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Resource Newsletter of

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Compulsive Addictions

Compulsive gambling, overeating, shopping, sexual behaviour, internet use, and even TV watching all offer opportunities for addictive behaviours.

Most compulsive addictions are officially called **impulse control disorders**. These are defined as “a failure to resist an impulse that is harmful to the individual or others but often starts out as pleasurable.” This generally involves an increase in tension or arousal before actually undertaking the act. This is then followed by gratification, pleasure, relief, and then remorse and guilt over the consequences of the act.

Addictive behaviours alter brain chemistry in much the same way as psychoactive drugs do. And the reasons that people engage in compulsive behaviour are the same reasons that they engage in compulsive drug use: to get an instant rush, to forget problems, to control anxiety, to oblige friends, to alter consciousness, to self-medicate, and so forth. The following are some of the most common compulsive addictions:

Gambling addiction is defined by Gamblers Anonymous as “any betting or wagering, for self or others, whether for money or not, no matter how slight or insignificant, where the outcome is uncertain or depends upon chance or skill.” The problems that result from pathological and problem gambling are often as severe as any drug-based addiction.

Compulsive shopping (oniomania) and obsessive spending are described as a pattern of chronic, repetitive purchasing that becomes difficult to stop and ultimately results in harmful consequences. Shopping can give temporary needed relief from depression, anxiety, loneliness, or anger.

Some shop for a “pick-me-up”, to get a high, a rush or emotional pain relief, similar to psychoactive drug users. They often buy things they do not need and later experience significant remorse.

Compulsive overeating occurs when the desire to eat is triggered more by emotional states rather than hunger in an effort to calm, satisfy, control pain, and combat depression.

Sexual addiction is marked by compulsive sexual behaviour over which the individual has little control. Activities can include self-pleasure, viewing pornography, high frequency sex with one partner, serial affairs, phone sex, and visits to prostitutes and strip clubs.

Internet addiction, like all other addictions, involves compulsion, loss of control, and continued use despite adverse consequences. Some addicts experience a

stimulant-like rush when online, while others speak of being tranquilized or in a trance-like state by their quiet isolated online time. In other words, some use it to stimulate, others to zone-out.

Computer games addiction is fast becoming a major compulsion for many “gamers” who will spend countless hours, either alone or with others, playing competitive games that are readily available through purchase or online. These are most popular with younger men and male teenagers and this often leads to neglect of school work, jobs, and relationships.

The biggest problem with most compulsive addictions is the ease with which one can access their “drug of choice”:

- There is an abundance of available casinos, lotteries, internet betting, poker tournaments, etc. and the ability to use credit that makes gambling easy and

convenient. A big win while gambling imprints the brain in much the same way that cocaine would.

- There are plenty of fast food restaurants and a growing attraction to sugar and fat-laden foods. The compulsive eater eats to change mood rather than sustain life.

- There is an abundance of easily available sexual material on both TV and the internet. Participation in pornography and other compulsive sexual activities can result in the “user” avoiding normal relationships.

- The ease of obtaining credit, the influx of advertising, home shopping networks on TV, and internet shopping kindles a surge of pleasure with no regard for financial responsibility or even a need for the item.

In 2002, UCLA researchers found that 71% of Americans went online for an average of 11 hours per week. It is not unusual for problematic users to spend well in excess of 35 hours per week online outside of school or work hours.

If you or someone you care about appears to have a compulsive addiction, there are professional addictions counsellors available to assist in overcoming these destructive behaviours.

Ref: Inaba, Darryl S. & Cohen, William E. 004). *Uppers, Downers, All Arounders (5th Ed)*. Ashland, OR: CNS Publications, Inc. (Pages 290-318)



*Rick Hancock, Psy.D.
Registered Psychologist*

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In Marriage, the Connection Counts!

In marriage, the bond is everything. Recently we attended the wedding of Dean and Macy. It was a beautiful wedding and the two of them were extremely happy. Their connection (or bond) was noticeably strong on their marriage day, and their love for one another was obvious to all present.

The challenge for Dean and Macy, however, will be how to keep this connection strong as they settle into the routines of daily life. Many couples take their marriage bond for granted or fail to realize that automatic pilot does not operate in a marital relationship. As Bob Dylan once wrote, "We're busy being born, or busy dying". There is no in-between with marriage either; it either becomes better or it becomes worse.

In what ways can my newly wed young friends keep their connection strong and healthy in the months and years ahead? One strategy is to establish a "framework."

This bond "framework" has four components. The first involves making time to visit with each other everyday. Life becomes busy so it is necessary to actually set aside a portion of time each day to visit or interact as a couple.

This talk time or "T-Time" need not

be rigidly defined. My wife and I tend to do ours between eight and ten each evening, when it is possible to do so. Often I will initiate the interaction by asking my wife if she wants to go for a walk or share a pot of tea; our visit takes place as part of these activities.

