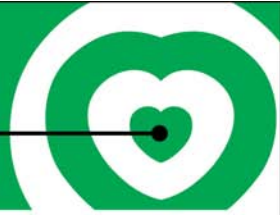


BEST OF THE LOVEFRAUD BLOG



Recovery
— FROM THE —
SOCIOPATH
SAMPLER

After the **antisocial**,
narcissist or **psychopath**,
how to rebuild your life

DONNA ANDERSEN

Author of **Lovefraud.com**

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Introduction

If you are, or have been, involved with a sociopath, your most ardent wish is probably for recovery. Here's the secret that will enable you to achieve your desire for recovery: All true healing is internal.

Now, you may feel like I'm stating the obvious, because you feel like crap, and you want to feel better. Or worse, you are numb, and you can't feel anything.

You may believe that fixing some external problem caused by the sociopath will enable you to feel better. If you can just finalize the divorce, get custody of the kids, move away, get your money back, or perhaps even get the sociopath arrested, you'll be just fine.

The truth is that while all of these endeavors are important, even when you succeed in them, you still need to address your internal recovery.

In our society, we tend not to do this. We work too much, run the kids around, buy a better house in a better neighborhood, engage in a social life, go to the grocery store, go to the gym — there's always too much to do, not enough time, and the last thing on our agenda is dealing with our emotions.

And that's why we never truly recover.

The fact is, emotional recovery is hard work. The reason is that every betrayal, disappointment, indignity, loss, attack, insult and scare that we ever suffer — every negative experience of our lives — creates an emotional wound. These wounds stay with us until

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we do something about them.

So we're all the walking wounded, all carrying tremendous amounts of internal pain, from the experience with the sociopath, and from previous wounds that made us vulnerable to the sociopath. This pain goes really, really deep.

But it can be overcome, and by opening this small book, you've taken the first step.

Best of the Lovefraud Blog Series

After my own disastrous marriage to a sociopath, I launched Lovefraud.com in 2005. Since then, Lovefraud posted more than 4,000 articles related to spotting, escaping and recovering from these dangerous social predators. To help you find information on the topics that you are looking for, I've selected my best articles and put them together in a series of four books called *Best of the Lovefraud Blog*.

These are the books:

Understanding the Sociopath explains, in plain language, the 12% of the population who do not play by the same rules of life as the rest of us. These master manipulators, who have antisocial, narcissistic, borderline, histrionic or psychopathic personality disorders, seem normal at first, but their objective is to use and exploit us.

Seduced by a Sociopath explains how millions of people pursuing romantic relationships are charming, affectionate, passionate — and fake. These deceptive sociopaths pursue romantic relationships not for love, but for exploitation. Learn how they convince you to fall for them, so you can spot the charade and escape.

Dealing with a Sociopath explains how to interact with someone who lies, cheats, manipulates and exploits. Sociopaths only care about what they want — what you want or need is irrelevant. If you have no choice but to engage with them, learn how to protect yourself.

Recovery from a Sociopath helps you understand why you feel so shattered by a confusing and abusive relationship, and guides you on how to heal your life. Sociopaths cannot love you; they can only use you. The experience is so devastating that you may wonder if it's even possible to recover. Yes, it is.

Introduction

The articles in this sampler are on the same theme as the recovery book. I encourage you to read the complete collection of recovery articles, and to check out the other books as well. Knowledge is power. The more you know about how these disordered people behave and how they affect you, the better you'll be able to move forward.

Emotional recovery is an investment in yourself and in your life. This work will make possible the peace, love and happiness that you've always wanted.

Why falling for a sociopath doesn't mean you're stupid

Lovefraud received the following email from a reader whom we'll call "Agatha."

Since I found your website I have been doing a lot of reading, learning, and understanding.

I made my break from my spath about three years ago. I keep reading how a spath knows who to target and how to catch a person in their web. Seemingly being very intelligent as to getting exactly what they want from us.

In my case, my spath doesn't seem to be all that intelligent. Does this mean that I was taken in by a man of low intellect, and what does that say about me?

I'm having trouble understanding how a man who seems to have no common sense and lacks vision (he has been trying to sue me, but I seem to be one step ahead, so far) could possess the intelligence to fool me in the beginning.

Donna Andersen responds

Getting fooled by a sociopath has nothing to do with intelligence. I've heard from thousands of smart, successful people who were taken in by these predators.

So how does it happen? Why can sociopaths get us to act against our own self-interest? Two reasons: Our humanity, and our cultural myths.

Why falling for a sociopath doesn't mean you're stupid

Trust makes us vulnerable

The human race survived as a species because of trust, according to Paul J. Zak, author of *The Moral Molecule — the source of love and prosperity*. Back when we were cave men and cave women, trust enabled us to live in groups, which enabled us to protect ourselves, which enabled our species to survive.

