

# Lost: Understanding and Coping With Abandonment

by Dr. Michael Obsatz

We hear a lot about abandonment. Infants are abandoned in front of churches. Victims of bullies are often abandoned when they come forward and tell their truth. Some of the elderly are abandoned by their families and spend their last years alone. Some marginalized kids are abandoned and left to cope on their own.

So, what does abandonment mean, and what forms of abandonment exist? Abandonment is about being left, deserted, and without support. Abandonment is being cast out, being an outcast. This can take many forms and have many consequences.

1. **Physical abandonment** is the most obvious type. It involves the absence of the physical being of a real person. Statistics tell us that 36 million American children live without a biological Dad in their homes.

2. **Emotionalphysical abuse abandonment** means that a person is not valued, and not treated with respect. This abuse can include physical attacks, emotional shaming and ridicule, and neglect.

3. **Abandonment through entitlement** is another type. This means the individual is led to believe that he/she deserves to have everything without having to earn it. Some people become grandiose and think only of themselves. When people experience this type of abandonment, they may have a rude awakening that the world does not owe them a living.

4. Another aspect of this is called **“lack of guidance” abandonment**. An individual is being thrust into situations that he or she is not prepared to handle. A Person sometimes fails and blames themselves for the failure.

5. **Social exclusion** is another type of abandonment. It is usually done by one’s peer group, but not always. People ignore, ostracize, or exclude certain people who don’t fit in some way.

6. **Self-abandonment** occurs when a person pretends to be what they are not, living a life. Or, they may be so out of touch with their own needs, feelings, and capabilities that they have no clue as to what they are about.

7. Some people also experience **societal abandonment**. Some examples of this include children who have no rights, children who are homeless or live in poverty, children with no health care, and groups of marginalized people. Society as a whole can abandon a group of people. All genocides are about abandonment.

### **Why does abandonment exist?**

Some people have been so emotionally and physically damaged themselves that they lack skills. It does not occur to them to care for others because they don't believe that they are responsible for them.

Other people lack empathy and compassion. They are self-absorbed and do not think about the consequences of their behavior on other people. It takes a level of maturity to see the big picture - and begin caring for those in need, those who have little or nothing.

Still others, out of laziness, don't want to handle the responsibilities of caring for others.

### **How does abandonment relate to trust?**

Psychologist and author Erik Erikson said that trust is the cornerstone of emotional development. In the first years of life, a child is dependent upon the consistency and care of the adults around them. When a child is abandoned, it is difficult for the child to trust anyone.

### **How do some people feel about being abandoned?**

They suffer in pain, and sorrow, missing what they have lost. Many numb themselves. Some close up, and become martyrs, not trusting anyone. This grieving can take many forms and go on forever.

### **How do some people respond to abandonment?**

Some are very hurt, and some bitter and hostile. They go on to do violence to others and themselves. Some engage in self-sabotaging behaviors. Others may be suicidal or depressed. Some mask their hurt feelings with addictive behaviors that temporarily numb them and give them a high, such as drugs, busyness, gambling, food, shopping, or codependency.

### **How can we help abandoned people?**

We must first notice them and see who they are. We have to listen, pay attention, and care about them. This is difficult to do for some abandoned people who are not pleasant to be around. Abandoned people almost always need therapy, skills training, support groups, and opportunities to realize that their abandonment was not their fault. Spiritual practices which validate the value and worth of every person can also help.