

Introduction

An issue is any **conflict, concern or potential problem**, whether **conscious or unconscious**, that is **incomplete** for us – or **needs action or change**. A core issue is one that **comes up repeatedly** for many of us. There are at least 15 core issues.

These include:

- **Needing to be in control**
- **Difficulty trusting**
- **Difficulty being Real**
- **All-or-none thinking and behaving**
- **Fear of abandonment**
- **Low self-esteem**
- **Dependence**
- **High tolerance for inappropriate behavior**
- **Over-responsibility for others**
- **Neglecting my own needs**
- **Grieving my ungrieved losses**
- **Difficulty handling feelings**
- **Difficulty resolving conflict, giving love, and receiving love**

These core issues tend to emerge especially from several areas of our life and recovery:

- **Relationships** – of any kind – with others, self, and our Higher Power
- Doing **experiential recovery work** – throughout our healing
- **Feedback** given by our therapy group members, therapists, sponsors, friends and others
- **Insight** from reading, listening, reflecting upon or working through conflict.

Core issues can assist us in describing and framing some of the origins and dynamics of such concepts as our:

- **Problems in living**
- **Day to day conflicts**
- **“Character defects” and**
- **Our struggle with our ego or false self**

Core issues thus show up for us in our day-to-day lives in **countless ways**, some of which I will describe throughout these chapters. In most of my prior books I have named and discussed core issues to a degree. In this book I will go into more detail and depth about them, how they affect us, and how we can use them to our benefit.

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Table 1.1 Twelve Common Characteristics among Core Recovery Issues

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Description</i>
1) Survival Oriented	When we are abused & neglected, learning to rely on using core issues can help us survive the associated emotional pain
2) Defense against emotional pain	We usually activate the core issue to avoid experiencing the emotional pain in a current or past conflict. The core issue is thus, in part, a defense against emotional pain
3) Unconscious	We are usually unaware or unconscious of the full dynamics involved & what is transpiring when we are involved in a core issue
4) Primitive	Core issues usually have a primitive or primary process nature (e.g., dream-like, primal, magnetic, and sometimes irrational). They also often have opposites (e.g., trust v distrust).
5) Dissociation/ Age-regression	When experiencing a core issue, we commonly dissociate (separate) from our full awareness of what is happening and often age-regress
6) Ego-based	When we are living in a core issue, our ego (false self) usually plays a major role. These dynamics & effects are often manifested by being a martyr & a victim, & by enacting a repetition compulsion.
7) Blocks awareness of our Real Self	All of the above dynamics usually block our ability & awareness of our Real Self. Bringing a core issue into our conscious awareness provides us the experience of the unfinished business, a better psycho-spiritual understanding, & a movement to self actualization, integration, wholeness, & serenity.
8) Often involve basic dynamics	Focusing on a core issue sets in motion a flow to other issues, both core & non-core. Core issues often involve & interact with <i>basic dynamics</i> in relationships (described on p -)
9) Character defects	Core issues may make up a large part of our “character defects” from a Fourth Step perspective (of the Twelve Steps)
10) Naming them can be freeing	Like many truths in healing & recovery, naming a core issue accurately can empower us & help us heal. It is then useful to explore how the issue came to be & how it still manifests in our life.
11) Help in grieving	In working through the core issues, as we grieve, we connect the pain (of experiencing the dynamics-in-action that the core issue exposes) to how we were mistreated & how our True Self went into hiding.
12) Help in all our relationships	Most issues that we have with others, we also have with our self & with our Higher Power

Table C.1. What I Can & Cannot Change

<p>Accept, CANNOT Change (I am powerless over)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That I will have, and have to work through, painful feelings – necessary ones. 2. My family (family of origin & current family) 3. Relationships – others’ beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, feelings decisions, choices & behavior in 4. Others’ differences from me 5. My differences from others 6. My own mistakes 7. That I have healthy human needs 8. My human condition 9. That I will experience change, conflict, and duality 10. My uniqueness and sameness as a spiritual being
<p>Courage, CAN Change</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My awareness of my inner life 2. My beliefs and attitudes 3. My thoughts 4. My painful feelings – necessary ones (can work through) 5. My painful feelings – unnecessary ones (can let go) 6. My inflated feelings 7. My negative ego 8. Relationships – my feelings, choices and behavior in 9. Getting my needs met 10. My decisions and choices 11. My expectations 12. My martyr/victim stance 13. Who runs my life (as a Co-creator) 14. That I work through the conflict and duality I experience 15. My attachment to many things, including my unnecessary suffering, my character defects, and my negative ego 16. My behavior

Core Issues as Defenses against Emotional Pain

When a child grows up in a crazy (abusive, traumatic, or neglectful) family and a crazy world, several crucial things happen. One is --

The associated emotional pain becomes so much that the child's Real Self (True Self, Child Within) goes into hiding.

