

## The masks that block emotional intimacy

Alex Howard

*Disclaimer: The contents of this interview are for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. This interview does not provide psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or psychological condition.*

### Alex Howard - [00:00:06]

Hi, I'm Alex Howard and welcome to this session where we're going to be exploring the masks that block emotional intimacy.

What are the patterns, the ways that we hide our true and our authentic self that stop us really having the depth of connection in our life that we're looking for?

I'm really excited to be sharing some of my thoughts in this presentation. I love being in the role of interviewer in these conferences and having the amazing conversations we get to have with the guests that we're interviewing. But I also like to have the opportunity to share some of my own teaching, some of my own ideas in this area.

Just to give you a little bit of a sense of some of what we're going to be covering today.

We're going to talk about why emotional healing is really critical to transforming our relationships. In a sense, if we don't work on ourselves, if we don't work to process, to metabolize the emotions and the history that lives inside of us, it becomes a block. It gets in the way of the quality of really all relationships in our lives.

We'll talk about how emotional overload causes us to live with masks. I'll share a little bit around my own story with emotional healing, particularly in the context of relationships. I'm going to talk about why you can't heal what you don't feel. Why learning to really connect to and feel our emotions is so important.

I'll talk a little bit about the HEART model for healing your emotions and also ultimately, how can we learn to feel? How can we learn to really connect with, to metabolize, to digest the things in our lives that perhaps up until this point, we haven't been able to.

Just to share a little bit about myself. I've been deep diving in this field for around 25 years now. Primarily catalyzed through suffering from a chronic illness, ME Chronic Fatigue Syndrome in my teenage years, which really triggered what became a 5 year active healing journey of reading hundreds of different books, seeing dozens of different practitioners, taking dozens of supplements on a daily basis, really trying everything I could to turn around the living hell that my life was at that time.

And as a result of that, I founded the Optimum Health Clinic. It's now one of the world's leading integrative medicine clinics, with a team of 25 full time practitioners supporting patients in over 50 countries around the world.

## Alex Howard - [00:02:52]

For the last 15+ years, I've been training practitioners in the therapeutic coaching methodology, which alongside my colleague, Anna Duschinsky, I developed and continue to develop as these things are a living, breathing knowledge base that are always growing and unfolding.

I've also, for the last few years, been documenting some of my therapeutic work through my YouTube series "In Therapy with Alex Howard". These are real life filmed therapy sessions, and each week we release an episode. It's part of really my mission to break the stigma around mental health, chronic illness, the fact that we all go through challenging times in our lives. But it's not talking about it that makes the challenge so much harder.

Finally, I've published research in journals such as the *British Medical Journal Open Psychology in Health, Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*. I've also written several books.

And really, though, I feel that the heart of my experience, beyond having done over 10,000 hours of clinical work, is that I am deeply passionate about living this work in my own life.

And as I share some of this teaching in the video today, I'll share a little bit of about some of how these ideas have been so transformational for me in my own relationships.

Also, just a few nice things people have said about my work over the years. Miranda Hart, about my latest book, said it was a hopeful, practical book to help people move from debilitating fatigue to a purposeful, joyful life once again. And Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum said, are you ready to be empowered instead of blown off? Enlightened instead of fumbling in the dark? Here's a map to help you get there from somebody healthy who has been where you are.

But let's jump into it.

When we talk about emotional overload, what do we actually mean? Emotional overload is when we experience events in our life which are either just too big to process at the time or we don't have the support or the resources to be able to process them.

This often happens when we're small children. We experience things that are frightening, we feel all these big feelings and emotions and we don't know what to do with them. So they have to go somewhere. Where do they go? They end up getting repressed, our body has to hold all of that.

I sometimes use the analogy, it's like having a big black sack of all of these things over the years that we haven't metabolized and processed, we end up carrying that black sack around, and then every so often, something seemingly small happens and all of that stuff comes exploding out.

An example might be that we're driving our car around a roundabout, we think we're in a relatively calm mood and then someone cuts us up and we just find ourselves honking the horn and shouting and screaming and having this massive explosion in response. But all that happened was someone just drove badly. Why do we have such a big reaction?

