

Signs of Fear of Abandonment Handout

Fear of abandonment is an intense and persistent worry about being left alone or rejected by loved ones. It often stems from childhood experiences or past relationship traumas. The initial behaviors of abandonment fear are frequently not intentional. However, with time, the reaction to these behaviors and the attention they receive can become self-reinforcing. This can lead to someone repeating the behaviors to get the desired result again. This act may have negative repercussions and has the potential to damage relationships over time and inhibit the formation of healthy connections.

Common signs and symptoms

- Intense anxiety about being alone or unpartnered
- Difficulty trusting people and fear of intimacy
- Hypersensitivity to criticism and frequent self-blame
- Low self-esteem and feelings of unworthiness
- Insecure attachment style and repressed anger
- Cycling through relationships
- Needing constant reassurance



Behavioral manifestations

People with a fear of abandonment may exhibit clinginess in relationships, reassurance seeking, self-isolation, or "testing" behaviors with partners. They often struggle with maintaining healthy boundaries and may cycle through shallow relationships or stay in unhealthy ones to avoid being alone.

Physical manifestations

While primarily psychological, fear of abandonment can manifest physically as increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, nausea, difficulty breathing, and sleep disturbances.

Causes of fear of abandonment

1. Childhood experiences like neglect, abuse, loss of a caregiver, or inconsistent parenting.
2. Traumatic events in adulthood, such as the sudden loss of a loved one or betrayal in a significant relationship.
3. Mental health conditions like borderline personality disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder.
4. Insecure attachment styles developed in early life.

Overcoming fear of abandonment

1. **Self-awareness and self-care:** Recognize your fears and triggers and prioritize your well-being.
2. **Therapy:** Consider cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), or psychodynamic approaches.
3. **Building self-esteem:** Practice self-compassion and set achievable personal goals.
4. **Developing healthy relationships:** Learn effective communication, set appropriate boundaries, and practice trust-building exercises.
5. **Addressing underlying trauma:** Consider trauma-focused therapy.
6. **Mindfulness and relaxation techniques:** Practice meditation, deep breathing exercises, or progressive muscle relaxation.



Remember, overcoming the fear of abandonment takes time and effort. Be patient, and don't hesitate to seek professional help if needed. With the right support and tools, you can build healthier relationships and a more secure sense of self.

Additional notes

References

- Matthies, S., Schiele, M. A., Koentges, C., Pini, S., Schmahl, C., & Domschke, K. (2018). Please don't leave me—separation anxiety and related traits in borderline personality disorder. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 20(10). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-018-0951-6>
- Zerubavel, N., Messman-Moore, T. L., DiLillo, D., & Gratz, K. L. (2017). Childhood sexual abuse and fear of abandonment moderate the relation of intimate partner violence to severity of dissociation. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 19(1), 9–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2017.1289491>