

FINDING A HEALTHY PARTNER AFTER DIVORCE

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of FlyingFreeNow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 120 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we have two listener questions. We're going to be talking about dating and finding new love after divorce as well as how to avoid attracting bad men and how to attract good guys. It's going to be an interesting episode. Let's get started with our first question.

CALLER: Hi Natalie. My name is May. I left my husband one and a half years ago. I'm in the middle of my divorce. About a month ago I met a guy on Facebook, and we started chatting. I feel a connection with him. I thought that I finally met a good guy, and I could see the end of the tunnel. But it ended up all being a scam, and I lost a lot of money. My question is this: Was it me that I keep attracting bad guys into my life? Do I need to change myself to be less kind and good so I will stop attracting bad guys who want to take advantage of me?

NATALIE: This is a great question, and I get this question quite a bit, especially in the Flying Higher program, which is specifically for divorced Christian women who are rebuilding their lives. They've invested sometimes decades of their lives in an abusive relationship, and then they spent sometimes years working on getting out and suffering the loss of their marriage, family, friends, church, sometimes their children, their financial security, and their marital home. Now they'd like to start over and potentially make new friends and possibly even find a healthy partner to walk through life with. But they fear ending up in the same mess they just got out of. They want to know how to fool-proof their life, how to repel dysfunctional men rather than attract them, and how to attract a good guy.

Here's how I see this. Abusers are men... (They can be women. I'm not saying they can't, but my work is with female victims, so I'm going to be talking about the abuser as being male in this episode and all episodes that I do. Just a little caveat there.) Abusers are men who are stuck in emotional childhood. What's emotional childhood? That is when a person remains stuck in the phase of childhood where they cannot take responsibility for their own behavior. They see the world only through their own limited lens, kind of like a toddler only being able to see what's inside of his backyard and thinking that's the only perspective there is. Everything is black and white, good and bad, right and wrong, in and out. There is always an authority figure to tell you which is which.

Now take this same toddler. If a man grows up but never develops past this stage and then is told that he is the authority figure, that is an interesting recipe for disaster. This is like giving a toddler a sword. He now decides what is right or wrong, in or out, good or bad, or black and white based on his immature and limited perspective — his little backyard. He views other people like little Lego characters in his mind. These little Lego characters need to do what he imagines they should do according to his programming or manual for life. When a real person, like a wife or a girlfriend, deviates from his pretend version of them, he feels threatened and will do whatever it takes to get her to go back to being and doing what he says that she must be or do.

There are a lot of men out there who are stuck in this stage of human development. They are always right, and everyone else is always wrong. There is no gray. There is no nuance. There are no differences of opinion or ideas or preferences. If there are, they are wrong. If you are in a relationship with them, then you belong to them in their imaginary world. For some of these men, if you cooperate and join their pretend world, you will be treated okay. Often the beginning of a relationship is like this. You join or enter their pretend world. You don't even realize it is a pretend world until you show up as yourself, and then you find out that was not a good idea. Some men will treat you okay as long as you are in their little world. Other men fall along the more dangerous end of the bell curve. This would be the bully boy on the playground who bullies other people for kicks and giggles. You will think you are cooperating. You can even cooperate, doing exactly everything he wants you to do, but he'll still say that you are not. Or he will change the rules at the last minute to justify his abusing you.

There is another type of guy out there. There are emotional adults. These are men who see women as equal adults in full color. They respect women. They enjoy them. They enjoy learning from them. They gain wisdom from their male/female relationships. They don't see women as sex objects, but as whole, contributing, valuable, and equal members of the human race. These men aren't pretending, because they are adults. They are rooted in reality. They understand that you have a different opinion, mind, will, and perspective than they do. They don't expect you to buy into theirs. I know these men exist because my dad was a man like this, and I'm married to a man like this. They are safe, because you get to be you when you are with them. You get to be you without any shame or blame. They don't pretend like they know who you are and you don't.

The other important clue that you are dealing with an emotional adult is that they always take personal responsibility. They are not about controlling you and everybody else. They let everyone else control themselves, but they are all about self-control. This is called adulting — when we take control of ourselves and we let go of controlling all

the other people. You can give them feedback and they are interested in it, because they enjoy self-development and growing wiser. They are self-aware. They usually have a high EQ. All of this applies to your female relationships as well. If you constantly struggle in friendships where your friends are controlling or manipulating you or shaming and blaming you, then you are hanging out with emotional children. We love them, but they will not encourage your growth and development simply because they cannot do that for themselves. When one or both people in a relationship are living out of emotional childhood most of the time, you are going to have a dysfunctional, lopsided relationship at best, and an abusive one at worst. How do you avoid attracting emotional children, and how do you attract an emotional adult?

First, what do emotional children look for in a relationship? Someone operating out of emotional childhood wants what they want when they want it — and that is usually now. If it's a guy, they are going to want sex as soon as possible. They believe their needs are paramount and that you exist to meet those needs. It's interesting, because Christian women are groomed from the pulpit to meet the needs of men, so Christian women are great candidates for emotionally immature men.