We are biologically programmed to trust — literally. A brain chemical called oxytocin, known as nature's "love glue," makes us feel calm, trusting and content, and eliminates fear and anxiety.

Oxytocin is released into our brains and bloodstream when we experience intimacy, and not just sexual intimacy. Hugs, empathy and even conversation cause our bodies to release oxytocin, increasing our level of trust for whomever we are interacting with.

This is all normal and natural. It's the human bonding system.

Sociopaths as hijackers

Sociopaths do not bond like the rest of us do. They have excess testosterone, which interferes with oxytocin. And they may be missing the "oxytocin receptors" that are necessary for oxytocin to work. These issues help explain why sociopaths have no empathy.

Even though sociopaths do not feel empathy, they know that they can manipulate us by taking advantage of *our* empathy.

Therefore, sociopaths hijack the normal human bonding system. They engage us in conversation; they appear to be affectionate; they offer emotional and physical intimacy.

Sociopaths use our humanity, our built-in predisposition to trust others, against us.

Cultural myths

The problem with our natural instinct to trust people is that we don't realize that we need to be very selective about whom we trust. We don't know that there are people in the world who seem to look and act just like us, but have totally different motivations.

We don't learn about personality disorders. If we hear about sociopaths and psychopaths at all, it's through movies and TV shows, in which they are unrealistically portrayed as deranged villains.

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In fact, all our lives we hear messages that hide the truth about the human predators among us. Here are the most dangerous cultural myths:

“We are all created equal.”

“There’s good in everyone.”

“We’re all God’s children.”

“Everyone deserves a second chance.”

“Treat everyone the way you want to be treated.”

“Everyone wants to be loved.”

“We’re all basically the same.”

The problem with these statements is that they contain the words “all” and “everyone.” Yes, they are wonderful principles to live by — as long as you’re dealing with people who are not disordered.

If you are interacting with a sociopath, following these principles can lead to your own heartbreak, devastation and destruction.

Serious disadvantage

In the end, falling for a sociopath doesn’t mean you’re stupid.

It means that you’re a normal person, trusting as we are meant to trust, and believing all the cultural messages encouraging you to trust.

So please don’t be hard on yourself. Until the existence and tactics of sociopaths become common knowledge, normal, empathetic people are at serious risk of being exploited by sociopaths.

Sociopaths and soul mates

I'm reading *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert, which was the #1 New York Times bestseller when it was published in 2007. Gilbert tells her story of supposedly having everything — career, marriage, home — yet feeling depressed and unhappy. She left it all, got a divorce, and then spent a year abroad to find herself. She ate her way through Italy, studied spiritual practice in India, and sought to balance pleasure and divinity in Indonesia.

While going through her divorce, Gilbert had a relationship with a man whom she calls “David.” This didn't seem to be a sociopathic relationship, just normally dysfunctional. Although they broke up, Gilbert, from time to time, pined for David. Her feelings came back to haunt her while she studied at an ashram in India. She was obviously despondent, so her wise and funny friend at the ashram, “Richard from Texas,” asked her what was wrong.

Here's how Gilbert describes the conversation:

I was actually crying. “And please don't laugh at me now, but I think the reason it's so hard for me to get over this guy is because I seriously believed David was my soul mate.”

“He probably was,” Richard said. “Your problem is you don't understand what that word means. People think a soul mate is your perfect fit, and that's what everyone wants. But a true soul mate is a mirror, the person who shows you everything that's holding you back, the person

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who brings you to your own attention so you can change your life. A true soul mate is probably the most important person you'll ever meet, because they tear down your walls and smack you awake. But to live with a soul mate forever? Nah. Too painful. Soul mates, they come into your life just to reveal another layer of yourself to you, and then they leave. And thank God for it. Your problem is, you just can't let this one go. It's over. David's purpose was to shake you up, drive you out of that marriage that you needed to leave, tear apart your ego a little bit, show you your obstacles and addictions, break your heart open so a new light could get in, make you so desperate and out of control that you had to transform your life, then introduce you to your spiritual master and beat it."

Soul mate agenda

In my book, *Red Flags of Love Fraud — 10 signs you're dating a sociopath*, the #2 red flag is "sudden soul mate." When you meet the sociopath, you feel like you've met the person you've been waiting for all your life. Why? Because the sociopath studies you, figures out what you're looking for, and then transforms himself or herself into your ideal mate (at least in the beginning).

Many sociopaths actively push the "soul mate" agenda. In my Internet survey for *Red Flags*, 64 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, "The individual said we were 'soul mates;' I was the person he/she was waiting for."

