

# Who Am I When Love Isn't Being Offered?

*BY BRIGID HOPKINS*

For every individual who grew up with or lived through domestic violence, this is for you.

It has taken me many moons to realize that I was a child of domestic violence and neglect. My only parent was struggling with addiction issues. She didn't know her worth or that she mattered to me. As her daughter, I took on her shadow of "unlovable" and began tending it in my own heart.

For years I have told myself that nothing I do is good enough. That no one will ever love me because I am not lovable. I worked myself tirelessly to the quick, because I wanted everything to be perfect. In the hopes that my perfection would win me praise and acceptance. With said praise, I would finally begin to believe that I was of value.

Except it doesn't work that way. These actions were my confusion and helplessness, driving these behaviors. I forgive this version of self. I forgive all of the selves that had a misunderstanding of what love can be.

Watching my mother get beaten by the man she loved. Rejected by family and friends, who then came around later to tell her they loved her. Drove a lot of my confusion. Why would people who say they love you, hurt you? Why was I hurting so badly by living with those same people? They loved me. Why didn't I feel it? Why did I constantly protect myself from their love?

As an adult, I have spent hundreds, if not thousands of hours "fixing" my broken parts.

The parts that couldn't feel love.  
The parts that didn't trust love.  
The parts that didn't believe love was real.  
I had love all around me, and I couldn't let it in.

I watched people around me have ease and simplicity with love. They trusted it without hesitation. Even the words, when spoken to me, felt like untended wool – scratchy and burdensome.

***The truth is, I was starving to be loved. I hungered for it more than any nutrient on the planet. But I couldn't let my guard down. I didn't want to leave myself susceptible to being hurt again. Love for me equaled pain. To be loved meant I would be hurt, or even worse, left behind. Forgotten. Inconsequential.***

The love I craved was also my poison.

At least I believed it to be. If I were to let love in. That would mean I would be vulnerable to attack. I would show weakness and softness.

How would I survive if I tasted true love?

How would I be independent if I embraced true love?

How would I not become attached and needy if I allowed true love to be with me?

Then the day came when my isolation and suffering were much greater than my fear to be loved. I had tended my wounds for long enough. I needed them to air out. I needed them to breathe. I needed to stop pouring the salt into my wounds. You

see, I was the only one continuing my pain cycle. It has lived in me for so long, it became a habit. My suffering and self-isolation became my fixation. I will even say my addiction. If I kept my focus on being unlovable. Then, then! You see, I wouldn't have to face the responsibility of being loved. Crazy, but true.

To be loved means that I would no longer settle. Take less than I deserved. I put up with the same vile behaviors I watched as a child. I would be my advocate and my own safe space.

I would be responsible for loving myself.

I would take care of my needs.

I would feed my hunger.

I would draw the curtains back and let my suffering breathe in the dawn of a new day.

***I could finally stop believing that I am unlovable and hand back the tattered shadow, with compassion. With love, with care. I could drop the armor because the truth is. I have only been protecting myself against me. I have been my threat.***

The parts of me that have hungered didn't trust me to care for them. I blamed another.

The parts of me that were afraid to be seen, didn't trust me. I blamed another.

The parts of me that were afraid to be loved, in spite of flaws, didn't trust me. They hid.

The parts of me that worked tirelessly for praise, didn't trust me to deliver. I begged for it from others.

The parts of me that feared to be lovable, didn't trust me to know how to love. I looked for another person to love me.

I grew up with abuse. *And* I have learned from that abuse to stop abusing myself. To be my parent. My ally. To learn through many trials and errors. That it comes back to me being a safe space for myself, first. Before I can ask another person to do this. I had to do this for myself. I needed to learn how to trust. Where it lives in me. How large is my capacity to hold it? Where do I turn when my tanks are empty? Where do I turn when my tanks are full?

Who am I when love isn't being offered? Who am I when I am at my lowest? Who am I when I am at my best?

My mother wasn't meant to find out who she was. She was meant to show me the dark places, which helped me be an avid seeker of the light!

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DANIELLE DULSKY

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