If we explore more into it, inquire into it, we might find that in that moment we felt unseen, we felt pushed out. We've got all these memories, all this history and all these other times we felt that way that haven't been processed. And that's what comes through. That's what comes exploding through in that moment.

In relationships so many of the arguments, the reactions, the things that happen are not actually about what's going on in the relationship in that moment. It's the black sack. It's all of that stuff that we've not processed, that we've not dealt with.

## Alex Howard - [00:06:34]

To truly be intimate and connected to someone in our lives we need to not be reacting and being triggered by the past. Otherwise, we're in relationship more with the past than we are with that person at that moment in our lives.

Now, you might be watching this, and you might be thinking, well, I can already think of all of these things that have happened in the past. I know I've experienced adverse childhood experiences. I have trauma that's not been dealt with. Others might be thinking, well, I had a relatively happy childhood. My life seems fine. I don't have this big black sack that Alex is talking about. But more increasingly, there is growing evidence that shows that we don't need to have obvious traumas to have unprocessed emotions.

There's, what we call trauma with a big T, like the loss of a parent or being physically or sexually abused, something like that. There's also trauma with a small T, or what might be called micro traumas. Those moments where perhaps we came home from school and we felt sad and our parents just told us to man up. So we learned that feeling our feelings was a sign of weakness.

Or we have an experience where we're in class and we put our hand up and the teacher didn't notice us. We didn't get seen. And what we learned is that people don't care about us. People don't recognize us. And so we don't put our voice out there in the world.

There are so many different ways that we can be shaped, and we can have emotions that are unmetabolized and unprocessed in our lives, that these things end up becoming, sometimes lots of small things, end up creating big patterns and habits in our lives that have enormous impact in really, every area.

When we don't process emotions, where do they go? They go into our physical body. They can be a source of chronic illness, chronic pain because of all this stuff that we're holding on. They go into our emotional body. This is what I mean about this big black sack, stuff gets triggered. We have all this stuff we're carrying around that's waiting for something to happen to trigger a response.

We can also find ourselves projecting our emotions onto other people. We might, for example, have a lot of anger, but what we learned is that being angry is not okay. And so we have this anger, but we're not allowed to have it. So we just see everyone else as being angry. We might be in a relationship and, perhaps you're in a relationship with someone that has this pattern, and you're not someone that's particularly angry. And they keep saying, why are you always so angry? You're like, the anger's not here, the anger is over there.

So we have different coping strategies, different ways of hiding or dealing with the fact that there's all of these emotions that are not being processed that are not being dealt with. We end up walking around with a big sack of unprocessed emotions and experiences that really cover everything else in our lives.

Our unprocessed emotions, particularly in our emotional body, we can experience depression, like just the absence of feeling. Because there's been so much feeling that we've become numb.

Stephen Porges work on the Polyvagal Theory is a very helpful way of seeing how we can go from what we call, he was a safe and social state, what I would call being in a healing state, we can go then to a fight or flight, that anxiety state that we might be familiar with. By the way, anxiety is another result of his overwhelm of feelings. But it can be so intense that we go another level. We go into shutdown. We go into a numb state. Often, depression is not the fact that there is no feeling, it's the fact that there's so much feeling we've gone numb to those feelings.

Another example of unprocessed emotions affecting us is addiction. We find ourselves self medicating our feelings. If you've seen the film Rocketman, which is the biopic of Elton John's life, it's

a great example of him having these really difficult feelings as a younger man and using drugs, alcohol, sex as ways to constantly try to change his feeling state, to self medicate these emotions.

### **Alex Howard - [00:11:07]**

To cope with all of this, to deal with these overwhelming feelings, emotions that we've got in our black sack or we're repressing or we're projecting onto other people, we become perhaps depressed, or we become anxious, we have addictions. We have to find ways to hide all of this. We have to find ways to be in the world where we can meet our needs. Needs for safety, needs for love, needs for strength and showing up.