Sociopaths, of course, are using the "soul mate" terminology only as a tactic in their strategy of calculated seduction. It's part of the act, and their real agenda is exploitation.

But as much as I hate to give sociopaths credit for anything, they may, indeed, serve a purpose in our lives.

Hooking our vulnerabilities

Sociopaths look for our vulnerabilities and then use them to hook us. Their actions are certainly despicable. But the fact remains that we're the ones with vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are often detrimental to our happiness, and perhaps even our

Sociopaths and soul mates

lives. The sociopath offers us a solution to our problems, an answer to our prayers. It is fake, but we don't know that until much later, when everything falls apart.

As we're standing amid the devastation that used to be our lives, wondering how we got into this mess, the truth may be right in front of us: In some way, we were vulnerable.

If we're honest, we can identify the weakness, pain or mistaken belief that may have been hidden even from ourselves, but the sociopath was able to find and use. Then, we have an opportunity to truly heal not only from the sociopath, but from the vulnerability that the sociopath targeted.

Shattered

This certainly happened to me. When I met James Montgomery, I was 40 years old, had yet to marry, and was worried about my biological clock ticking. I was primed to be plucked. When I discovered Montgomery's betrayal, and realized that my marriage had been a scam from the very beginning, I was shattered.

But what, specifically, was shattered? The walls I had built around my heart. These walls were based on my fear of being hurt, my disappointment at feeling so alone in life, and my mistaken belief that I was not worthy of love. The betrayal by James Montgomery caused me so much emotional pain that I could not contain it, and the pain burst out of me, taking the walls with it.

And with the pain and the walls out of my system, real love was able to enter my life.

Two-fold recovery

So was James Montgomery my soul mate? I guess it depends on how you define the term. Richard from Texas, quoted above, would probably say yes.

I certainly agree that James Montgomery demolished who I was and changed the course of my life. But I'm the one who worked to clear out the emotional debris and discover who I really am. And that's what I hope you will do as well.

I am not making excuses for sociopaths. But I talk to a lot of

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people who have been involved with them, and usually, when I ask, they can identify the weakness that made them vulnerable to manipulation.

So make your recovery two-fold. Work on recovering from the sociopath. Then identify and work on recovering from the original vulnerability. Your life may change dramatically, and for the better.

The journey from pain to peace

The Lovefraud reader “Kataroux” has been struggling with the profound betrayal she endured at the hands of a charming young sociopath who turned out to be nothing more than a parasite. She told her entire story in the post from September 25, 2013, entitled *How I was duped by a young sociopath and believed all his lies until now!*

On October 4, Kataroux posted the following comment on Lovefraud:

As I sit here tonight I find myself wondering how I ever let something like this happen to me and yet I know the answer. I just buried my husband and wanted to feel loved again and Spath jumped in with promises of a wonderful future and I bent over backwards to give him just that. Notice I said to “give him just that” because I never bent over backwards for myself. I allowed him to dictate my life and control me without even knowing it. I allowed him to cause so many complications that I sent my youngest son to live with his father (I will always regret that decision) because I wanted Spath to be “happy.” All the money I spent and borrowed (and still owe) because of this man makes my hate for him so strong that I can barely stand it at times.

There are two things I cannot seem to do:

1. Grieve — Every time I am sad and want to cry I force

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it back and refuse to shed another tear over that man. Yet, sometimes I know if I just cry and scream I will feel better but I can't seem to dig deep enough to allow myself to do that. I have always had trouble dealing with grief and I know if I don't deal with it I am going to drive myself crazy.

2. Forgive myself — How can I forgive myself when I allowed this to happen? How can I forgive myself when I should have known better? How can I forgive myself for giving up so much for a man I only thought loved me? Forgiving myself is a hard one because I am so dang mad. I am so mad at him it physically causes me pain and I am mad at myself because I am so mad at him that it causes me pain — make sense?

I am trying to move forward — I just don't know what forward is. I mean I am dieting and working out but I don't know who I am anymore. I don't feel like the strong person everyone says I am. I don't "feel" anything but hate! Even though I NEVER want to see that man again and looking at a picture of him makes me want to vomit, I will never not hate him for making my life a lie and for faking to love me. I will hate him forever for that and that knowledge eats me up because I have always been a kind, trusting person and now I am suspicious of every man.

Spath has been out of my house since September 1, the last time I physically saw him was on the 15th and I have had zero contact with him since the morning of the 25th. I guess it is a good thing that he is so convinced that I am the "crazy ex-girlfriend" and so busy trying to "fool his new victim" that he does not even try to contact me. According to him everything is my fault and, you know, sometimes I believe it.

