex of non-existence was diminishing.** His Brogue shoes were replaced in the dream by comfortable slippers symbolising Matthew’s ability to renounce the “masculine act” and assimilate being vulnerable and authentic.

In the dream, his naked body walks for miles across a barren landscape denoting Matthew’s fear of being exposed, misjudged, unloved and afraid of rejection... Defenceless with nowhere to hide and no one to comfort him, until he sees himself through the eyes of his mother.



We discuss what had happened to Matthew, and how he started to transfer his addiction to love into an addiction to online dating...

### **Our work included...**

- ✓ **We look at Matthew's relationships with the women in his life.** Matthew had one sister 5 years older than him who moved to Australia when Matthew was 13. He describes this experience as another loss in his life, leaving him at home with his mother and his Grandmother who he describes as very domineering. He didn't leave home until his mid-20s and shortly afterwards meets Denise, who he would eventually marry.
- ✓ **We explore Matthew's dream in relation to his persona, the self that he portrays to the world and how he wanted others to view him.** Matthew dyed his hair and changed his appearance in order to gain the attention he wanted from the woman he met online. I helped him to understand that he was trying to become what others wanted him to be, and how this reflected his chronic low self-esteem, insecurities and his search for positive approval.
- ✓ **We addressed the need to create a more positive attitude in the event of losing a "significant other".** One way to approach this is that we can either be desperately lonely, or find a way to enjoy the sovereignty that solitude brings. This idea of turning a negative into a positive connected with Matthew, as he'd spent most of his life with an expectation for others to liberate him
- ✓ **We then took this idea one step further.** When there is no support among family and friends, he could either feel alone, isolated and resentful or rejoice in the fact that he will survive this immense human need for self-approval and confirmation and move towards feeling emotionally free.
- ✓ **We addressed the consequences of losing his father.** Matthew describes vividly how his father was a kind and gentle man and how he would take care of his mother, especially when she suffered bouts of depression.

He remembers how his father used to collect records of country and western music, but if he played them his mother would get more agitated so Matthew and his sister used to go into his father's office and play plastic guitars and build Lego houses.

*“I remember dad used to like making furniture and I helped him sand down some wood for a coffee table he made. It seems so clear, I can almost smell the wood. I remember it was a pine table. Mum liked it.”*

### **I then notice something in Matthew that I’d not seen in previous sessions...**



Speaking about his father fills him with a sense of joy; a shared task they did together, sanding down wood, with country and western music playing in the background. He seemed lighter, more playful in his speech.

**So far he had described a world of women;** mothers, domineering grandmothers, an estranged sister, his wife Denise and numerous women he went in search of in order to find solace and completeness.

**Yet here I could hear that it was the father who ignited pleasure in him, which cut short at the tender age of four.**

It began to make sense that Matthew’s role as a small child would be to protect and care for his mother to comfort her through the loss of her husband.

This was a story of loss and the absent father and it saddened me to imagine the kind of desolation that had occurred in Matthew’s life.

His dream of walking naked through a barren landscape encapsulates the depth of his grief, and it was little wonder that his love addiction and subsequent chronic rejection had ruled his entire life.

### **We were beginning to get to the bottom of Matthew’s problems...**

We then moved the treatment forward in order to help Matthew to cease seeking approval of himself through others.

### **Our work included...**

- ✓ We worked through Matthew’s anxious attachment and the fear that he wouldn’t survive without Denise in his life
- ✓ I helped Matthew to understand how in all his relationships he seemed to play an emasculated role, rather like a puppet that could be pulled any

which way, leaving him completely powerless. This sense of self-abandonment lies at the core of anyone who suffers from love addiction.

- ✓ We explored Matthew's fear of falling out of an emotional connection with Denise, crushing any illusion of togetherness and secure emotional connection.
- ✓ I helped Matthew to understand the mother/son relationship and maternal deprivation. Matthew would describe in great detail how it was *him* who would be attentive towards his mother. He spoke with a warm tenderness in his voice and explained how he would comb her hair and massage her feet every evening, as he knew how low she felt. I could clearly see here how he would be prone to being servile and adoring towards any woman he would meet.
- ✓ We worked through issues regarding his sister's absence and how that triggered further feelings of loss.
- ✓ We talked about the concept of "Projection" and how all women Matthew had a crush on were borne out of the desire to recreate what he wanted from his mother in early childhood.
- ✓ We discussed the concept of "Separation anxiety" and Matthew's longing for a secure base in every woman he felt an attraction towards.
- ✓ We discussed positive ways that Matthew could take care of himself and build emotional self-reliance. This meant dealing with any kind of rejection and being able to survive love withdrawal if his love was not reciprocated.
- ✓ I helped Matthew to face head-on the overwhelming effects of primal abandonment and the fear of isolation.
- ✓ We addressed his longing for love and how Matthew needed to experience a sense of self-love, validation and self-generosity.
- ✓ We worked through Matthew's panic, anxiety, fear of separation and of being alone.
- ✓ We carried out self-development exercises and visualisations, to help Matthew gain strength and self-worth.