So we develop masks. We develop ways of hiding behind these masks in the world. And these masks that in some ways initially, are almost a way of protecting ourselves. It's almost like we've put up some barriers to keep the scary world out. But after a while, what is protecting us becomes our prison. We become trapped behind the masks that we develop to try and be safe, but they stop our authentic self, our true nature, our true capacity from showing up in our lives.

And here's the thing, intimacy is, 'in to me see', emotional connection comes from living from our authentic self, from being true to who we really are. The more masks we have, those masks become an obscuration, they become a veil, they become a wall in the way of our connection to those that we love and care about.

So I want to tell you a little bit about some of my own experience with masks.

Like a lot of people I had, and at times, a very challenging childhood. My mother left my father soon after I was born and my father was never to be seen again. He just basically abandoned us, didn't pay child support. My mom then had to work, at one point, three jobs to be able to support us financially. And my sister suffered from a number of quite severe mental health issues right through childhood and through into adulthood as well.

And I learned some things along the way. I learned that expressing emotion was a sign of weakness. And also when my sister was so explosive emotionally, I became afraid of seeing so much emotion out there because of how destructive it could be. I learned that I wasn't lovable as I was. I had a grandmother that, on one hand, was very loving but very conditional in that love, that I had to be the best in the class, and if I was second in the class, why weren't you top? If I got one wrong in a test, it was not about the 99 out of 100 that I got right, it was which one did you get wrong? And why did you get it wrong?

So, like we all do in our own different ways in childhood, I learned things about myself. I learned things about other people. I learned things about the world.

I then went through 7 years of suffering from a severe chronic illness, the first 2 years in a very hopeless, desperate way before this very active 5 year recovery journey

I found myself then in my, 26, 27 years old, having had a very close romantic relationship that had broken up in ways that have been quite painful and quite difficult. And I learned emotions are weak, emotions are scary, so I just hadn't felt the emotions around this. In fact, I was immediately in another relationship before I'd even moved out of the shared home we were in despite the fact that we decided to separate.

And for the coming few years, I was from one short-term relationship to another short-term relationship to the point that it became quite embarrassing. The studio where I'm recording this session is one of the back rooms at our offices here at the Optimum Health Clinic, and actually in the next room is the big training room and there's a kitchen in there. And we used to do staff training every couple of months. All the practitioners would come in and we'd all share a lunch and we'd chat, standing up, having a buffet around the kitchen.

## Alex Howard - [00:15:18]

And I realized that every couple of months I was in a different relationship. And after a few years, as it got so embarrassing that when people would ask with a, part curiosity and part awkwardness, what's happening in your relationship life? I just started to get ashamed of the fact that I just I couldn't seem to have a lasting relationship.

I was so looking for a certain type and looking for who I believed I needed to be, to attract that type. I was particularly into a lot of the self development work around becoming the person that you aspire to be. There was, in a sense, I was a very kind and giving, loving person, but also I didn't really believe I was enough as I was. So I had these masks. I had the mask of trying to be seen as the successful guy and being seen as self sufficient and being seen as not needing anyone else. And these were the masks that I wore in the world, but also the masks that I wore in relationship.

And that meant that when I was with someone for more than a few months, those masks would start to crack a little bit. Some of my vulnerability might show, and that was scary. And so I would then tend to leave the relationship.

What also happened was I was looking for a certain type of woman who would have her own masks, and they would be masks around aesthetic beauty and masks around being strong, independent women. Therefore, the relationships often, not all, but a lot of the relationships I was having we were both hiding behind masks and as the masks dropped, the relationship then would fall apart.

And this really came to a climax for me where on my 29th birthday, I was having dinner in Camden Town, which is just down the road here in London from where the office is. And I had a bunch of the team from work and we were sat in a Belgian restaurant. I remember it very well. And I'd been in a relationship that had ended a month or so ago. I'd been in this relationship, I think, for like, 6 weeks, and it had been, as I described, that I'd been wearing my masks and she'd been wearing her masks.