Response from Donna Andersen

Dear Kataroux,

I know exactly how you feel — as does everyone at Lovefraud. This is one of the most painful aspects of realizing that our partner

The journey from pain to peace

is a sociopath: We have to acknowledge that we participated in our own betrayal. But keep in mind that you, like all of us, were deceived. You were looking for love and companionship. He said he was looking for love and companionship. In reality, he wanted a place to live and someone to support him.

This man targeted you when you were vulnerable. Your husband had just died. This man saw your grief as an opportunity. Under the guise of “being there for you,” the creep moved in on you. His behavior was despicable.

You have every reason to be angry. You have every reason to hate him. In fact, when anger and hatred are so overwhelming, they morph into numbness. That’s where you are right now; you are numb. And that’s why you can’t grieve and can’t forgive yourself. You are so filled with rage at his horrendous betrayal that you are numb.

And that’s okay for now.

Keep in mind that this is all very fresh and raw for you. You last had contact with the man on September 25, and you posted your comment on October 4. So it’s only been nine days since your last had contact!

Remember, every time you have contact, it’s like reopening a fresh wound. That’s why it’s critical for you to maintain No Contact. This is what enables you to heal, and you’ve only just begun.

The recovery journey

Recovery is a process. In fact, I found one of the best step-by-step recovery procedures in a book called *The Legal Abuse Syndrome*, by Dr. Karin Huffer.

In her practice as a therapist, Dr. Huffer found that many people who had been betrayed by a sociopath were further betrayed by the legal system when they sought justice. This book provides eight steps to recovery from legal abuse, but the steps work for recovering from sociopathic abuse as well. You can read a description of the steps in the Lovefraud blog article, *A guidebook for recovering from the devastation of a sociopath*.

The point is, recovery takes time, and you are in the very early stages of the process. Your wounds are deep. Your pain has been

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accumulating over years. There is the pain of the sociopath. There is the pain of your husband before the sociopath, who was addicted to drugs. And there may be an earlier pain that made you vulnerable to both of those men.

Maintain no contact. Eventually the numbness will start to thaw, and then you'll feel the grief. You'll process the anger and the hatred.

The sociopath deserves to be hated. Unfortunately, there is a problem with hatred — it doesn't affect him, but it eats you from the inside out. So at some point, when you are ready, it would be best to let go of the hatred.

And that will be the forgiveness. We've had many discussions of forgiveness here at Lovefraud. Forgiveness does not mean you pretend that the betrayal didn't happen. It doesn't mean that you allow the predator back into your life.

Forgiveness means that you accept what happened and you let it go. Forgiveness is not for him; it's for you. Forgiveness means he no longer consumes your thoughts, and his actions no longer matter to you.

You're just beginning this journey, and it will be a bumpy. You'll probably discover many things about others, and yourself, that you didn't know. But I promise you, if you keep going, and allow yourself to recover, eventually you will find peace.

After the sociopath: Being heard, being validated

Last week I posted two articles related to the Vienna Presbyterian Church in Vienna, Virginia. Between 2001 and 2005, as many as a dozen teenage girls may have suffered sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse from a church youth director. This year, the youth director was long gone, but church leaders felt that the wounds had not been properly addressed and healed. So a few months ago, the pastor and church issued a public apology.

Lawyers for the church's insurance company warned the church not to accept responsibility for the failings of the youth director. Doing so, the insurance company said, would jeopardize the church's coverage in case a lawsuit was filed.

The Vienna Presbyterian Church ignored the demands of its insurance company. On March 27, Pastor Peter James preached a sermon that acknowledged the church's failings.

“Let me speak for a moment to our survivors,” he said. “We, as church leaders, were part of the harm in failing to extend the compassion and mercy that you needed. Some of you felt uncared for, neglected and even blamed in this church. I am truly sorry. I regret the harm this neglect has caused you.”

Guess what—so far, none of the young women have filed a lawsuit. Why not? The case would be a slam-dunk. The youth director pleaded guilty to contributing to the delinquency of a minor. The

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church accepted responsibility. Several of the now young women have had trouble in relationships, because they are still seeking the fantasy that the youth director promised. If they filed suit, they'd win.

My guess is that the women don't want money. They want to be heard. They want to be validated. And they want to be healed.

Invisible damage

The problem with sociopathic entanglements is that so much of the damage is invisible. Even in cases where we lose money, jobs, homes, and are subject to physical violence, the big wounds are not readily apparent. Before all those obvious injuries occurred, the sociopaths softened us up with emotional manipulation, psychological control and spiritual abuse. These internal wounds not only eat at us, but they make it difficult for us to respond to, and recover from, the obvious physical damage.

After the sociopath, we need to purge our emotional and mental pain. We need internal stability. But when we reach out for help on this level, many of the people around us simply don't get it.

