

# Recovering from Childhood Emotional Neglect

*A groundbreaking new book offers answers and strategies for people who feel disconnected and unfulfilled—but don't know why.*

What didn't happen in your childhood and what you don't remember has as much power over who you've become as an adult as any of those events you do remember. It's an invisible factor called **Emotional Neglect**, and it can disrupt your health, personal life, relationships, and career in devastating ways.

In her new book, ***Running on Empty: Overcome Your Childhood Emotional Neglect*** (Morgan James, 2012), psychologist **JONICE WEBB PHD** identifies a spectrum of behaviors resulting from Childhood Emotional Neglect. She shows how even a very subtle lack of nurturing, compassion, and connection when we were children can have an insidious effect on us as adults, causing us to struggle with self-discipline and self-care, or to feel unworthy, disconnected, and unfulfilled.

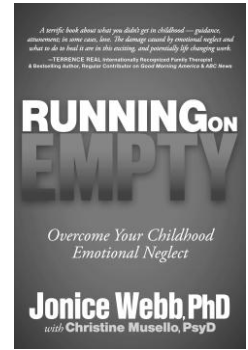
The good news is that once you become aware of this unseen force from childhood, healing is possible. Based on more than 20 years of clinical experience, Dr. Webb introduces a new approach to reclaiming a healthy and fulfilling emotional and social life.

- Discover how your parents, even well-intentioned ones, may have left your emotional tank empty.
- Identify symptoms of Emotional Neglect and their impact on your health, work, and relationships.
- Repair the damage of Emotional Neglect and learn life-changing self-care behaviors.
- Be more emotionally supportive and connected as a parent to your own children.
- Help a patient or loved one overcome Emotional Neglect using Dr. Webb's time-tested strategies.

Many people have experienced Childhood Emotional Neglect to varying degrees—from a few subtle but important events, to an entire childhood that's defined by it. This is the first book to give it a name and delve into the profound and often perplexing ways it influences our adult behavior, emotional life, and choices.

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**JONICE WEBB PHD** is a respected psychologist and pioneer in the field of Childhood Emotional Neglect and its negative impact on adult behavior. A licensed psychologist since 1991, she has a private practice in Lexington, MA, specializing in the treatment of couples and families. Over the course of her career, Dr. Webb has worked in a variety of settings, including a psychiatric emergency service, substance abuse programs, and outpatient clinics. ***Running on Empty*** is her first book.



## What Is Childhood Emotional Neglect?

It's a parent's failure to validate or respond enough to a child's emotional needs. When this happens, it has a tremendous effect on how that child will feel and function as an adult. Because it's not an action but a *failure* to act, CEN is not observable, visible, tangible, or memorable. Therefore, the child grows into adulthood with no explanation for why he feels this way. Too often, he blames himself.

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# Four Steps to Putting Yourself First

## Self-Care Strategies to Heal from Childhood Emotional Neglect

Many of us suffered Emotional Neglect from our parents to some degree or another. But you may not realize the effect this lack of nurturing, connection, and compassion has had on your adult life.

Adults who have been emotionally neglected often mislabel their unhappiness as something else: depression, marital problems, anger, or anxiety, for instance. Emotional Neglect can disrupt your health and personal life in devastating ways, from struggles with self-discipline and feelings of emptiness, to poor relationship skills and poor self-esteem.

But one thing adults who experienced Childhood Emotional Neglect have in common is difficulty taking care of themselves. An important component of self-nurturing is putting oneself first. Here are four ways to do it.

### 1. Learn to say no.

The people in your life have learned that you will be there for them, because that's what emotionally neglected people do. Being a generous, compassionate person is wonderful, but sacrificing yourself too much by saying yes to things that deplete your time and energy is not. Remember this simple rule: Anyone has the right to ask you for anything, and you have the equal right to say no without giving a reason. Saying no when you need to, free of guilt and discomfort, is a vital building block of self-care.