Another thing an emotionally immature man wants is to always be right. Remember that a toddler only sees life from his perspective. He does not know there are other perspectives, other cultures, other ideas, or other valid opinions to consider. If he has to be right, that means whenever you disagree, you will be wrong — always. So he's looking for a woman who is going to buy into his imaginary world and allow him to be right all the time — a woman who will not offer a different opinion or a different perspective. Christian women are groomed from the pulpit to believe that their hearts are deceitful, so it is likely that if their opinion differs from a man's opinion, the man is most likely correct. This makes her the perfect candidate for an emotionally stunted man.

Third, if he is always right, then whenever he has problems or consequences for his behavior, it's not his fault — it's your fault, or the boss's fault, or the kids' fault — but it is never his fault. He does nothing wrong. He's going to look for a woman who's an easy scapegoat — someone who will take the blame, someone who will take all the responsibility, someone who will let him off the hook and enable him to justify his poor behavior. Christian women are groomed from the pulpit to believe that they are dirty, rotten sinners who make men stumble with their curves and smiles. They come to the table already feeling guilty and primed to take the blame for whatever goes wrong in the emotionally stunted man's life. She is the perfect candidate for him.

Fourth, men operating from emotional childhood have temper tantrums when things

don't go their way. They cannot control their emotions, and they lack self-awareness to understand that their emotions result from their own thoughts and beliefs of entitlement and not someone else's responsibility. Some of these types of men will rage overtly, while others will rage in a more covert, passive-aggressive way. But they will take out their anger on their target. Christian women are groomed from the pulpit to forgive and forget and overlook a multitude of sins, so they come to the table ready to be a punching bag for their toddler husband or boyfriend. They are the perfect candidate for him.

Fifth, emotionally immature men are insensitive. Do toddlers have the ability to understand the nuances of a situation and how others in the room are reacting or why? No, and neither do men like this. They don't understand the emotions of others, nor do they care to understand. Christian women are groomed from the pulpit to die to themselves, to take up their cross, to lay down their lives, and to suffer in silence. They come ready to accept not being listened to, not being understood, not being empathized with, and they believe it is normal. They are the perfect candidate for an insensitive, immature man.

I hope I've given you a good picture of the emotionally immature man and the good Christian woman that he is looking to exploit. If you don't want to attract a man like that, does that mean you have to be a mean, hard, bitchy woman? No! An emotionally mature man isn't looking for a mean, hard, bitchy woman either. My guess is that you would like to attract an emotionally mature man. So what does an emotionally mature man look for in a relationship? I decided to ask my husband. He was a bachelor until he married me. He was fifty years old when he married me; I was fifty-one. I robbed the cradle. Here's what he told me:

He said he always wanted an independent woman. He wanted someone who had a life she loved and was whole and complete by herself. He wanted someone who had self-confidence and didn't need him to stroke her or make her feel like she was worthy because she already knew she had intrinsic worth. He wanted a woman that he could respect and admire.

The second thing he told me wanted was an opinionated woman. I laughed when he said that because I am an opinionated woman, and maybe that's why he picked me. I asked him why he wanted an opinionated woman, and he said, "Because I want her to believe what she believes. I wanted someone who would be authentic and transparent enough to be themselves. I wanted someone who had courage and conviction and wasn't afraid to say what they thought."

The third thing he said is that he wanted someone who had a sense of humor. Again, I asked him why that was important to him, and he said he wanted his partner to be able to laugh at herself and her mistakes and not take her faults so seriously. He wanted her to be confident in who she was, warts and all. He was coming to the table ready to accept a woman with warts, to accept an imperfect woman, and he wanted her to accept herself that way as well. He got an imperfect woman, and we get along great.

Fourth, he wanted someone with life experience. For him, as he got older, he wasn't looking for a younger woman. He wasn't attracted to youth. He was attracted to wisdom and the ability to be resilient through the hard knocks of life. He wanted someone who would not crumble and fall apart when life got rough.

Finally, he said he was looking for a woman with similar values. He said she didn't have to have the same religion or vote the same politics, but she had to have a good heart and strong morals. She had to love other people and care about justice for the disenfranchised.

Does that sound like he was looking for a mean, hard, bitchy woman? Nope. But it also doesn't sound like your typical Christian woman who's been groomed to be a doormat for a toddler in a grown-up man's body.

So back to the original question. How do you stop attracting toddler men? You'll need to rewire the programming that your religion or your home culture has downloaded into your brain that has perfectly groomed you and set you up to be an abuse victim. Once you have your new programming and are loving your badass self exactly the way your Creator made you, the toddler men will run a million miles per hour in the opposite direction. They might try. They might test you out to see if you are who you say you are. But if you don't flinch and you stand strong, they will not be attracted to you, because they are looking for "easy." The mature adult men are going to wonder where the heck you have been their entire lives.