The second part of the framework has to do with actively listening and talking with each other, looking for the underlying feelings in the conversation. It is not what each person does each day that is important, but what their day *did to them*.

What happens then when a strong emotion "hangs in the air", either expressed or unexpressed? How should a spouse react when their loved one is obviously upset? Many people will automatically make efforts to fix the problem by offering the upset

spouse advice and solutions. It is more beneficial, however, to accept and acknowledge the feeling(s) and withhold the advice until later. In some cases, it feels great just to be "heard," with no attempts made at all to solve the problem!

The third part of the framework is collaboration. Most spouses, soon after marriage, realize that they have many differences, both in personality and opinions. When they try to force their individual ideas onto one another, power struggles often result. Collaboration, and

finding the middle road, brings out the best in both spouses.

To collaborate well it is important to keep a few things in mind. First of all, it is a good sign when spouses have different ideas about an issue. This reality can be annoying of course, as everyone likes to have his/her ideas affirmed. Yet, differences can mean that a couple is a good match, that there is balance, that husband and wife can relax and avoid the temptation to demand agreement or acquiescence. Secondly, it is important to enter every conversation with the attitude that collaboration is the goal. State the different positions and then move ahead and create a "third reality" which will represent "our way" of resolving the issue.

The fourth part of the bond framework involves having fun, regularly. Many couples date often while they are "courting," but once they marry and have children they stop. It is important, however, to slip away from routine life from time to time. Going out on a date, as a couple, provides an opportunity to unwind and share an enjoyable outing. The marital bond is strengthened by such outings.

For a marriage to survive, both spouses have to be "bearers of the bond." I am confident that my two young friends will keep their connection vital and healthy and wish them a long, happy marriage.



*Denis Boyd, M.A.
Registered Psychologist*

Workshops

What is a Great Marriage?

How to revitalize your relationship

presented by

Denis Boyd, M.A.

Registered Psychologist

Monday, March 12, 2007

7:00 to 10:00pm

Limited Enrollment

Cost: \$25.00/person, \$40.00/couple

(Handouts included)

Parenting for Children and Teens

(Systematic Training for Effective Parenting)

presented by

Don Lasell, M.A.

Registered Clinical Counsellor

Wednesday, February 28 - April 11, 2007

(every Wednesday for seven weeks)

7:00 - 9:30pm

Cost: \$100.00/person, \$125.00/couple

(Parent manual included)

Location: 202 - 1046 Austin Avenue, Coquitlam, BC V3K 3P3

To register, please call the office at 604-931-7211

Good Anger, Bad Anger

Conflict and anger in life are normal and to be expected. Anger often rears its head when there is a gap between what we want or need from someone and what we are actually getting. Anger can be healthy in instances when it provides us with the energy for honest communication. It can also be destructive when it is used as a source of power or to blame and control others.

Anger comes in various forms and can be expressed with silence or passivity (under-reaction), aggression (over-reaction), or by assertiveness which involves direct and open communication. Let's take a look at the differences between the first two styles of communication and ask yourself if it is possible that your depression, anxiety, or conflict with others could be connected to these styles of communication.

1. Passivity: This style comes from a place of fear. People expressing passive anger look and sound timid and may appear shy and insecure. They often become angry at self and others for being taken advantage of. When they are hurt, they internalize their anger and keep it bottled up or they may get even by withdrawing and giving the

silent treatment to those who have offended them. They may often feel powerless towards those they believe control them. This in turn can generate self-dislike which may pull the person toward compulsive and avoidant behaviors (drugs, alcohol, internet) to avoid the problems they know exist in their lives. These are fearful, cautious, unconfident, indirect, lonely and apologetic individuals.

2. Aggression: This style is also fear based. People expressing aggressive anger look and sound intimidating and angry. They set boundaries with threats. When they are hurt they hurt others and when angry they blame others. It is through their fear and sense of powerlessness that they insist on having control. Despite feeling lonely inside they increase their alienation by being critical and verbally or physically abusive. These people are also often pulled toward compulsive behaviors to avoid their problems.

The key ingredient is to first recognize if you have a tendency to engage in either passive or aggressive communication. Some people alternate

between both styles, either remaining silent and then exploding or the reverse, exploding and then retreating with guilt and remorse.

Communicating your anger with passivity or aggression is harmful and results in the destruction of relationships with family, friends or co-workers.

Communicating your anger assertively and respectfully empowers your self esteem and is an indication that you care enough to work out your problems.

Therapy assists individuals who struggle with these issues by helping them figure out what is behind their anger and then learning that "assertiveness is an attitude that allows you to act in your best interest, express yourself honestly, and exercise your personal rights without denying the rights of others." The goal is to develop the knowledge, skills and willingness to make change.