They don't understand why we need to talk so much about what happened. They don't understand how, when we suspected that we were being used, we allowed it to continue. They don't understand why we are still confused in our thoughts and emotions about the sociopath.

Get over it, they tell us.

These are the people, of course, who are lucky enough to have avoided a direct assault from a sociopath in their own lives. We often understand why they don't really understand what happened — after all, we were once as clueless as they are. Still, their ignorance of the depth of our pain seems to increase our pain. We feel like we are not being heard, and our suffering is being invalidated.

Debriefing

Karin Huffer, in her book, *The Legal Abuse Syndrome*, describes this situation in detail in her chapter on "Debriefing."

Debriefing, she says, is the first step in recovery. In the debriefing process, we tell someone exactly what happened to us, in all the painful detail. Unfortunately, it's hard to find what Huffer

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describes as “quality listeners.” These are people who have the ability to hear what we have to say, overriding their own protective filters. She writes:

Protective filters are always at work. If an individual begins to share with another and the data threatens the listener’s feelings of safety, they may try to divert the data or simply not hear it at all.

The function of this protective filter is to maintain the equilibrium of the listener. Victims’ stories shake the foundations that we lean upon in order to feel safe. When it is impossible for friends or family to hear, due to their protective psychological filters shielding them from vicarious pain, the victim feels rejected and alone.

Huffer goes on to describe a formal debriefing process. It’s best done with a quality listener or support group, but an individual can do it alone if necessary.

Support at Lovefraud

I believe that we have many, many quality listeners on Lovefraud. I am always amazed at the thoughtful, comforting and patient comments posted in response to readers who are spilling their traumatized guts.

The reason Lovefraud readers can do this, of course, is because we’ve all been there. We know what it’s like to be deceived, betrayed and assaulted. We know what it’s like to sit amidst the wreckage of what was once our lives. We’re all on the path to recovery, and those of us who are further along help those of us who are just beginning.

Healing, in the end, is an individual journey. To fully recover, we must consciously excavate and examine our pain, and find a way to let it go. But the process is helped immensely when we are heard and validated. I am so glad that Lovefraud offers this to so many people.

After getting rid of one sociopath, another sociopath shows up

I've heard from multiple Lovefraud readers over the years who were annoyed, angry, horrified. These readers had finally realized what they were dealing with — a sociopath. They extricated themselves from the relationship and had no further contact with the disordered individual. And what happened? Another sociopath came into their lives.

The readers asked: What is going on? Why can't they leave me alone? Am I a sociopath magnet?

The answer is, not necessarily. Following are some observations to add perspective to the situation.

Millions of sociopaths

These disordered individuals are everywhere. As long as we're living on this planet, we face the possibility of running into them.

Experts estimate that 1 percent to 4 percent of the population meet the criteria for psychopathy or antisocial personality disorder. But if you add in the narcissists and those with borderline and histrionic personality disorders, about 12 percent of the population are social predators. In the United States, that's about 30 million people. With so many out there, we shouldn't be surprised to come across them.

Faster recognition

The bad news is that these readers found themselves dealing with another sociopath. The good news is that they figured it out

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much more quickly this time around.

I think these readers should interpret their most recent experience as signs of growth. Yes, another sociopath came into their lives, but they spotted the predator! They knew the warning signs and listened to their instincts! This is progress! This is good!

More healing

The fact that another sociopath appeared could also indicate that these readers still have more healing to do. Sociopaths sense vulnerabilities, like sharks sense blood in the water. Perhaps the readers need to look for more injuries within themselves that need to be addressed.

Remember, sociopaths come into our lives by exploiting vulnerabilities. Afterwards, we need to recover from the nasty encounter with the sociopath. But we also need to heal the earlier, deeper injury that enabled the sociopath to target us in the first place. Perhaps we were neglected as a child or abused in an earlier relationship. Or perhaps we had negative beliefs about ourselves — that we were unwanted or unlovable. By addressing and healing our vulnerabilities, we protect ourselves from further pain.

How to stay safe

The bottom line is that millions of sociopaths live among us, so chances are good that at some point, we'll come across them. Here are the three steps to protecting ourselves:

1. Know that sociopaths exist.
2. Know the warning signs of sociopathic behavior.
3. Listen to our instincts.

Our intuition is designed to protect us from predators. It will almost always tell us, early in the involvement, that something is wrong with an individual. The trick is to pay attention and take action.

All of these readers did that. So yes, it is annoying to find another predator. But at least they got rid of them quickly, before too much damage was done. These Lovefraud readers should be proud of themselves.

How do I forgive myself for staying in a relationship with a sociopath?