- ✓ We re-directed his craving for love to significant new connections with himself.
- ✓ I helped Matthew to build healthy self-esteem and emotional self-reliance.
- ✓ We discussed the key differences between healthy love and insecure anxious love.
- ✓ I helped Matthew to stop searching for a safe emotional connection in another woman, and instead work towards finding a secure emotional connection to himself.
- ✓ I taught Matthew how to gain self-integrity and self-respect, and how to find the strength to let go when love becomes painful.
- ✓ I showed Matthew how to survive a painful separation and heartbreak that can occur through loss and abandonment. (In Matthew's case it was about changing his views, thoughts and behaviours to stop the negative cycle of self-blame.)
- ✓ We discussed what it is to "love too much" and to find a way through romantic love addiction, rejection, insecurity and the desire for reassurance.
- ✓ We worked on moving forward, beyond past hurts, and instead focusing on things that would inspire Matthew to feel a sense self-accomplishment.
- ✓ We worked through shame and blame: parents, primary caregivers and past relationships that led to rejection, co-dependency and abandonment issues.
- ✓ I helped Matthew to recognise that he was being drawn to "emotionally unavailable partners" which would then trigger his abandonment issues and emotional exclusion.

In his last relationship we see that Matthew had **changed his entire persona** in order to gain attention from the woman he met online.

Of course, most people would have declined her offer of "a now and then relationship" if they knew what was best for them, but unfortunately, for someone craving so much attention for love and acceptance, Matthew was unable to protect himself from this kind of need, and the inevitable rejection that followed.



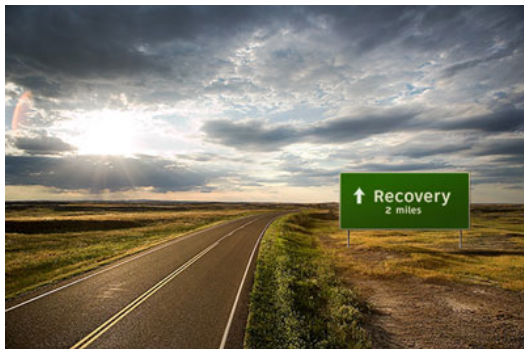
We clearly see here how Matthew passively agrees to this kind of unhealthy relationship dynamic, without any thought as to what is good for HIM, or that it might trigger his abandonment fears.

I'm sure many would agree to a "casual" relationship as that might suit them very well, but for Matthew it would lead to negative consequences, **rather like signing your signature to something that may lead to your own emotional bankruptcy.**

In my sessions, I know that if I can help people to understand WHY they're acting the way they are, and then be able to spot the signs in the future, I can help them to avoid the slippery slope to emotional devastation.

This "**awakening**" becomes the turning point, whereby they begin to re-educate themselves and eventually break the repetitive cycle of love addiction, chronic rejection and abandonment.

## The Road to Recovery



After a few months of treatment, Matthew sits in his normal chair and seems light and happy in himself.

He tells me that he has enrolled in a **furniture making course**, building bespoke hand-made pieces.

He goes on to say that if he could put more time into furniture making, it would focus his mind on something positive and creative, and assist his self-development.

He'd been working in an office for so many years and he felt like this was part of the problem; that he was so used to it. The work no longer engaged him.

He explained that he would stay in his current job for a few more years and in time create his own furniture business.

**I reminded him that he enjoyed helping his father to make the wooden coffee table, and what he says next takes me by surprise...**

*“I need to be around men much more, and one of the things that attracted me to this course is that it is run by two men who have showcased their bespoke furniture since the 1960s.”* (This would have been around the age his father was when Matthew helped his dad sand down the coffee table).

Matthew then goes on to say; *“There are around 30 students of all ages that do this course, and I am happy to say I shouldn’t get in too much trouble as most of them are males!”*

He smiles and tells me this feels right. Already he has made a chair out of chestnut wood and for a whole two weeks **had not thought about his marriage to Denise, or the other women he met online.**



For many who have fallen into the grip of an addiction to love, emotional isolation and grief, it is as though they are literally fighting for their lives, **overcome with such powerful emotions that it is difficult to hold on to any kind of normality.**

The fierce waves of anxiety at the slightest glimpse of loss, rejection and abandonment are so emotionally crushing that it literally feels as if they are taken over by some almighty power; an avalanche of raw trepidation.

Often, the only thing that can contain this kind of emotional trauma is to work towards self-development, **to build a secure emotional connection with oneself**, and to know that you *will* survive this most painful affliction of the heart, however terrifying it feels at the time.

By the end of our sessions together I felt like Matthew had been on a long turbulent journey of unimaginable pain.

From being married, secure and safe, **Matthew’s entire World suddenly collapsed around him.** Denise had been his “secure base”. His foundation. He believed he was loved and secure, which left his self-worth and self-value completely intact.