The relationship had ended and it became clear that she, became clear after what I'm about to describe, that there had been a history of some mental health struggles. And she was particularly devastated by the end of this relationship, I think partly because on the surface, the masks were worn so well and there was such a, it seemed so perfect. And then, of course, there was a disintegration. In the ending of this relationship, this particular person had been very devastated by it and she'd actually tried to end her life.

And I found this out as I was sat in this restaurant surrounded by a bunch of friends of mine, I got a text message that informed me what had happened and thankfully she did survive and it was okay. But it was a massive wake up call.

It was a wake up call because I have a strong pattern of taking responsibility. And although, of course, I wasn't to blame for her actions and I hadn't actually behaved in any ways that I needed to be ashamed of, but nonetheless, I'd been in this connection with this person and what was so clear to me was the void between the people we were pretending to be, the masks we were wearing, and the actual truth of where we were.

So after this, I basically just stopped dating and I decided I wanted to do the inner work on myself, and I wanted to process, I wanted to learn to be who I really was in relationship.

And to cut a long story short, I did, over the next year, a lot of inner work. I did have a few short relationships in that time, but it was different. And a year later, I met my now wife. We've been together 11 years. We have 3 kids and something really fundamental changed.

One of the things that was so different when I met my wife is, either way, I tried to wear my masks, she wasn't interested in the mask. In fact, she would pull away energetically the more I tried to put those masks on.

## Alex Howard - [00:19:31]

What I discovered was that for relationships to have a really solid foundation, we have to learn to take those masks down.

So I want to talk a little bit more in this session, what are the masks? What are the masks that get in the way of emotional connection and intimacy?

And one of the ways I talk about it is really we all have three selves. We have three different ways or selves that we can be in the world.

The first is what we call the collapsed self. This is the self with that big black sack of all of those emotions is just leaking out all over us, and we end up feeling energetically overloaded, collapsed, deficient. We don't have what it takes. And sometimes we can relate from that place and people can, in a sense that becomes their character, that they're emotionally drained and flat and heavy.

But for a lot of us, what we do is we develop masks to protect that place. We become what I call the idealized self, the person that we believe if I was this person, people would love me, people would like me, I would feel safe, I would get the things that I want in the world. And some of us might be really good at being that person. We may be really good at driving ourselves hard and achieving and becoming that idealize self. Others, we may not feel so competent at doing that, but we still aspire to be that person.

We carry around this idea that if I was a bit skinnier, if I was a bit cleverer or if my children behaved a little better, whatever it might be, then I would feel more safe, then I would feel loved.

And we just do the best we can to be more of the idealized self and less of the collapsed self. But we all have an authentic self. We have a true self which is embracing and holding all of our talents, our potential, our gifts in the world, our capacity to be courageous, to be strong, not in an idealized, I can do anything, I'm indestructible, but being in touch with our true capacity, our true resources. In that place we can also be vulnerable. We can also ask for help.

So I want to talk a little bit more about each of these. And hopefully you're getting a sense that to have true 'in to me see' (intimacy), we need to be coming from our authentic self. We need to process all of that emotion in the collapse self so we're not collapsing into all this reactivity, but also not this constant striving and efforting to be this idealized self that just becomes this huge wall in the way of connection and intimacy.

So let's explore each of these selves in a little bit more detail.

So the collapse self. This is where we collapse into our emotions and pain. Often in this place we feel unlovable. We think no one's going to love me with all of these difficult feelings and the states and moods that I'm in. We tend to reject ourselves. We find ourselves unlovable in this place, but also we therefore return the world around us. Often what we'll do is we'll reject ourselves before we give anyone else the chance to do so.

We can also find ourselves projecting our pain onto others and the world. We see, we have a part of our brain called our reticular activating system, and its job is to look for patterns and to look what we train it to look for. This is where if you suddenly find out that you're having a baby, you see babies everywhere. The babies were always there, but you start noticing them. Or something more mundane, you decide you're going to get a new car and you start seeing that car everywhere.