Lovefraud received the following email from a divorced mom who asked the above question, and others.

I suspected that my ex boyfriend was a sociopath, but your website confirmed it. I always thought that sociopaths were murderers like Ted Bundy or Casey Anthony, but I realize now that the vast majority lead “normal” lives (whatever that means).

I’m a divorced mom with a precious little daughter. My ex boyfriend was the first man I dated after a long and abusive marriage to an alcoholic. I was with my ex boyfriend a little over 2 years, although he exhibited signs of sociopathic (or what I considered narcissistic) behavior, including chronic infidelity, pathological lying, a grandiose sense of self, a total lack of empathy (particularly towards his five children whom he rarely saw), a lack of responsibility, impulsivity, etc. You get the picture.

Fortunately, he didn’t bilk me out of money, but, unfortunately, he completely drained me emotionally to the point where I feel like I will never be able to find or love a truly good, healthy man. I am a strong woman, though, and I know this feeling will subside over time. After reading through your website, I’m 100% positive I will never see or speak to my ex boyfriend again.

The last time I saw him, he told me he was going on a

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secret mission trip and that he could not talk to me for at least two weeks, but that he would spend the holidays with me. I threw him out of my apartment that night, but I continued to email him while he was away on his important, “James Bond” business trip. To make a long story short, I found out that he was with another woman in a foreign country. I was not surprised by this discovery and, perhaps, it is a blessing in disguise that I found out. It strengthened my resolve to have no contact with him, as your website suggests.

My question to you is how do I forgive myself for staying in this relationship so long even though I routinely saw the signs of his sociopathic behavior? Most importantly, how do I forgive myself for putting my daughter in harm’s way by being with this creep? Finally, would it be best if I stayed away from dating for a period of time so that I can clear my brain of this whole ordeal?

I’ll address the reader’s questions one at a time.

How do I forgive myself?

We cannot blame ourselves for what we didn’t know. And all of us who have been targeted didn’t know about sociopaths, about what they really are and how they really behave.

Here’s what we all believed that is not true:

- Everybody wants to be loved.
- There is good in everyone.
- Sociopaths are all deranged serial killers.

Here’s what none of us knew:

- Some people pursue romantic relationships not for love, but for exploitation.
- Sociopaths can look us right in the eye, tell us how much they love us, and be lying.
- Sociopaths listen to us carefully not because they’re

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- interested, but to figure out how to hook us.
- There are people who have no inner core—they change their personalities to reflect what they perceive we want.
- Sociopaths are motivated not by love, but by power and control.
- Sociopaths hijack the human bonding process.

This last point is very important. Sociopaths deceive us into falling in love with them. As we fall in love, all of the biological processes that Nature created in order to ensure the survival of the human race kick in.

When we love someone, we form a psychological bond with the person, so that we feel a compulsion to be with him or her. This bond is linked to chemical and structural changes in the brain that are much like the changes associated with addiction. So we feel an irresistible pull to keep the relationship going. This is why we stay.

Here's another thing we don't know: Sociopaths do not form these psychological bonds the way the rest of us do. But they're good at faking it. So while we are legitimately falling in love, they are pretending to fall in love, and they are fabulous actors. In reality, they are only using us.

How do I forgive myself for putting my daughter in harm's way?

You forgive yourself because of all the reasons stated above. But with your daughter, you take the next step. You teach her, in age-appropriate ways, that there are bad people in the world. There are people who lie, who cannot be trusted, and she must stay away from them.

You also teach her to trust her instincts. Our instincts will usually tell us when someone is bad news. But we've long been conditioned to override our gut feelings, to give people the benefit of the doubt, to wait for "proof" before ending a relationship.

Nature set up our biology to encourage us to stay with our partners. But Nature also set up our biology to warn us when pred-

How do I forgive myself for staying in a relationship with a sociopath?

ators approached. Make no mistake — a sociopath is a predator. So if someone makes us feel cautious, afraid or creeped out, we must honor that and run away.

Would it be best if I stayed away from dating?

Absolutely yes!!! You must give yourself time to heal.

Remember, sociopaths are experts at finding our vulnerabilities. If you are still feeling injured in any way because of your experience with the ex-boyfriend, you are a walking target for another sociopath. Many, many readers have told me that they escaped an abusive relationship, found someone who seemed to be the answer to their prayers, and the new lover turned out to be worse than the previous one.

You must make a decision to recover. Face what happened. Allow yourself to grieve and get the negative emotions out of your system. As you put your emotional and psychological health back together, eventually you'll find a new relationship without even trying.

The answer is always within. Heal yourself, and the rest will fall into place.

Healing your addiction to sociopaths

Lovefraud received the following email from a woman whom we'll call "Peggy Sue."

