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## Do Stronger Human Connections Immunise Us

"The opposite of addiction is not sobriety. The opposite of addiction is connection."  
- Johann Harri

These sentiments are augmented by a growing number of experts, including addiction specialist Dr Gabor Maté, who [cites](#) 'emotional loss and trauma' as the core of addiction. Compare this 'emotional loss' to Johan Harri's idea about lack of connection and it is clear they're talking about a similar emotional condition.

## Limbic Resonance

If connection is the opposite of addiction, then an examination of the neuroscience of human connection is in order. Published in 2000, [A General Theory Of Love](#) is a collaboration between three professors of psychiatry at the University of California in San Francisco. *A General Theory Of Love* reveals that humans require social connection for optimal brain development, and that babies cared for in a loving environment are psychological and neurologically 'immunised' by love. When things get difficult in adult life, the neural wiring developed from a love-filled childhood leads to increased emotional resilience in adult life. Conversely, those who grow up in an environment where loving care is unstable or absent are less likely to be resilient in the face of emotional distress.

How does this relate to addiction? Gabor Maté observes an extremely high rate of childhood trauma in the addicts he works with and trauma is the extreme opposite of growing up in a consistently safe and loving environment. He asserts that it is extremely common for people with addictions to have a reduced capacity for dealing with emotional distress, hence an increased risk of drug-dependence.

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*"Humans require social connection"*

## How Our Ability To Connect Is Impaired By Trauma

Trauma is well-known to cause interruption to healthy neural wiring, in both the [developing](#) and [mature](#) brain. A deeper issue here is that people who have suffered trauma, particularly children, can be left with an underlying sense that the world is no longer safe, or that people can no longer be trusted. This erosion (or complete destruction) of a sense of trust, that our family, community and society will keep us safe, results in isolation - leading to the very lack of connection Johann Harri suggests is the opposite of addiction. People who use drugs compulsively do so to avoid the pain of past trauma and to replace the absence of connection in their life.

## Social Solutions To Addiction

The solution to the problem of addiction on a societal level is both simple and fairly easy to implement. If a person is born into a life that is lacking in love and support on a family level, or if due to some other trauma they have become isolated and suffer from addiction, there must be a cultural response to make sure that person knows that they are valued by their society (even if they don't feel valued by their family). Portugal has [demonstrated](#) this with a 50% drop in addiction thanks to programs that are specifically designed to re-create connection between the addict and their community.

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*"Human connection is crucial in in the immediate task of clearing trauma"*

## Personal Solutions To Addiction

*"Ask not why the addiction, but why the pain."*

*- Gabor Maté*

Recreating bonds is essential in the long term, but human connection is crucial in in the immediate task of clearing trauma. When a person decides to finally face and feel the pain that they may have been avoiding for years or decades, the first steps cannot be done alone.

*"You have to be with that pain, but you have to have support."*

*- Gabor Maté*

This support is essentially the reintroduction of the care and support which is so important in creating the neural structure of emotional-resilience in early life. By doing so, we begin to replace what was missing, and thanks to the [revelations](#) of neuroplasticity we now know that you can in fact teach an old dog new tricks; neural rewiring *is* possible in adult life. Though it is essential for addicts to feel supported in order to finally face and feel the pain they have been trying to avoid, this is ultimately an inner journey that must be taken by the individual.

*"Whatever you do, don't try and escape from your pain, but be with it. Because the attempt to escape from pain creates more pain."*

*- The Tibetan Book Of Living And Dying*

## The Roots Of Healing

loving support for an addict wishing to face the emotional pain they carry, they are loving them and caring for them until they can learn to love themselves. With this in mind, perhaps the neural-wiring of emotional resilience developed through the loving reflection of another, once fully developed, could simply be called self-love.

Everything You Think You Know About Addiction Is Wrong | Johann Hari | TED ...



*Johann Hari: Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong*

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