When we're in a state of anxiety or depression, we start to see that everywhere in the world. Also, memory is state dependent. So if we're in a state of anxiety, we remember all the times that we've been anxious in the past.

## Alex Howard - [00:23:51]

The collapse self becomes a self-perpetuating state. Now, the thing is not that we want to reject and ignore this place. Ultimately, we're learning to metabolize, to process all of these feelings and emotions. But that isn't the same as just living in this collapsed place that we feel we need to hide and we need to reject so others can't see us in that place. It becomes a place that we either can get stuck or a place that we're constantly trying to run away from and escape from.

Coming to the idealized self a little bit more. This is who we think we need to be to feel loved, to feel safe and to feel accepted. It's often fueled by our inner critic. Our inner critic is that voice inside of our mind which is always judging and criticizing and, in a sense, assessing our worth as a human being by the things we do, the things we don't do. And the impact of the inner critic is it's trying to whip us into shape, it's trying to drive us to become that idealized self, so we can then be lovable, acceptable, all the things that it thinks we need to be, to be safe and loved in the world.

So the challenge also is we can feel identified with it. In fact, we can believe that we are the idealized self, and we'll almost do anything to defend being the idealized self. Or we, as I said a little bit earlier, we can feel it's so unobtainable, we're never going to be that version, but we keep comparing ourselves against it. We keep judging ourselves, criticizing ourselves and telling ourselves that if we were more like that version of ourselves, then we would be lovable, then we would be, people would want to be close to us.

This idealized self, the attempt to be, even the becoming it, is a way of being in the world that's not true. Ultimately, the reality is, the more effort, the more energy that goes in to trying to be the idealized self, the further away we are getting from true intimacy, true 'in to me see'.

Let's talk a bit more about the authentic self. This is our true nature, in a sense, the essence of who we are which isn't all of these patterns, these habits, these conditions, these ways that we've learned that we need to be in the world. It's the treasure trove of our greatest talents and potential. Our true courage versus our fake courage. Our fake courage is pretending we're not scared and putting loads of pressure on ourselves as opposed to our true courage may be that, we feel scared of something, but courage isn't the absence of fear. It's the ability to act and step forward despite the fact that we have fear.

When we're in our authentic self there's a level of flexibility. We can be responsive. We're not trying to force and drive an agenda. We're also able to listen to others.

Taking a relationship example, if we're in our idealized self we're never wrong. The problem is always with someone else because I've got to be this perfect idealized self. So if we're having a debate and maybe it's more of an argument with someone, we're more interested in the idealized self of winning the argument to protect the image of who we think we need to be.

In the authentic self, we're more interested in truth, we can be flexible, we can be responsive, we can be challenged, and someone might say something to us where we reflect and go, actually, I think you're right. We're not trying to defend an image. We're just interested in the truth of that situation.

There's also a sense of, with our authentic self, of being in touch with our true power. Not an arrogance, overinflated, needing to be better than we are or better than everyone else. But we're also not apologizing for our strengths, for our beauty, for our capacity in the world.

The more that we learn to relate to the world from our authentic self, the more we are able to have true intimacy in relationship, the more we are able to support those that we love because we can respond to what they need. We can be emotionally available in that moment. We're not collapsing into all of our reactivity, and we're also not trying to hold up an image of the person we think we need to be.

## Alex Howard - [00:28:28]

I should say also, that often early on in relationships, we spend and a lot of time trying to be the idealized self and even on very simple levels, like making a real effort in our appearance of wearing lots of makeup to go on a date or having a perfectly ironed shirt, a crisp suit, whatever it may be.

And then as the time goes on, the visual stuff slips because we're not, in a good way in a sense, we're not having to be this idealized self. But if we've got all this unprocessed stuff, this collapsed self of all these emotions, that's what's starts leaking through.

And that's what happened in the example that I gave you, that I hadn't dealt with this emotional history. So I was trying to be this idealized self in relationship, and then when that fell down, both for me and for the other person, then we got to some of the really mucky stuff of what hadn't been dealt with, and then the relationship falls apart.