I feel hopeless. I'm a target for sociopaths, or I'm addicted to them. My ex-fiancé was one. I was with him 7 years and was abused every way possible. I was so confused with the lies and double life. He said I was crazy and I went on tons of medication and was completely isolated.

I finally was able to leave after 7 years with the help of police, only to move back to my dad's with nothing and to start all over. A month later fell in love with another sociopath. My friends and family think I'm gonna end up dead by him or killing myself.

I have been to therapy — they all just say move out and leave. I can't — that's the problem. If I leave I always come back, like I'm addicted to sociopath men. If I finally get to the point of leaving, I just meet and love the next sociopathic man.

My life is passing me by. I'm depressed, lost, confused. Please help. Is there any hope for me?

Yes, Peggy Sue, you can turn this around. The key is to focus on your own healing.

Addiction and the brain

I previously explained why involvements with sociopaths are so addictive. The article includes a video of Dr. Helen Fisher, a biological anthropologist, explaining how romantic love affects the brain. The article is called, *Love addiction with a sociopath*.

Okay, so addiction to a sociopathic relationship is a known psychological phenomenon. It causes changes in the brain. It causes you to feel compelled to stay involved with destructive individuals.

To overcome this addiction, you need to focus on your own healing. Here are the steps to take.

1. No Contact

First, you need to break away from the current sociopath. That means no contact with him or her.

- No phone calls
- No text messages
- No emails
- No in-person meetings
- No visits to his or her Facebook page

Take all necessary steps to prevent the person from contacting you. Block phone calls and email. Don't let anyone who knows the individual tell you what he or she is doing or saying.

Establishing No Contact can be difficult. Why? Because you're addicted! So, just like anyone who is trying to break an addiction to smoking, drugs, alcohol or anything else, take it one day at a time. Promise yourself not to contact the person today, and get through the day. Do the same thing tomorrow. And the same thing the next day.

This advice assumes that you were in a dating relationship and you can walk away. You don't have to have contact because of kids, working together, or some other unavoidable involvement. But even if you can't totally block interaction, you need to strive for emotional No Contact. That means you want to get to the point that the person simply does not matter to you.

Recovery from the Sociopath Sampler

Just like an alcoholic trying to get off of booze, you need to stick with the program. I've heard from many Lovefraud readers who felt they were "strong enough" to interact with the sociopath, only to find that any contact sent them into a tailspin.

The longer you stay away, the stronger you'll get. But if you break the No Contact rule, you may need to start rebuilding yourself all over again.

2. Do not date

If you are ending up with a succession of sociopaths, it means there is pain or vulnerability within you that attracts them. And of course you are wounded — you've been involved with sociopaths!

So, for the time being, do not date. At all. Do not join an online dating site. Do not let a well-meaning friend fix you up. Do not go places where the primary activity is looking for someone to pick up. Give yourself a breather.

This does not mean you should isolate yourself. On the contrary, fill your life with family, friends and activities that you enjoy. Keep yourself busy. Earn a certificate or degree that will help your career. Do volunteer work. Fill your life with fun and supportive people — even if they aren't dates.

3. Heal the vulnerabilities

The secret to finding a good relationship is to become whole and healthy yourself. This doesn't just happen — it requires effort on your part. I urge you to commit yourself to healing the vulnerabilities.

This means looking at your actual experiences, not sweeping them under the carpet. It means acknowledging that you were injured, and figuring out how to move past the injury.

You may need assistance to do this. Use whatever method works for you — psychological counseling, self-help programs, prayer or meditation, peer groups such as Lovefraud. Just be sure that anyone you ask to help you understands what it's like to be targeted by a sociopath, or at least believes you when you tell them what happened.

Healing your addiction to sociopaths

It can be scary and painful to face your experiences, but it's worth it. The process may take time, because sociopaths don't just cause one injury, they inflict a multitude of lies, manipulations and betrayals, and you'll need to excavate many of them. Please be patient and gentle with yourself.

The good news is that once you process your emotions and release them, you are free of them. In time, with the vulnerabilities healed, you'll feel much more happy and peaceful. And your hard-won wisdom about the behavior of sociopaths, even if another one does show up — there are so many of them in the world that it is certainly possible — you'll quickly spot him or her, and have the strength to get away quickly.

Focus on building a happy and joyful life for yourself, even if you are temporarily unattached to a partner. If you do, the right person will come along, and you'll be ready.

Heal your heart for Valentine's Day

For people who feel like their love lives are lacking, Valentine's Day can be really miserable. I know. I spent far more years of my adult life alone than I spent attached.

