

# Surviving an addiction to Romantic Love



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Addiction, Heartbreak and Codependency.

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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.

*“Romantic love addiction is not a story about love. It is a story about powerlessness, heartbreak, helplessness, rejection and addiction to the feeling of being in love. Love Addiction is about unrequited love, unfulfilled dreams, romantic fantasies, obsession and the longing for love to be reciprocated. Fearing abandonment and loneliness, the person addicted to love will either stay in, or return to painful, destructive relationships even when they “know” they should walk away.” — **Helen Mia Harris***

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## **A Personal Message from the Author**



Hi, my name is Helen Mia Harris and I specialise in helping people who suffer from love addiction, co-dependency and the painful effects of rejection, separation anxiety, insecurity and abandonment in their relationships.

I also work with couples who are experiencing **toxic patterns** in the way they relate to one another, whereby dysfunctional communication and an unhealthy attachment can reinforce the love addiction cycle.

During my face-to-face 90 minute recovery programmes, I help my clients to deal with their most painful and raw emotions that surround love addiction and the love relationship, and I’m here to help you do the same.

**In just a moment, I’m going to tell you about my own battle with love addiction.**

But first...

## **What is Love Addiction?**

Love addiction is a condition whereby individuals often fall in love with someone who **fails to return their love and affection**.

More often than not, the love addict will be attracted to somebody who is emotionally unavailable, emotionally unresponsive or someone who will disregard the relationship, show no interest or “appear” to be there yet not really present.

Despite this, the love addict forms the belief that this person will *complete* them and is their “soul mate”.

Love addicts feel that they CANNOT live without the person to whom they are addicted, and that life feels desolate and empty without them. This is why romantic love addiction is so hard to break.

Often, the person who is the subject of the love addict’s attention may feel an inability to respond or reciprocate love which can **reinforce intense feelings of rejection and anxiety in the love addict.**

### **LOVE ADDICTION IS PAINFUL**

Typically, love addicts would rather endure tremendous pain and suffering than contemplate ending the relationship. They experience as much panic over the withdrawal experience as a drug addict does while going ‘cold turkey’.

Love addicts cling to the idea of being in a relationship, even short term relationships, because being in a relationship signifies being **lovable**.

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#### **A Love Poem by Pablo Neruda**

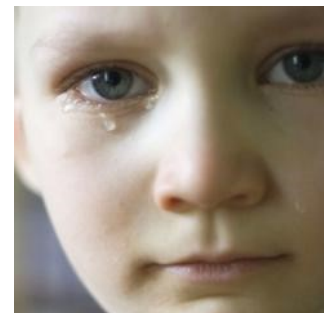


*I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where. I love you simply, without problems or pride. I love you in this way because I do not know any other way of loving but this, in which there is no I or you, so intimate that your hand upon my chest is my hand, so intimate that when I fall asleep your eyes close.*

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### **The Causes of Love Addiction**

Often, love addiction and co-dependency in relationships are directly linked to things like abandonment, neglect, rejection, being bullied at school, loneliness, social isolation/exclusion, poor nurturing and mirroring issues that occurred in early childhood; **and this influences a person’s choice of romantic partner.**



If in the formative years, there has been a lack of

mirroring or validation of self; or that a mother hasn't been able to attach to her child for reasons of depression, loss or illness, for example, then when that child grows up, they are more likely to form **unhealthy attachments** to people who they believe can satisfy this longing to be loved.

If you choose someone that is either emotionally withdrawn or absent, for example, this will activate primary fears of abandonment and insecurity, reinforcing one's own sense of "unlovability" and strengthening the debilitating cycle of toxic patterns.

For women who suffer from love addiction, it is often linked to the absent father. And more often than not, she will consequently have relationships with men who are emotionally distant or unresponsive.

**It's uncanny when I ask women, who are distraught from love withdrawal, about their fathers.**



On many occasions, they tell me that the very experience of emotional abandonment they are currently experiencing is *exactly* how they felt about their father, i.e. awkward, clumsy, inept, and emotionally unresponsive, or they knew their father loved them but they were emotionally unable to show it.

Many of these women are desperately trying to **recreate the perfect mirror of the father they longed for**; a father who would catch her if she fell.

However, the father was never able to show her that she was lovable and worthy of approval, and this creates the perfect emotional situation for love addiction to take hold.

**A yearning to merge the absent father with every man she meets is commonplace.**

And inevitably, time and time again, heartbreak occurs when the man leaves.