"Holding onto anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else, only to find out you are the one who gets burned." (Prince Gautama Siddharta, founder of Buddhism, 563-483 BC)

(Excerpts taken from *Dealing with Anger*, by Sandy Livingstone)



Maureen Chapman, M.A.
Registered Clinical
Counsellor

Where Is Love?

A few weeks ago, I conducted an informal survey of seven married couples. In total, these couples represented a total of 181 years of marriage! I was curious to know what they thought had helped them stay together through good times and bad, through the challenges and the tragedies that occur in every life.

I asked each couple to choose one trait, quality or virtue that they believed had been very important in the longevity of their marriages. The answers I received were: perseverance, commitment, communication, friendship, forgiveness, acceptance, patience, trust and flexibility. Perseverance, friendship and forgiveness were mentioned two or three times each.

Where is love? Wasn't love the reason each spouse chose to marry each other; isn't it love that keeps them together; doesn't the bible say that love is the most important virtue? Why didn't any of these couples choose the word "love" when asked for a word that would help explain the longevity of their marriage?

I think the answer is that perseverance, friendship, forgiveness, acceptance, patience, trust and flexibility are love. When we decide to engage in these traits, we are being loving; when we give this love, more love is generated and

we feel loved and lovable in return.

The words of these couples are good news. In order to experience love, one doesn't have to wait for lightning to strike, for someone to change or for someone to be loving. Anyone can decide any day and everyday to be loving and feel love in return by deciding to practice the traits these couples mentioned. That is where love is – in the decision to persevere, to commit, to communicate, to forgive, to be a friend, to be patient, to be trustworthy and trusting, to be accepting and flexible. It is not easy but it is possible and it is guaranteed to work.



Tena Colton, M.A.
R. Psych. Assoc.

Boundaries in Relationships

Anne complained, "He's always making us late". "Whenever we have to be somewhere, he always gets himself ready at the last minute and I end up having to wait for him". "We never show up anywhere on time!" "Never!"

Anne was clearly upset. Last night she and her husband Gary had been invited to attend a surprise party for a very close friend. Just at the time they should have been leaving together in their car, Gary predictably strolled in from the garden, a mess, then took twenty minutes to clean up and get changed. When they finally left their home and showed up at the location of the party, they ruined the surprise by arriving at the same time as the people for whom the party was being thrown. The other guests who had arrived on time and had been hiding ready to surprise the guests of honor, were clearly annoyed at both Anne and Gary for ruining the surprise. Anne was mortified and apologized profusely. She had been looking forward to this evening for months. Now her only desire was to forget everything to do with the previous night.

Boundaries let us know where we stand in relation to others, and are an essential part of all healthy relationships.

Anne was clearly angry. She blamed Gary for the entire situation. Her past attempts at trying to make Gary 'smarten up' only met with resistance and resentment from Gary who blamed Anne for being 'controlling'. Anne felt frustrated and helpless. She believed that there was nothing she could do to change the situation and was tired of being victimized by Gary's behaviour. What could Anne do?

Anne needs to set a boundary with Gary.

Boundaries are limits. They define personal responsibility and provide

clarity regarding what is socially appropriate. Townsend and Cloud (1999) describe boundaries as being like a property

... enforcing a boundary can be one of the most loving acts one can do for another person.



Don Lasell, M.A.
Registered Clinical
Counsellor

line. "It denotes the beginning and end of something". In a sense, they help to establish where we end and another person begins. The old adage "good fences make good neighbors" illustrates this point. Boundaries let us know where we stand in relation to others, and are an essential part of all healthy relationships.

Anne, in the scenario described above, feels victimized by Gary's behaviour and sees herself as being powerless to change the situation. All past attempts at trying to make Gary change have ended in frustration and conflict. Anne needs to change the focus of her attention. Instead of trying to change Gary, Anne needs to focus on her response to Gary. Anne needs to put her energy into what she actually has power over—herself.

Anne cannot change Gary; she can only respond to his behaviour in a way that limits the effect it has on her. One way she can do this is by using an "I Message" and provide Gary with a choice. *"When we are late for appointments I feel very discouraged and embarrassed because I don't like to keep people waiting. The next time we are invited out we can either leave on time together or go in separate vehicles. The decision is yours."*

Telling Gary how she honestly feels, and what she intends to do differently the next time, focuses the attention on her own behaviour, over which she does have control; rather than on Gary's perceived irresponsibility, over which she has no control. Gary may not like the boundary Anne has set in their relationship and may in fact suffer some discomfort as a result of her decision. Anne should not try to rescue

Gary from this discomfort by going back on her decision when it comes time to follow through. The discomfort Gary experiences provides him an opportunity to reflect on his behaviour, which he might not otherwise do, should Anne rescue him.

The pain which results from being truthful and setting boundaries with one's partner provides the necessary conditions in the relationship for each to take personal responsibility for themselves and their actions. It also provides the relationship an opportunity to mature and grow in greater intimacy.

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