To survive, it develops, and with repeated traumas, it over develops a false self (ego).

As part of that process it learns to use several mechanisms and dynamics to defend itself from the inordinate emotional pain that it experiences repeatedly.

We can summarize a large part of these defense mechanisms most simply as being core recovery issues.

[Other defenses-against-pain include the classical "ego" defenses, such as denial, displacement, and projection.

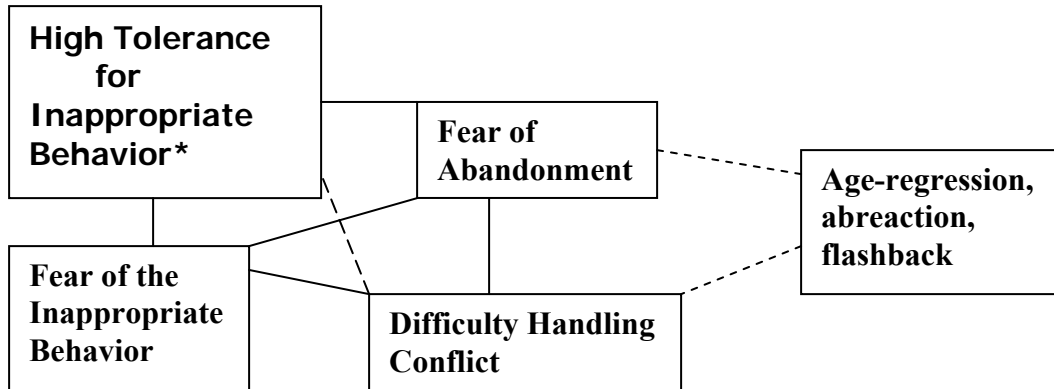
I see core issues too as both defenses against emotional pain and interwoven with the classical ego defenses.

Other such defenses include - intellectualization, rationalization, reaction formation, regression, regression, repression, suppression, and sublimation.]

**Table C.2. Paths to Letting Go of [Needing to be in] Control :
by Living in the Now**

<i>Working Recovery Aids</i>	<i>Key Terms</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1) Twelve Steps of AA & other fellowships	Let go [of ego], & let God	To work the Steps it usually helps to be in the Now, & surrender
2) Generic Spirituality	Eternal Now	From the perennial philosophy that is part of, yet transcends, religion
3) <i>A Course in Miracles</i>	Holy Instant	Sophisticated & effective handbook on ego psychology. Teaches prayer as a way out of conflict. Be at peace Now.
4) Ram Dass' teachings	Be Here Now	The 'truth' in three words --1971 book
5) Eckhard Tolle teachings	The power of Now	Let go of ego/false self into the peace of Now
6) Abraham-Hicks' teachings	More descriptions of Now	Simple, yet sophisticated advice for spiritual seekers
7) Power of Humility	How Now fits with humility	Teaches how to use humility Now in relationships

Dynamics in High Tolerance for Inappropriate Behavior



* Low self-esteem (shame) is commonly involved & underneath most of these dynamics. There may also be a “pseudo inappropriate behavior” involved at times, i.e., it only reminds me of what another did to me in the past (a transference or a projection), & is not actually inappropriate behavior.

Healing High Tolerance for Inappropriate Behavior

- **Begin a Stage 2 full recovery program**
- **Name the core issue(s) as they occur**
- **Name the inappropriate behavior**
- **Set boundaries & limits**
- **Grieve the past inappropriate behaviors (traumas)**
- **Learn to tolerate emotional pain**

... Who does all this? Our **Real Self**

... which helps by **letting go of false self** (ego)

... with **help from God/ Higher Power** (when asked)

Inappropriate Behaviors (Hurts, Losses & Traumas)

from <i>Family of Origin</i> (experienced as a child or teen)	from <i>Adult or Current Experience</i>
Psychological Abuse- Tease,* threaten, judge, compare unfairly, blame, shame, guilt, invalidate, “take your inventory,” break a significant promise; ... yell or scream any of these. Role reversal, use, exploit (narcissistic parent); invalidate feelings & experience	
Physical Abuse – Hit, slap, push, kick, bruise, burn, scratch, choke	Same, as physical or domestic violence
Sexual abuse <i>Covert</i> – Jokes, inappropriate nudity, sexual preoccupation <i>Overt</i> – Sexual touch, stimulation, penetration, threats	Sexual harassment Rape
Neglect – Attention, love, guidance, fathering or mothering, healthy modeling; Food, shelter, clothes, education, medical care	Varies