Many women will go to any length to humiliate, denigrate and blame themselves if a man rejects them in any way, because they long for selfacceptance and confirmation that they are lovable.

## When Love Addiction Strikes...

Love addiction or hungry love begins with an attraction, a glance across a room or an online encounter.

Without even meeting this person, you can experience an immediate infatuation, as if you are being catapulted into another reality by the most exhilarating of feelings.

**You feel as if it is 'love at first sight' and it feels so real.**

You become saturated with feel-good chemicals; serotonin, dopamine, adrenalin and oxytocin, and before you know it, you're hooked.

The soon-to-be Love Addict becomes **excessively preoccupied** and has an insatiable need to know how the relationship will develop in the future and where it's going.

More often than not, it's a woman who is struck by love addiction. However, there are also a great deal of men who suffer at the hands of this affliction, too.

But whether they're male or female, a love addict needs a hook, i.e. a person on which to project this insatiable hunger for love.

When this happens, the loved one or beloved will move quite naturally towards **"love avoidance"** as he or she feels that too much of a demand is being made upon them, and they often feel trapped, overburdened and smothered as a result.



**And this is where the core of the problem lies.**

As long as we believe that our happiness lies in the hands of another person, we will always feel desperately unfulfilled and alone, and will always remain victims in our relationships.

Ironically, love addicted people will often find good, polite, gentle, "present" and emotionally available people boring.

This is not surprising as the love-hungry, passionate person – on a subconscious level – always wants what is **unavailable**.

As a result, they are drawn to relationships with those who are distant and emotionally “cool”, as this acts to strengthen their ravenous hunger for romantic love.



Then, the further away the “beloved” goes, the faster the love addict will run after them, or they will play a game of hide and seek in order to preserve their dignity.

In love addicted relationships, the sufferer’s partner will become the centre of his or her world.

They can become isolated and protective of the relationship and resent their partner’s involvement with work, friends and outside interests, as that might make them less dependent on their love and their relationship.

**Therefore, jealousy and possessiveness plays a huge part in love addiction.**

In other cases, as in unrequited love, obsessed love addicts may experience attachments through secret fantasies, infatuations and obsessive thoughts.

Those addicted to love continue to maintain relationships that are quantified by how much ‘they love’ their partner instead of how ‘loved’ that partner makes them feel.

In healthy relationships, partners share mutual feelings of love and support and desire expansion and growth.

They have **healthy boundaries** that they respect, and should they feel mistreated or unloved, have enough self-esteem to leave their partners, no matter how much they may love them.

In contrast, the love addict finds letting go intolerable, no matter how bad the relationship is, and this is what keeps them fused together.

## **Why Can’t You Simply Retreat & Withdraw?**

Withdrawing from love addiction and co-dependency is **very difficult**, because people suffering from this condition would rather endure the continuing pain and suffering than contemplate ending the relationship.

Even just considering ending the relationship produces as much panic and withdrawal as it would a drug addict who is unable to get their “**fix**”.



This strong sensation is created after years of being caught up in romantic fantasies, adolescent crushes, some of which begin when the “real” world becomes too unbearable and the person instead retires into a world fuelled by heightened hopes and romantic dreams.

For many, “love hunger” can feel so innocent, natural and harmless until the realisation that much of what is felt is unrequited.

Often, sufferers literally abandon themselves, their own life and their own friends and family **for one person** in the belief that without them, they cannot survive.

## **The Signs of Love Addiction or Co-Dependency**

**Below are some of the classic signs of love addiction or co-dependency...**

- ✓ Constantly searching for love and romance and quickly becoming fixated on one person, often unbeknown to the person of addiction
- ✓ Falling in love with people online or in chat rooms without even meeting them in person
- ✓ Consistently choosing unavailable and emotionally unresponsive partners which then triggers the dynamic of hungry love and addiction
- ✓ Using sexuality to seduce partners very early in the relationship for fear of losing them
- ✓ Confusing love addiction and emotional pain with romantic love
- ✓ Being unable to break away from toxic relationships