The more we heal, the more we can be authentic, the more also, our relationships are truly nourishing, because we have the true contact in our hearts that we feel intimacy and we feel closeness with the person we're in relationship with.

Here's the thing as well, there's a lot of talk when people speak about trauma. About trauma being things that have happened in the past. And often trauma is things that happened in the past. But to me, the real trauma of the past is not in the past, it's in the present. It's how we've learned to not be our authentic self day-to-day in our lives. It's the masks that we wear to cover up this collapsed self. The idealized self we're trying to be, that's the real suffering.

Yes, the stuff that's happened in the past we haven't processed still hurts us, and we're carrying it around, but the real trauma is the masks we wear. It's the ways that we've learned to obscure our true nature and our true capacity.

So what does this mean to you if we don't heal our emotional pain? If we don't deal with the stuff from the past? It impacts our health, it impacts our emotional life, it impacts our relationships hugely, and everything else in our life is impacted by those things. If we don't have good health, if we're not in a good, stable, happy place emotionally, if our relationship with ourself and other people is over the place, everything else is shaped and is impacted by that.

Put another way, you can't heal what you don't feel. We have to learn to turn towards our emotions and our feelings, to own them, to feel them, to metabolize them, to process them.

I want to share a little bit also more about my story and how feeling my emotions ultimately transformed my relationships.

I mentioned that I had this relationship and I decided over the next year to really work on relating differently.

One of the things that happened over that year is I started to really work on getting in touch with my heart and feeling and metabolizing, processing things like being abandoned by my father when I was a child and the rage and the anger and the hurt and the longing and all of the emotions that were tied to that.

And as I got increasingly in touch with, and able to open to and feel my emotions, more and more of that started to flow through me and started to come out. That black sack got smaller as I gradually released and worked through the stuff that was in there.

And I remember very clearly one time I was on a flight, I think I was flying back from a holiday in Turkey, and I was flying back and I was on my own and I'd been thinking a lot about relationship and heartbreak of the past and particularly the relationship I mentioned earlier on where I'd been very



close to someone for a few years and then it had been quite painful the way it ended and I just hadn't dealt with it, I hadn't thought about it.

### **Alex Howard - [00:32:36]**

And I was on this plane and I was listening to this album. You know how sometimes music really helps you just plug into certain times. There was an album called 'O', by Damien Rice, this was an album that was out in, I guess it was 2004/2005, it was around the time I was in this relationship. And I kept listening to this album on repeat. And as I got closer to how I felt, I remembered how much I loved this person. How much I cared for them, the beauty of the intimacy that we had shared.

And even though it hadn't been right for us to stay together, and even though there'd been things that had been said that hadn't been perhaps reflecting of the true love that had been there, I'd been so focused on moving forwards, and in a sense, becoming this idealized self, I hadn't stopped to feel that I had a broken heart.

And as I was on this plane, I just started to just cry, and I was very grateful for the fact that I had three seats to myself and I almost hid myself under my jumper and I just laid on this plane and just sobbed and kept listening to this album.

And I found myself writing a letter to this woman, which I didn't actually ever send, but just writing it to express the feelings that I had. I think sometimes we write letters because the other person needs to read them. Sometimes we write letters because we need to write them. And that process of just really owning and feeling the broken heart, the longing that was there. And it was only a few months after that, that I actually met my now wife. And there was something about needing to own and to feel that heartbreak that allowed me to move through it.

And ultimately, we can't close our heart selectively. If we close our heart to sadness and to pain and hurt, we are also closing our heart to love and to joy and to connection. And in opening our heart to our hurt, we're also opening our heart to feel love, to feel connection.

So really my invitation to you in this video, and I felt it was an important point within the wider context of the lots of interviews of this conference, because lots of people in this conference will speak to this point, but I wanted to really to land this point, hopefully in this session, to have true emotional intimacy, we have to process our emotional history.

If we don't, we will find ourselves hiding behind masks and protections that become walls that become barriers in the way of us having the true connection that we all deserve, and we all long for.

