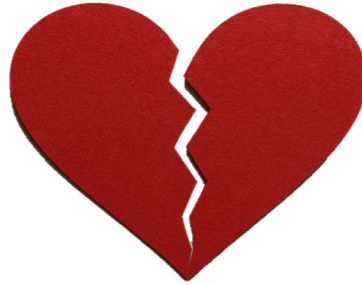


When Love Feels Heavy: Understanding Toxic Relationships and How to Heal

“You can’t build a strong career or a peaceful life if your emotional energy is being drained by an unhealthy relationship.”



Introduction

Starting out as a tax apprentice is full of challenges, learning the ropes, managing deadlines, and finding your feet in the workplace. It’s an exciting time, but it can also be emotionally demanding. As you build your professional life, your personal relationships play a huge part in how supported, confident, and focused you feel.

But what happens when a relationship starts to feel more confusing than comforting? When affection turns to control, and love becomes something that hurts more than it helps?

This post explores what a healthy relationship looks like, the red flags that may signal toxicity or abuse, and how you can begin to heal and rebuild if you’ve been through one.

What a Healthy Relationship Looks and Feels Like

“A healthy relationship should feel like home, not like walking on eggshells.”

Healthy relationships whether romantic, family, or friendship-based, feel like partnership, not pressure. They serve as an anchor to keep you grounded, encourage you to be your best self and create space for growth.

In a healthy relationship, you should feel:

- Safe – free to express yourself without fear or judgment.
- Valued – your thoughts and boundaries matter.
- Supported – your goals and wellbeing are encouraged, not dismissed.
- Steady – you don’t live in constant uncertainty about where you stand.

Even a healthy connection, disagreements arise, and nobody can be perfect 100% of the time. But in healthy relationships, people take accountability for their actions and disagreements are resolved with respect, empathy, and communication, not manipulation or silence.

Why chemistry isn't always compatibility

"If it feels like a rollercoaster, it might not be love, it might be adrenaline."

Unhealthy relationships rarely start out that way. They often begin with charm, excitement, or intense chemistry. We're told to follow the spark, that rush of excitement when we meet someone new.

But chemistry isn't always a sign of a healthy match. Sometimes, that powerful attraction is actually our nervous system recognising a familiar emotional pattern rooted in unpredictability or inconsistency. If you grew up around love that was confusing or conditional, that same chaos might feel "normal" or even exciting.

Healthy love often feels calmer, quieter, and more secure. That can take getting used to but real connections grow through peace, not drama.

Initial Signs of an Unhealthy relationship

If you are in an unhealthy or unbalanced relationship for a period of time you will probably start to notice unhealthy patterns emerge. This can include:

- Constant anxiety or exhaustion after seeing them.
- Doubting yourself or your memory ("Did that really happen?").
- Apologising for things that aren't your fault.
- Losing touch with friends or interests you used to love.
- Feeling like you're never 'enough' no matter what you do.

Spotting early warning signs is the key to protecting yourself. It is important to regularly check in with yourself both before and after you have connected and reflect honestly and without judgement on your feelings, as they come up.

Red Flags for Emotional, Physical, and Financial Abuse

If left unchecked, sometimes an unhealthy relationship can escalate into abuse. Be aware that abuse does not just mean physical abuse, but can, and often does, relate to more subtle forms of abuse which are just as harmful and can take its toll on your emotional and financial health.

The first, and possibly most important step is identifying and acknowledging when some form of abuse is happening. Common red flags of abuse are:

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes:

- Any physical harm or threat of it.
- Intimidation — blocking your way, breaking things, or using fear.
- Forcing affection or control over where you go.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse can include:

- Belittling, mockery, or constant criticism.
- Guilt-tripping or blame-shifting.
- Isolation from family or friends.
- Using silence or anger as punishment.

Gaslighting is one of the most damaging forms of emotional abuse and one of the hardest to spot. It's when someone manipulates you into doubting your own memory, perception, or sanity.

They might say things like:

- “You’re too sensitive — that never happened.”
- “You always twist everything I say.”
- “You’re imagining things.”

Over time, gaslighting erodes your confidence until you start believing their version of events over your own. You may feel confused, anxious, or like you’re “losing it.”

Financial Abuse

- Controlling your money or access to it.
- Forcing financial dependence or debt.
- Monitoring your spending or demanding justification for purchases.

Remember that “Love never demands control — it offers freedom.”

Protecting Yourself If You're in a Toxic Relationship

"You are never overreacting when you feel unsafe."

If you think you may be in a harmful or controlling relationship:

1. Reach out for support — tell a trusted friend, mentor, or HR contact.
2. Document incidents safely and immediately after the event if you can — This is especially important if you suspect gaslighting may be an issue and you find yourself doubting your version of reality.
3. Set boundaries and stick to them firmly. This may include minimising contact or removing yourself from the relationship altogether.
4. Plan for safety — have emergency contacts and a place to go if needed.
5. Contact professional help — support services and counsellors are trained to help you navigate safely and confidentially and begin your path to healing.

Healing After Leaving

Leaving a toxic relationship can be one of the bravest things you ever do, but healing takes time, you need to be patient and kind to yourself as you navigate through this process.

Here are some ways to rebuild:

- Therapy or counselling (especially trauma-informed).
- Reconnecting with friends, family, and hobbies.
- Creating new routines that focus on self-care.
- Journaling to process your emotions.
- Forgiving yourself for not seeing the red flags sooner.
- Knowledge is power -It is helpful to understand your own attachment style and how this may have contributed to keeping you trapped in this pattern. There are many excellent books and articles on attachment styles available.

Healing the inner child

Many people repeat relationship patterns from childhood not because they want to, but because the wounds are still unhealed.

Your inner child is the part of you that once felt unseen, unworthy, or unsafe. Healing means learning to give yourself the love and care you needed back then so you can attract a more positive and fulfilling future into your life going forward.

Try:

- Speaking kindly to yourself.
- Setting boundaries without guilt.
- Doing things that bring you joy, even small ones.
- Seeking therapy or journaling to process old wounds.
- There are many great books out there on healing your inner child and core wounds. I recommend John Bradshaw, in particular

It is not selfish to put yourself first, it is in fact a selfless act. According to the law of attraction, relationships often act as mirrors to reflect to us our subconscious feelings about ourselves and our self-worth. Therefore, if you want to attract a healthy relationship, the first step is to ensure you have one with yourself.

Where to Find Extra Help

If you're in the UK, confidential help is available:

- National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (24/7) – www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk
- Mind (Mental Health Support): 0300 123 3393 – www.mind.org.uk
- Samaritans: 116 123 – www.samaritans.org
- Refuge: www.refuge.org.uk
- Citizens Advice: www.citizensadvice.org.uk for financial or housing advice.

Many apprenticeship providers and workplaces also offer Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) that provide free, confidential counselling.



Final Thought

“Real love feels like peace, not panic.”

You deserve a relationship that makes you feel safe, not small. The strongest love doesn't demand that you shrink but celebrates your growth and expands with you.

As you build your career and your future, remember: the same care and respect you give to your work and to others, you also owe yourself.