- ✓ Merging fantasy with reality, being unable to sense when love is not reciprocated and holding on at all costs
- ✓ Experiencing romantic love and “soul mate” feelings when in reality these feelings are unrequited and your partner/person of addiction is unresponsive
- ✓ “Merging” with the beloved, and demonstrating an inability to live together as two separate individuals
- ✓ Misusing sex to mask loneliness and powerlessness
- ✓ Game-playing to manipulate the relationship in order to make the other person as insecure as they might feel
- ✓ Not being attracted to people who are kind, reliable, stable, present and interested in them. They find potential partners like this boring and uninteresting
- ✓ Being drawn to people who need “fixing” or “rescuing”
- ✓ Being unable to leave emotionally abusive relationships after promises that it will never happen again – a chronic inability to imagine life without the loved one
- ✓ Possessing the belief that they do not deserve to be happy (critically low self-esteem)
- ✓ Being terrified of rejection and abandonment, and consequently holding on to the relationship for fear that they won’t survive alone
- ✓ Fearing being open and vulnerable when experiencing intense feelings of love. Often, love addicts will feel immense embarrassment and shame if the person of addiction discovers just how needed they were
- ✓ Constantly texting, emailing, phoning the partner when alone for fear that he/she has left them

## Other Ways to Identify Love Addiction

**Loving Too Much:** When being in love equates to emotional pain, heartache and rejection, leading the sufferer to believe that the more it hurts, the more they must *feel* for the beloved. In this situation, the sufferer is constantly thrown from agony to ecstasy.

**Obsession:** When one person has an overpowering, fixated desire to possess the person to whom they feel desire, and are unable to consider the existing or potential relationship not working or failing.



**Fixated Love:** When one person becomes obsessed and attached to another person, regardless of whether or not the feelings are reciprocated.

**Blind Love:** Blindly besotted by the beloved, showing an inability to grasp reality, where the other person doesn't share those feelings.

**Passionate Love:** A feeling of intense excitement and passion for another person. This can be acquainted with ecstatic love.

**Unrequited Love:** A form of unbalanced love as it is not openly shared. The recipient may not even be aware that they have a devotee, or may not realize how deep or intense their feelings for them are.

**Hungry Love:** This type of love is stormy, where one loves another more than one's own life. It is closely acquainted to loving too much and ravenous love.

**Erotomania:** When a person believes that someone unknown to them, often a celebrity or famous person, has fallen in love with them. They don't even have to meet them in the flesh, as they may have only seen a face on a TV or computer screen and are immediately catapulted into a fantasy world, believing that this stranger might seek them out one day.

**Erotic Love:** Erotic is derived from the Greek word "Eros" and means "desire". This type of love causes strong sexual feelings whereby the person experiencing it has an intense desire for completeness.

## Traumatic Symptoms of Love Addiction

- Panic – Anxiety – Fear of Abandonment – Love Withdrawal
- Merging/Symbiosis – Obsession – Fixation – Insecurity
- Intense Rejection – Possessiveness – Grief and Chronic Sadness
- Dysfunctional Communication – Hysteria – Desperation
- Loss of Self – Powerlessness – Idealising – Attachment Hunger
- Separation Anxiety – Neediness – Vulnerability
- Social Exclusion from Family and the World
- Loneliness – Social Isolation – Chronically Low Self Esteem
- Neediness – Worthlessness – Agitation – Sexual Intensity
- Loss of Reality (Fantasy/Denial) – Jealousy – Revenge – Game Playing
- Co-dependency – Diminished – Obliteration of Reality – Fragmentation
- Self-Medication – Mania – Self Sabotage – Emotional Trauma

## Why I Understand Your Pain

I have spent 22 years working as an expert Relationship Therapist, specialising in helping people cope with loss, heartbreak, insecurity and rejection, and how to survive love withdrawal, abandonment and love addiction.

**However, my knowledge isn't just gleaned from training and books. It comes from my own personal experiences.**



During my early thirties, I experienced the most disturbing condition of the heart – loving too much – and all the anxiety that went with it.

To give you some background, I was working as a Grief and Bereavement Counsellor whilst studying for my Jungian Psychology and Psychotherapy degree.

I was also a Counsellor in an Australian prison working with women who had committed various crimes, including domestic violence, GBH and fraud, and many of these crimes were carried out whilst suffering from drug and/or alcohol addiction.

The common theme amongst these women showed that these crimes were often triggered by a variety of **emotional relationship breakdowns** which included a collapse of a relationship, separation, desertion, co-dependency, anxiety and depression, agoraphobia, powerlessness, immense physical, psychological and emotional abuse.

This caused families to fall apart and sometimes led to unwanted pregnancies.