So how do you learn to feel? This is a big topic, and I just want to say a few words about it. Learning to feel, learning to digest emotions in a lot of ways is like digesting food. There is a natural process that happens that we need to get out of the way of that process. When you eat food, the first thing you do is you chew. With emotions that's talking about it, it's journaling about it, it's reflecting on it. We need to just start the process of metabolizing something.

But then we swallow, and with our emotions that's an act of letting go. Then the food or the emotion moves into the stomach and it starts to get broken down by stomach acid and digestive enzymes. And that's the process of starting to feel and break down the emotion.

It then moves into our small intestine and our small intestine, our body starts to absorb nutrients. It takes the goodness from food. Even from the greatest pain, often there are lessons. There are things that we can take, gifts we can take from those experiences.

## Alex Howard - [00:36:23]

But then ultimately, we need to expel. This is where food moves through our large intestine, our colon, and we let go of what no longer serves us. And on the other side, we can feel cleansed. We can feel nourished and nurtured by the food, but also having let go of what no longer serves us.

The same is true emotionally. We need to chew, we need to talk about things, we need to journal about things, reflect on things, but then we need to let go. We need to break them down and trust our emotional wisdom to be able to metabolize things, then absorb what we need to and let go of what we don't need to.

It's a natural process we need to get out of the way of and allow it to happen.

I have a model that I found very helpful for supporting this process. Really, it's a five step process. The first thing is we need to have the foundations, what I call the healing foundations. We need to have the right support in place, the right practices in place. We need to have, what I call psychological scaffolding.

When we build a tall building, we need to, firstly, dig a ditch, put in solid foundations, and then that scaffolding is what supports the growth. We need that psychologically and emotionally.

We then need to examine our three selves, and we've touched this a little bit in this video. What's our collapse self? How does that feel? Where does it come from? What's the idealized self we have? Who do we believe we need to be, to be loved, to be safe, to be connected? We then need to connect with our authentic self, to learn to meet more of the world from that place.

We then need to release the past, that black sack, all of that emotion we're carrying around. We need to start to work it through. We need to chew it, we need to swallow it, we need to break it down, we need to absorb and we need to let go of it.

We then need to train our new self. We need to train ourself to live from this more authentic place. It takes practice to not go into those old patterns, to not put those walls up. I mentioned with my wife that when we first got together, and I don't think we ever get free of these masks entirely, but I'd been working hard of not going into this idealized self, but I would slip. But when I slipped what I noticed is that she pulled away. That helped train the conditioning of the new way of relating.

We need the healing foundations. We need to examine the three selves. We need to learn to live from our authentic self. We need to release the past, and we need to train the new self.

If you want to go deeper into some of these ideas, I have a free 3-part video series which goes, in a sense, this session has been a condensed version of what I go into in much more detail in this series. You can find out more at [heart.alexhoward.com](http://heart.alexhoward.com) for this in depth 3-part series.

There's then a 12 week online coaching program called The HEART Program. And in The HEART Program I take you on a real journey of this model of healing foundations, examining yourselves, bringing out your authentic self, releasing the past and training the new pattern. It's a comprehensive in depth 12 week online coaching program.

We're going to open registration for the next intake of that program after the Relationship Super Conference.

I also really want to encourage you to check out my YouTube series "In Therapy with Alex Howard". You can just go to YouTube and search "In Therapy with Alex Howard" and subscribe to the series.

A lot of what I'm talking about here you'll see in action of me working with real life patients as we're doing emotional processing work together, we're understanding their three selves, we're also doing

many other things like learning to calm the nervous system to learn to be more present, more connected in the moment.

**Alex Howard - [00:40:21]**

I really hope you enjoy this conference. I want to say that as well. This conference has been a real passion, a real project of love and care. I really think Meg and Jaia and I all bring something different in our interviews. But as Meagen describes it, it's the relationship survival guide that we all wish had existed at different stages of our own relationship lives.

But thank you for joining me for this session. I hope you've enjoyed it and I really hope you enjoy this conference.

Thanks for watching.