This is exactly the work that we do in the Flying Higher program, which is a program for women of faith who are divorced. At the time of this podcast, we're going to be in the middle of a dating course. But you can learn more if you go to joinflyinghigher.com. If you are a Christian woman who is not divorced but is still married to someone you think may be operating out of emotional childhood, I'd like to help you too. You can join Flying Free. You can learn more at joinflyingfree.com. Let's listen to our next question, which is a good follow-up question for this one.

CALLER: I need to thank you so very much for letting me know how the church has

manipulated me, what they have told me that God didn't really mean or intend that way, and that women are also part of it, not just men. I'd also like a podcast about once we escape, how do we move on, and what are our next steps? I have no interest in a man ever again.

NATALIE: This is a loaded question. How do you move on? There are so many rabbit trails I could go down. It's also a similar question, except this listener is not interested in a new relationship, which I want you to know is totally fine and normal as well. Not everyone wants to have a partner. I think to be a great partner, it is good to be your own best advocate and partner first, anyway. This is why the first course I bring Flying Higher members through is a course on discovering themselves and how to fall madly in love with who God made them to be. I think it's the first step to everything amazing in your life. It's also the first step not just about yourself, but the first step to changing your world. So what are your next steps?

The first step once you are out of your relationship is to heal. You need to learn how to process negative emotion; learn how to complete the stress cycle; learn what happened, why it happened, and how you can take your power back for the future. Second, learn how to love yourself. Find out who you are. If God loves you and that's good enough for God, you can love you too, contrary to what religious people will tell you. In fact, it's the key to everything. Take personality tests. Try new things. Go back to school. Make mistakes and learn. Be okay with just being who you are. Third, set achievable goals and work toward them. Gain some momentum around your life and your dreams, even if it starts really small. We do a lot of this work in Flying Higher. Fourth, rewire your brain's programming. Learn how to do thought downloads so you can discover what has been baked inside your brain your whole life. Once you can see what you believe, then you can question it. You can decide if you want to keep it. You can play with new thoughts and new beliefs that might serve you better.

Here's the thing: Rebuilding is not an overnight process. I can't wave a magic wand and say, "If you just do this A, B, C, 1, 2, 3, you will come out on the other side with a totally rebuilt life." Those are formulas. I think a lot of us in the Christian world are used to hearing formulas. Every sermon has a formula, and I don't believe in formulas. I think it just takes time. It's a lifetime process that is a journey. It's part of what life is — it's exciting and adventuresome. Do you know where it starts? It starts in your mind. The Bible calls it "renewing your mind." You create your life with your thoughts with what you believe. Think about it. Everything you've ever done began with a thought. That thought grew into a plan. Then your brain set about concocting a way to execute that plan.

I remember when I had the thought... I don't remember the first time I had it, but I do remember it was after I was married and had some kids. I had the thought cross my mind that I wanted to start a business one day. I had that thought for quite a few years until one day, I had another thought. I had a thought that I wanted to learn to make soap. I set about learning to make soap. The business thing I didn't know how to do, but I could learn how to make soap. I had Google and YouTube videos. That's how I learned. Because the thought of starting a business had been percolating for a few years, my brain eventually connected those two things. And guess what? Apple Valley Natural Soap was born. I grew that business for ten years until I sold it. It is now paying for my kids' education. And it all began with a thought.

What do you want to do in your life? Start thinking. Start writing things down. If you want systematic help to do all these things I just talked about, join Flying Higher. Here is just one of many things Flying Higher members have written to me over the past year. She wrote: "Here's an example of my growth from your classes. I was scrolling through Facebook and I saw a post about seven rules to live by. Here were my thoughts. It's interesting how lists like this would make me feel judged or shamed in the past if I didn't follow those rules, or I would feel uncomfortable or sad if the rule was one I felt was wrong or misplaced. I always felt there was some expert who knew better than me how to live or that I was a better expert if the rules went against my moral code. I think differently now. Now, thanks to Flying Higher, I can look at a list like this and see it as simply someone else's rulebook. I can choose to take it for myself or not. I do not need to judge it and determine if it is worthy or if that person needs to be corrected. I simply see it as their rulebook. I can also look at someone else's rulebook and find some rules that look good and might choose to add them to my life. It's such a newfound sense of freedom and respect. It saves me so much internal conflict. Thank you, Natalie, for enriching my life and many others as well. Just so you know, I don't see you as the ultimate authority. You are not a cult! You've done an excellent job empowering us women to choose for ourselves. For this I am so grateful. But I also love that you point us back to Jesus. That is such a beautiful gift."

You guys, I would love to help you in this same way someday. If you are a divorced Christian woman, learn more at joinflyinghigher.com. If you're not divorced and are still in your relationship with your husband, that is totally okay too. My original program is Flying Free. It is made and created for you. You can learn more at joinflyingfree.com.

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