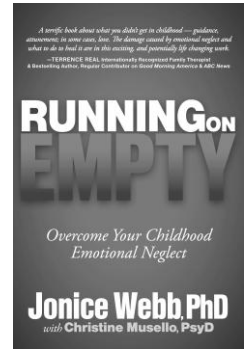
### 2. Ask for help.

As an emotionally neglected child, you internalized your parents' message: "Don't have feelings, don't show feelings, don't need anything from anyone, ever." If it's hard for you to say no to others, it's probably equally hard for you to ask them for help or a favor. To free yourself from this difficult bind, all you have to do is accept that other people don't feel guilty or uncomfortable saying no, and they don't have angst about asking for help. As soon as you can join them, a new world will open up for you.

### 3. Discover your likes and dislikes.

If you were emotionally neglected as a child, you may have difficulty knowing yourself, perhaps because your needs were not considered often and you weren't invited to voice your preferences. As a result, you may have certain areas where you know yourself well, and others in which you're mystified. If you've been focused outward for much of your life, you may not be able to identify your likes and dislikes, such as the types of people, food, and entertainment you most and least enjoy, or even the style of clothes, hobbies, and future aspirations that appeal to you. Your likes and dislikes are valid and important, so take the time to write them down.

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### 10 Common Themes in Adults Who Were Emotionally Neglected

- Feelings of emptiness.
- Fear of being dependent.
- Unrealistic self-appraisal.
- No compassion for self, plenty for others.
- Guilt and shame.
- Self-directed anger and blame.
- Feeling fatally flawed and unlikable.
- Difficulty nurturing self and others.
- Poor self-discipline.
- Poor awareness and understanding of emotions.

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#### **4. Prioritize your enjoyment.**

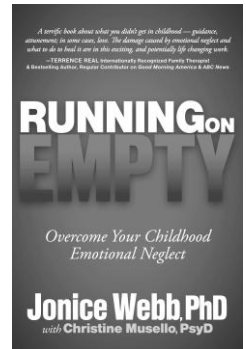
When you were growing up emotionally neglected, you probably weren't allowed to make choices that led to your own enjoyment. Or, if your family was scrambling for resources, perhaps there wasn't much left for fun things. In some ways, this last strategy encapsulates the previous three. In order to put a higher priority on your own enjoyment, you have to say no to requests that pull you too far away from it. You have to ask for help sometimes so that you feel enough support and connection to others to allow for opportunities, such as a movie or hiking companion. And you need to know what you like so you can seek it out. Think of one activity you'd like to pursue, and then follow up by taking action. Having more pleasure in your life will make you a happier person.

#### **How to Change Your Self-Care Behaviors**

For 3 months, keep a daily log recording: the number of times you say "no" to overly demanding requests; the number of times you ask for help per day; and the number of times you prioritize your own enjoyment per day. Doing this will make you more conscious of these behaviors in your life.

# Suggested Interview Questions

1. Why did you write your book, *Running on Empty*?
2. What is Childhood Emotional Neglect, and why is it so hard to detect?
3. One might think that it's mainly mean, authoritarian parents who neglect their children's emotional needs, but you say that's not the case. What other types of parents leave their kids' emotional tanks empty?
4. What symptoms or behaviors are common in adults who experienced Emotional Neglect growing up?
5. What's the link between suicidal feelings and Childhood Emotional Neglect?
6. If they weren't nurtured properly as children, what are some self-nurturing behaviors adults can learn?
7. Talk about poor eating habits and other food-related issues and how they may be the result of Childhood Emotional Neglect.
8. Why do people who suffered from Childhood Emotional Neglect often lack self-discipline as adults, and what can they do to improve that skill?
9. What advice would you give to parents who struggle with providing enough emotional support, compassion, and care for their children?
10. What role do emotions play in our well-being, and how can we learn to have a healthier relationship to them?



## Emotionally Aware Parenting

When a parent notices a child's feeling, helps the child express that feeling and manage or use it, that parent is teaching the child 4 things: that feelings matter, that they exist for a reason, that feelings should be expressed and managed, and that emotions are useful. If a parent fails a child on any one of these crucial skills, that child may grow up with a hole in his self-awareness, self-knowledge, or emotional intelligence.

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