

SINGLES

Counselor emphasizes inner strength

Self-esteem based on relationship with your parents

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Part of the fun of self-help books is finding out what they'll come up with next.

Carolyn Nordin Bushong, a psychotherapist from Denver, says she has come up with the "answer" for women who keep feeling they need the approval of a man to have high self-esteem.

She has written "Loving Him Without Losing You: Eight Steps to Emotional Intimacy Without Addiction" (Crossroad/Continuum, \$18.95) for women who suffer from emotional dependency and repeatedly find themselves in destructive relationships. It is scheduled for mid-February distribution by HarperCollins of New York.

Bushong, reached by telephone recently in Denver, said that most of the self-help programs available to emotionally addicted people simply transfer their dependencies onto "something outside yourself," like support groups, religion or other people.

Bushong's emphasis, she said, is on inner strength. Predictably, the first steps in the book involve recognizing your dependencies and withdrawing from them, forgiving yourself, understanding yourself and getting in touch with your feelings.

The sixth step, however, is a real kicker — one that even Bushong admits turns some people off: Confront your parents.

"We can never have a relationship with a man any healthier than the one we have had with our parents," writes Bushong, her words typed in italics for emphasis. Our ties with our parents are at the



Carolyn Nordin Bushong is the author of "Loving Him Without Losing You: Eight Steps to Emotional Intimacy Without Addiction," to be released in February.

root of all our connections, she said, because they were our *first* relationships and "the people whose approval we most long for."

"That's where we learn about relationships — from our parents," said Bushong.

The step in this program essentially says you will never truly gain intimacy with — or respect — your parents until you tell them how they have hurt you. And, subsequently, that you will never truly learn how to have true intimacy with a lover or mate until you gain intimacy with the people who are at your developmental core.

The author admits that she is part of a growing trend in psychotherapy to blame or cite parents for the emotional hang-ups of an entire generation. But she says that other programs stop short of what she advises: "I'm different because I say **CONFRONT** your parents."

"*It is their fault,*" writes Bushong (her italics) in her book. "You were born an innocent, loving person with a full range of emotions you wanted to express. They stopped you. As you begin to feel the anger at your parents, you

will blame them. It is necessary to blame them to relieve yourself of guilt and blame. If you blame yourself, you will forever feel guilty for the way you are."

Bushong explained that there is a right and a wrong way to confront parents.

"You don't beat them up (verbally). But children have to say 'This was your mistake — a mistake I am not going to repeat.' You have to tell them 'I'm going to live my life differently.'"

The confrontation is just the beginning, too, since it must lead to resolution. "It's destructive to blame them and not work it through. It means not just throwing your anger at them. You've got to force them to recognize you as an adult," she added.

Bushong believes everyone has "parental issues repressed" that form some shadow or pattern that hangs over them in relationships. This step is not just for people who believe they came from so-called dysfunctional families. "We all have to separate from our parents," she said.

Examples of the mistakes parents made, says Bushong, include teaching us to deny our real feelings, especially anger; teaching us to be fearful of taking risks; never accepting our imperfections; teaching us never to confront our problems; and trying to keep us dependent on their judgment of how we should live our lives.

Bushong said that in her private practice, one-third of her clients leave therapy "when they see where I'm taking them," that is, toward confronting their parents. It can be the single most difficult, and yet most rewarding, experience of their lives, she said.

Asked if she had followed her own advice, Bushong replied "Absolutely, I have. How dare I write a book if I hadn't done this myself."