* Indicates unfair or vicious teasing

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What are *not* Inappropriate Behaviors (Hurts, Losses & Traumas) –

Child - Appropriate boundaries & limits

Both child & adult - Different preferences, decisions, simple disagreements, ordinary conflicts; transferences, mistakes

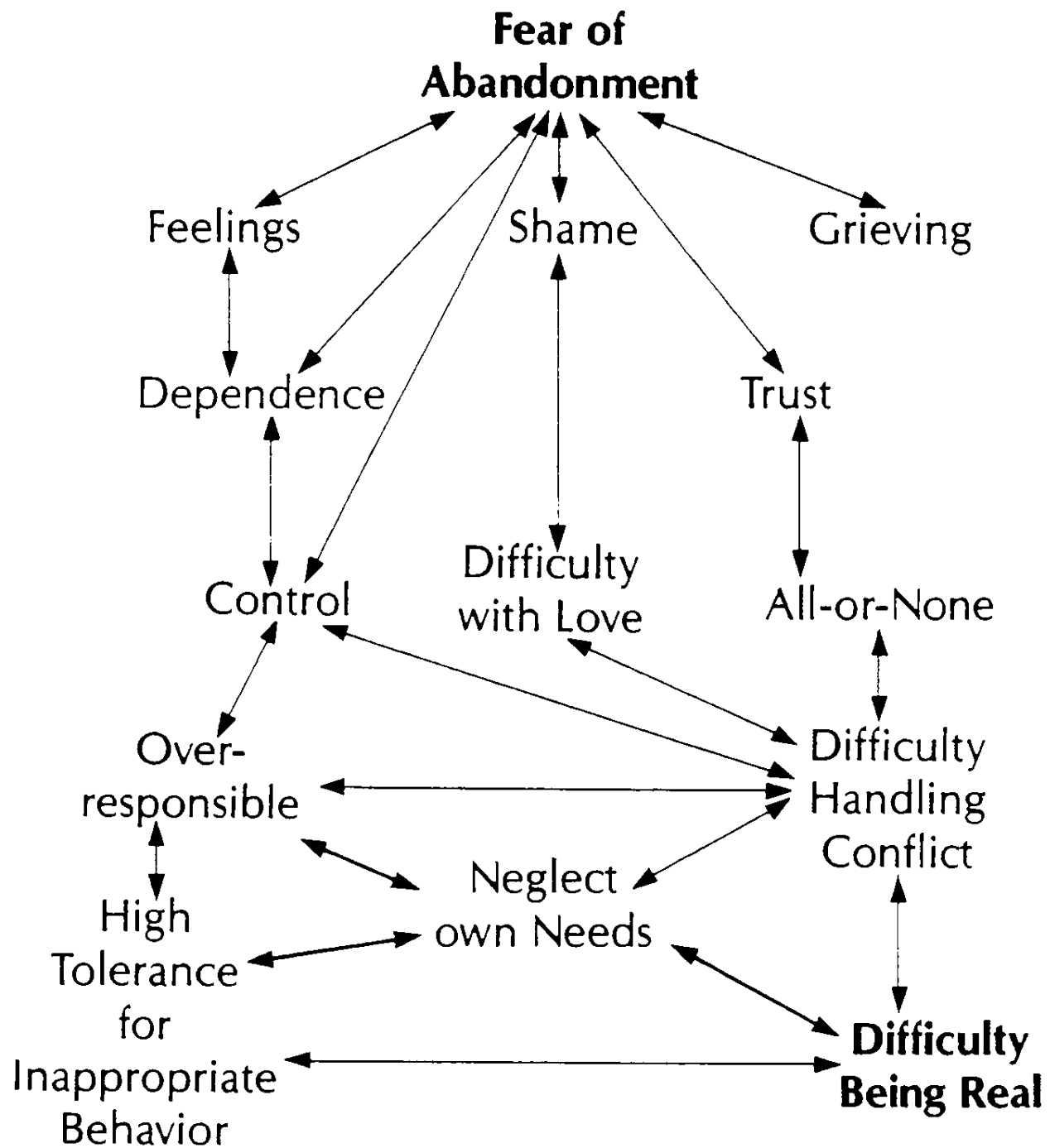


Figure 12.1. Inter-relationships among Core Recovery Issues: From the perspective of **fear of abandonment**, which ultimately may block **ability to be Real**.