These women's lives had collapsed in every way imaginable, leading to a complete breakdown of logic and rationality and resulting in jealousy, social exclusion, rejection and abandonment at the heart of their despair.

Often, the breakdown in a relationship led to them committing a crime which in a split-second transformed their life and landed them in prison.

Listening to their stories and going deeper into my studies, I knew then that I had to understand how **ONE PERSON** could destroy another person's life to such a degree.

It was as if this one person held the key to their entire existence and purpose; their self-esteem and self-approval, and if he or she was to abandon or reject them, it would lead to a downward spiral into nothingness and despair.

**Little did I know it at the time, but that “one person” was about to find me, and turn my entire life upside down.**

## **My Story**

It's important to say that for the first two months of this relationship, the one which later caused such grief, **our love was completely mutual**. In fact, we were deeply in love. My anxious symptoms only began after his behaviour became erratic, distant and unavailable.



*This is the key factor, as it's the unresponsiveness and emotional unavailability from the one you adore that sits at the core of love addiction, and creates the feeling of anxiety, rejection and abandonment.*

By the third month of this relationship, I had begun to sense something quite worrying, as one moment he'd speak of a joint future with marriage and children whilst the next moment he would completely cut off from me.

He'd be there, but not quite there, telling me that he needed to be free of commitment and all responsibilities, requiring long breaks away from me.

## **Why Didn't I Just Walk Away?**

I continued to believe that things would change one day and we'd walk off in to the sunset together. I would tell myself that he would see the light and it was just his fear of closeness that stood in the way.

I encouraged him to read self-help books, in the vain hope that he would see himself more clearly and understand **his fear of commitment and closeness**.

Ironically, he was possessive and jealous of *me*, so I learnt to adapt my behaviour around his needs so he didn't feel insecure.

However, the more I became attentive, expressive and present with him, the more emotionally distant he became with me, before finally shutting down entirely.

I was the one who was shut out and rejected, yet I blamed myself for "feeling" too much. It was bewildering. All the yo-yoing back and forth was cruel and heartless.

Friends kept telling me he was a narcissist, but even with all my training, I couldn't see it.

## **Who Had I Become?**

**To cope with the fear of losing him, I became someone most unlike myself...**

I decided to hide my true feelings from him, as even loving him a little would cause him to close down on me. I would go to great lengths to avoid seeing him for two weeks at a time, as I wanted to avoid him rejecting me first.

**Over time I learned that two weeks was his deadline, literally.**

I'd pretend to be preoccupied and fabricate a busy 'full' life as I knew that this would gain his attention and release him from feeling pressured.

Little did he know I'd spend those two weeks unable to function, falling apart, drenched with the most annihilating sense of emptiness, grief and sadness.

After two weeks, on the very day that he'd agreed to see me, he was happy, elated even, and more than "emotionally responsive" towards me. I remember thinking that this was the "bonus".



This would make the two weeks of longing for him worth it. **The ecstatic high I felt far outweighed the loss that I felt without him.**

He would be completely present, happy and passionate to see me. But within a few days of euphoric love and romance, the cycle would repeat itself once more, as very quickly he would pull back and abandon the relationship again.

I could not be 'me', so over time I turned myself into a different woman; a woman that felt nothing at all. Yet inside I felt powerless and vulnerable beyond belief.

The man that would eventually take me so close to my own disintegration met me as a very strong and powerful woman; someone who gave all her love and compassion to her patients.

**But that person had now disappeared and died.**

He would pursue me, but only whilst I played the "ice queen game", which was so far removed from who I was.



His constant mixed messages caused me to fall apart. The irony at the time was that I was training to become a psychotherapist and counsellor, yet I couldn't work out the contradictions in his messages.

**I now know him to be a Love Avoidant.**

He wanted no pressure, no responsibility, and he was a perfect hook for my own loss of self.

## **The Rapid Decline**

Towards the final months of the relationship, my physical and emotional wellbeing declined at a rapid speed.

I felt as if I was hanging over the edge of a precipice, not knowing how far I would fall, yet still unable to let go. I became most unlike myself and had difficulty understanding what was happening to me.

**I was so confused and lost.**

My waif-like body was unable to either eat or move and my muscles ached. I became an empty shell of a woman who previously had everything going for her.

I was forced into taking months off work, but I had to lie about the reason, saying that there had been a bereavement in the family. I felt so ashamed and embarrassed to tell anyone the truth, and that it was me who was dying.