I was so happy for Matthew that he was about to embark on a new life, and felt that he was now able to be self-regulated and self-fulfilled.

Through his furniture making course, he even began to understand how his wife Denise felt when she realised what it was that gave her life a sense of fulfilment and purpose.

Matthew had clearly gained a sense of purpose himself. He was now excited and passionate about the possibility of achieving something for himself **and was able to spend hours alone in his own company**, without yearning or longing to find the love that he felt would complete him.



At the end of his last session, he referred back to his late father and spoke about his mother with complete tenderness. He knew that she would be proud of him.

It felt as though life had somehow been on pause, and now he could see the World with renewed vision.

**Finally, Matthew could begin to validate himself, without the need for someone else to validate him.**

Matthew's therapy finished and he didn't return again.

The last I heard, he had set up his own furniture business, and was dating a woman he'd met on the course.

## **Did You Relate to Matthew's Story?**

**If so, here are 14 further steps you can take...**

**STEP #1: Be careful not to swap one addiction for another.** Many sufferers will turn to self-medicating, smoking, drugs and alcohol to help them through this painful time, or in Matthew's case, online dating.

**STEP #2: Make a significant new connection with yourself.** Build your self-esteem, gain self-worth and shed self-defeating thoughts.

**STEP #3: Try not to dwell on past mistakes or regrets.** Accept that you can't change the past and focus instead on the present and the future.

**STEP #4:** Practise “letting go”. Love addiction is often felt as an insatiable hunger. Remember, you don’t NEED the other person.

**STEP #5:** Do something you are passionate about. Choose something that gives your life meaning and purpose. Remember, this has happened because you have “projected” all that you are and all your passion onto the person of addiction.

**STEP #6:** Don’t put your life on hold whilst you wait for love to come. Instead stay focused on your own dreams, goals and aspirations, and set new goals and projects for your own personal growth.

**STEP #7:** Discover emotional pain management tools to help you overcome the pain of romantic love withdrawal. Make sure you complete the guided imagery sessions in your 15-Step Recovery Programme, as this will help you reduce the stress hormones that may be limiting your recovery.

**STEP #8:** Hold on to the fact that you *will* be free one day and you can survive love withdrawal. This won’t last forever. Freedom, happiness and a chance at real, healthy love is just around the corner.

**STEP #9:** Stop seeking approval and validation from others. Remember, it is only YOU who can accomplish this. Self-validation is the only thing that matters.

**STEP #10:** Stop “abandoning” *yourself* in relationships. This way you can finally find autonomy and emotional self-reliance.

**STEP #11:** Remember that it’s OK to be alone. If you’ve been stuck in a destructive relationship cycle, it’s BETTER to be alone for a while. And don’t worry, you *will* survive the pain of romantic love withdrawal.

**STEP #12:** Know that you CAN survive without the person of addiction. Love withdrawal can feel as if a part of your body has been amputated. But believe me, YOU CAN SURVIVE THIS!

**STEP #13:** Each day give yourself at least three things to do that will reflect your new-found independence. Doing this will strengthen your ability to take care of yourself, and build emotional self-reliance.

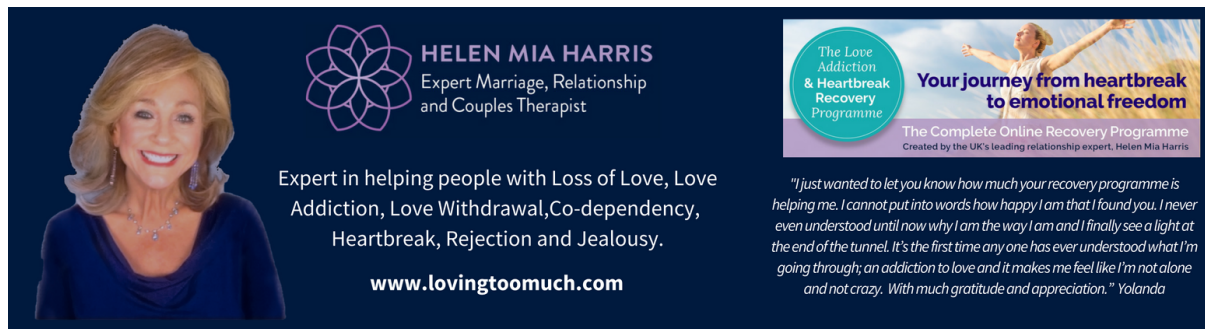
**STEP #14:** Make choices that impact the way you live in a POSITIVE way. Don’t allow yourself to play the role of victim. Instead, make decisions that reflect your strength as a man or woman.



Like Matthew, once you've applied the principles of my [Surviving the Addictive Love Cycle](#) program to your daily life, you will emerge **emotionally free** of the debilitating sense of powerlessness and start to experience a stronger, more vital connection to yourself.

And very soon you'll be free to find **real healthy love**, and true unbridled happiness.

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**Best Wishes,**

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