Pining for romance makes us vulnerable to the sweet nothings of the sociopath. Of course, we don't realize when we hear those smooth, silky words that they literally are nothings — empty promises. We think they're the answers to our prayers. Our dreams come true.

Then, at some point, we shockingly discover that our “relationship” with Prince or Princess Charming is nothing but a cruel mirage. We've been tricked. We find ourselves once again single, but now we're also carrying whatever additional devastation the sociopath has wrought — embarrassment, rage, doubt, illness, debt, a multitude of losses.

The pain and emotional turmoil are so overwhelming that we feel like we'll never recover. Or, perhaps we passed through the worst of the trauma and now we're just tired, too exhausted to care about Valentine's Day. Or, we still want to fill that empty hole within us, but our faith in our own judgment is severely shaken. How can we feel better?

The answer is always to heal our own hearts. Much of my book, *Love Fraud—How marriage to a sociopath fulfilled my spiritual plan*, is about discovering how to do exactly that.

Deciding to heal

The first step is deciding to heal. When we're in the midst of

Heal your heart for Valentine's Day

the trauma, this may feel counterintuitive. We want somebody to do something about the sociopath. We want somebody to deliver us from our circumstances. We want somebody to fix us.

Unfortunately, it's rare for the situation to change quickly enough to make us feel better. But we don't have to wait for changed circumstances in order to begin healing. In fact, we shouldn't wait, because that's not the way the energy of life works. First we heal ourselves, then our circumstances change.

Pursuing healing requires conscious action, participation on our part. It is something we do, not something that we wait for. So how do we pursue healing? By purposely finding peace and moments of joy.

Peace and joy

Yes, we can find peace within us, even as the storm rages around us. You can use any method that is comfortable and comforting, such as quiet contemplation, meditation, prayer, religious services, walking in nature, listening to music, or any activity that brings a sense of stillness and calm.

At first, we may feel only fleeting moments of peace before we are interrupted by stressful thoughts of our circumstances. That's okay. Keep trying, and little by little, you'll find that you're able to hold on to the peace for longer and longer periods of time.

Then, as you go through your day, look for moments of joy wherever you can find them. Maybe you find a sock that you thought the washing machine had eaten. Maybe you get a good parking spot. Maybe a clerk in a store is helpful. Maybe a friend takes you out to lunch. Notice those little treasures, no matter how small. And when you do, say a small prayer of gratitude—it can be as quick as the words, “Thank you.”

What happens when you focus on peace and joy? It reduces your stress, which deactivates your fight or flight response, which allows your body's natural healing capacity to do its job.

Miracles

Healing your heart is always the answer. When we work on healing our hearts, miracles happen. When we create peace, har-

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mony and health within us, our life circumstances improve as well.

I know this for a fact, because it happened in my life. I worked on changing my inner landscape, and as I made progress, my life got better. It took time, but I finally let go, emotionally, of the sociopathic ex-husband. As soon as I did, I met Terry Kelly, the man who became my new husband.

Terry and I are now in the midst of what we call “Love Week” — the celebration of our wedding anniversary and Valentine’s Day. We go out to dinner. We indulge in a one-pound box of chocolate and slowly nibble away, a couple of pieces at a time. Best of all, we exchange mushy sweet somethings, words that reflect our love and happiness.

True love feels like a miracle, but in reality, it is a direct result of a healed heart.

About the author

Donna Andersen is author of Lovefraud.com, a website that teaches people to recognize and recover from sociopaths. She is also author of *Red Flags of Love Fraud—10 signs you're dating a sociopath* and the *Red Flags of Love Fraud Workbook*.

Donna learned about sociopaths the hard way—by marrying one. She tells the whole outrageous story in her first book, *Love Fraud—How marriage to a sociopath fulfilled my spiritual plan*. The book was awarded five stars by the Midwest Book Review.

Donna founded Lovefraud Education and Recovery. The non-profit offers online webinars to help professionals and the public spot, escape and recover from narcissists, antisocials, psychopaths and other manipulators. She is co-author of a scientific paper about therapy for victims of sociopaths, and has presented research to the Society for the Scientific Study of Psychopathy.

Donna has appeared on television shows including *Insight* in Australia, *ABC News 20/20*, *Who the Bleep Did I Marry?*, *My Life is a Lifetime Movie*, *Handsome Devils* and *The Ricki Lake Show*. She has been interviewed for multiple radio shows, print articles and web posts.

Donna graduated summa cum laude from the Syracuse University with degrees in magazine journalism and psychology. She was the original editor of Atlantic City Magazine, and then founded a boutique advertising agency, Donna Andersen Copywriting, in 1983. Her portfolio includes multimedia scriptwriting, freelance magazine articles, newsletters, web content and more.

Donna is happily remarried, proving that recovery from betrayal is possible.