I even hid it from close friends and my parents as I knew they would encourage me to leave him. "What on earth are you doing with him, Helen? You must get out of this!" I could hear them saying.

**I couldn't though, because I didn't know HOW to leave him.**



I couldn't even listen to the music we shared as that acted like a "trigger", throwing me back into the deepest grief.

I still longed for him and no matter what anyone would say, I believed I could make 'us' work.

**The only thing I wanted to do was "understand him".**

I thought that if I could get to the bottom of this confusion, all would be okay.

I thought that surely my therapist training could achieve this! And if not, then how could I become a therapist myself? I could see how this one person was destroying everything I wanted in life – even my role as a Grief Counsellor – yet I couldn't stop it.

I knew all this was my own doing. I kept asking myself why I couldn't trust my own intuition and instinct.

I knew more than anything that I had to get my life back on track. If I didn't, then this would be the end.

I knew I wasn't strong enough to go through any more emotional pain, and thankfully, reality hit me like a bolt from the blue.

I finally realised something...

**"This was NOT love."**

## **Regaining Control**

From this moment on, I began to slowly plan my exit... to gradually wean myself away from him.....

And my determination to hold onto my own life was what kept me going.

I knew that if I was going to survive, I had to find something in myself that was going to reverse this self-abandonment.

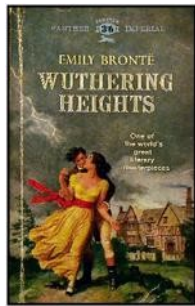


I had projected all that I was and wanted onto this ONE man, and as a result, my own identity was fading away.

### **It was time to bring her back.**

I read everything there was to read about my condition. And the more I read, the more I understood, and the stronger I grew.

### **And crucially, I realised that I wasn't alone.**



I ordered every book on the subjects of abandonment, women who love too much, self-empowerment, reversing self-abandonment, chronic rejection and books written around the topics of projection, self-identity and symbiosis/fusing.

I watched every single film around these topics and read and reread **Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights** constantly.

A key line in this classic piece of literature is written in the voice of Cathy when she speaks about Heathcliff, and has resonated with me ever since.

*"He's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same."*

Every day I would write in my journal, turning this raw experience of love withdrawal, loss and grief into a therapeutic process.

Every time I longed to speak to him or be with him, I would take my pen and write down what I was feeling.

I realised that this was comforting and helpful to me, because by speaking to myself on the page, it reduced the longing to make contact with him.

### **Slowly, I began to make sense of what had happened.**

My training to become a psychotherapist and grief counsellor required me to be in therapy and psychoanalysis as part of the process, which allowed me to gather more knowledge and gave me an even greater insight into the condition I was experiencing.

**I eventually discovered that I saw in him MY OWN POWER. This is the sharp end of projection.**

I had, in fact, projected all that I was onto him. I had given my POWER away to him, and I had turned him into a type of God-like figure. So it was no small wonder that I felt as if I was dying **without** him.

In fact, losing all that we are and our complete self in the beloved describes Love Addiction completely.

## Cutting Contact

The more I learnt, and with the support of loving friends, I was able to build the physical and emotional strength to distance myself from him, as I knew if I saw him again, it would trigger the shattering and debilitating feelings of love withdrawal.



**Going “cold turkey” means you cannot be anywhere near the very thing that will pull you back in.**

I felt hugely abandoned and rejected by him and the love withdrawal was immense.

It was completely debilitating, exactly like the grief experience when someone dies, but made worse by the fact that he was very much alive – **but simply didn't want me.**

I changed my landline number so I wouldn't sit at home waiting for him to call.

It also meant he could no longer contact me and draw me back into his web of confusion.

Finally, I decided to move away from the area, because I'd only lived there in order to be close to him.

## The Key to My Freedom

So here's the secret...

The way I healed and rebuilt myself was to re-educate myself.

I decided to go back to my training, to study Jungian Psychology, grief counselling, psychotherapy and to learn everything there was about sacred love, deity projection, love addiction, jealousy, insecurity, rejection, fusing, symbiosis and the loss of self in love.



**I did this in order to reclaim MY OWN autonomy and individuality.**

I later did a Creative Writing degree with my thesis entitled, *“Keep Your Distance, So That I Can Make a Journey of You.”*

And I found the answers.

## **Coming Full Circle**

**So believe me when I say, I KNOW how you feel.**

I have experienced Love Addiction at first hand and I’ve healed myself. And since then I’ve come full circle, and now dedicate my life to helping people just like you who suffer from love addiction, obsession, abandonment, rejection, anxious attachment, co-dependency and the mysterious and powerful emotion called **romantic love**.

**In short, healing myself has allowed me to heal you...**

Combining my in-depth studies and research with my own life experiences, I am able to help others find their way through this most incapacitating phenomenon where love addiction, rejection and emotional pain is mistaken for 'being in love'.

My life experiences and what I have seen and heard in my practice over the past 22 years has led me to specialise in Toxic and Dysfunctional Relationships, Love Addiction and Co-dependency, and ultimately, to develop a bespoke **[Surviving the Addictive Love Cycle Program](#)** to overcome these debilitating conditions.

This program will help you recognise love addiction, and see for yourself how people move from the first initial stage of falling in love (with romantic love

and attraction) towards feelings of fantasy, obsession, denial, co-dependency and an addiction to love.

Love addiction is a phenomenon that after many years of research is finally being recognised as a pervasive, complex and serious problem.

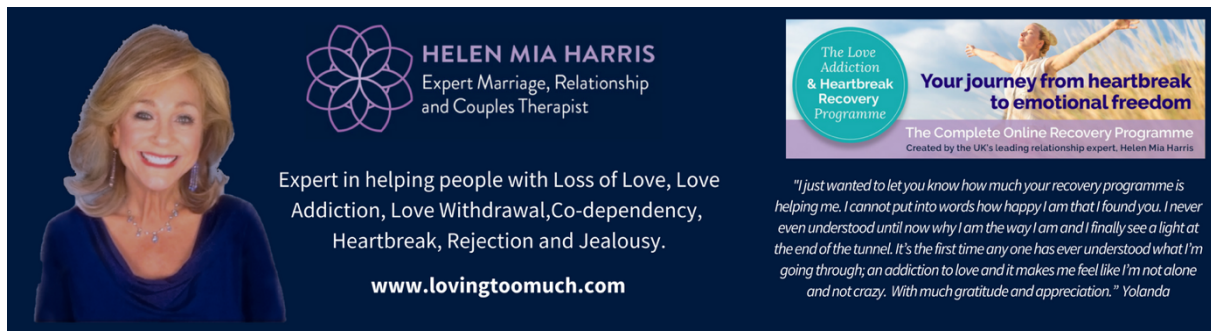
**But YOU don't need to suffer from it anymore...**

In this “[Surviving the Addictive Love Cycle](#)” Program you will learn to bypass these painful emotions and move towards healthy vital self-esteem, self-empowerment, peace and clarity, and free yourself from the painful effects of love withdrawal.

Follow this process through and you will finally heal that part of you that “looked” to the beloved for wholeness, completeness, self-acceptance, worthiness and self-approval.

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If you're looking for a proven, step-by-step program to help you bypass painful emotions and emerge emotionally free and self-empowered, then take a look at my “[Surviving the Addictive Love Cycle](#)” Program here:



The advertisement features a dark blue background. On the left is a portrait of Helen Mia Harris, a woman with blonde hair wearing a blue top. To her right is a purple flower-like logo. Text next to the logo reads: "HELEN MIA HARRIS Expert Marriage, Relationship and Couples Therapist". Below this, it says: "Expert in helping people with Loss of Love, Love Addiction, Love Withdrawal, Co-dependency, Heartbreak, Rejection and Jealousy." and "www.lovingtoomuch.com". On the right side of the ad is a smaller image of a woman with arms raised in a field, with text: "The Love Addiction & Heartbreak Recovery Programme Your journey from heartbreak to emotional freedom The Complete Online Recovery Programme Created by the UK's leading relationship expert, Helen Mia Harris". Below this is a testimonial: "I just wanted to let you know how much your recovery programme is helping me. I cannot put into words how happy I am that I found you. I never even understood until now why I am the way I am and I finally see a light at the end of the tunnel. It's the first time any one has ever understood what I'm going through; an addiction to love and it makes me feel like I'm not alone and not crazy. With much gratitude and appreciation." Yolanda

[www.lovingtoomuch.com](http://www.lovingtoomuch.com)



**Best Wishes,**

Helen Mia Harris x

MBACP Registered, MNCS Accredited Relationship Therapist, Marriage Coach & Love Addiction Specialist [www.helenmiaharris.com](http://www.helenmiaharris.com)

