

The Courage to Change

Before we can change anything in life, we need to realize things are not where we want them. Let say Joe is 37 years old and has, for the most part, been physically fit with little effort. Over the past 5 years, Joe has put on some weight due to the natural slowing of metabolism. The days of eating whatever he wants without any consequences is over. Joe has started to notice some negative changes due to his weight gain. He is out of breath after climbing the stairs, his energy level is down, and he has noticed some mood swings. Joe does not like this and becomes increasingly uncomfortable with his physical and emotional state and decides something needs to change.



Brooke Lewis, M.A.
Registered Clinical
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After we make such a decision we start to prepare. We may begin to investigate or gather information or ask our peers and loved ones for advice. For example, research can be done online or at the library. We may try to connect with somebody who has made a similar change in the past and ask about their experience. For Joe, he begins comparing gyms in his neighborhood and starts researching healthy eating. He asks his friends where they work out and talks to his wife about ideas for healthy meals.

Once feeling ready, it's time for action! We start changing our behaviors

and choices. At this point, Joe signs up for a gym membership, stops eating his late night sweet treat, and exchanges his salty snacks for some veggies and dip. At first, we may need to keep ourselves accountable to our new routines and over time a new habit is formed. After 6 months, Joe has worked out consistently three times per week and has maintained a healthy eating diet. In fact, in seeing his success just two months in, Joe's wife joined his gym and now they work out together to support one another.

Another important and very normal aspect to this process is falling back into our old habits. It is completely natural for us to break our new routine. This may happen for a variety of reasons, such as family stress, a major event, or even a change of heart. In our example, December rolls around and Joe doesn't work out for a couple weeks due to entertaining guests and working overtime. His healthy eating gets ditched for holiday candies and eggnog. At this point, Joe reminds himself that it is a temporary state and gets himself back on track for the new year. He has not lost sight of his ultimate goal of everyday health and does not get discouraged about the holiday setback.

The example used here is a fairly common situation. Sometimes in life, changes can be much more difficult and

can take a lot of courage, such as leaving an abusive relationship, quitting an addiction, moving away from family, making a major career change, or having another baby. At times we question whether we are making the right choice. For any change that seems overwhelming, it is important to reach out for support and mentorship. By doing so, one can receive encouragement and guidance.

This whole process gets me excited. Knowing what to expect from the change process can replace the negative aspect of feeling uncomfortable with an eagerness for what is to come. It can even trigger possibilities for personal growth and development. Knowing setbacks are common can provide comfort in times of guilt and doubt. Lastly, finding others to support you can make the entire process much more pleasurable.



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Flip Side of Boundaries

Sam felt frustrated. He and Claudia have been married for 12 years and had made the decision a year ago that Claudia would take a leave from her job as a registered nurse to stay at home with the children. At the time this decision seemed to make sense for them. The amount of money Claudia made taking the few available shifts at the hospital barely offset the day care expenses of their two children Justin (3) and Emily (5). Now that Tyler had come along, it didn't make sense to pay someone else to look after their children. Claudia was thrilled to finally be able to be "a stay at home mom". She took great joy in doing many activities with the children and started to get them involved in a number of local community programs. As a result of so much activity outside the home things at home had noticeably started to slip. While this



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bothered Claudia a little, it bothered Sam a great deal. Frequent attempts on Sam's part to kindly bring this to her attention were met with resistance and anger.

Claudia always justified herself by stating "the children are more important than a tidy home".

Sam too was busy. As a self-employed mechanic and sole wage earner, he often left the house before the family was up only to return home after dinner to have a few minutes with the children before bedtime. Neither could remember when they had last been alone on a date together, or could even just sit down and chat over a cup of tea; everything seemed to

center around the needs of the children and Sam's work schedule. Most of their discussions as of late seemed to be characterized by anger and fault finding. Any real intimacy in the relationship had ceased months ago. Claudia was

becoming more and more distant, and the family life he and Claudia had always dreamed of was slowly becoming a nightmare.

Sam felt frustrated. He also felt scared. In desperation he had started reading a number of self-help books that suggested the need for greater assertiveness and firmer boundaries. Sam's attempts to implement these new found assertiveness skills, rather than helping

continued on page 3

Also in this issue:

**A View of Sexual
Addiction.....Page 2**

**The Courage to
Change.....Page 4**

Workshops

Marriage Can Be Great! ...no really

Topics include: Attitude, Communication, Listening, Dating, Sense of Humour, and more.

Presented by

Denis Boyd, M.A., Registered Psychologist

Tuesday, April 27th from 7:30 - 10:00pm

@ St. Anne's Parish, Abbotsford

Thursday, June 17th from 7:00 - 10:00pm

@ St. Augustine's Parish, Vancouver

Pre-registration is required by calling 604-931-7211.

Social Anxiety

Rebecca is a 24 year old striking blond woman, who has developed a successful business and owns a condo. She seems to have it "easy," yet she has always struggled in dating new men or trying to develop new friendships, fearing rejection....In contrast, Mark has a serious girlfriend and some close friends but feels extremely self-conscious and anxious whenever he goes into a store, bank, or public venue and has to interact with people he does not know...

What is in common between Mark and Rebecca? They both are struggling with social anxiety - a condition that causes individuals to feel highly anxious and uncomfortable in various

social situations, due to a fear of being judged or scrutinized. "Shyness" and "social anxiety" are often used interchangeably; however, shyness is the personality trait of the person (i.e., a "shy" person), whereas social anxiety indicates the anxiety symptoms that are experienced in the social situation. Some shy people notice their anxiety in a novel situation, with their anxiety greatly decreasing as they begin to interact with the other people present; other shy people feel chronically anxious in various social situations, without their anxiety ever remitting.



Deborah Kors, Ph.D.
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The experience of social anxiety is relatively common and involves a variety of unpleasant and distressing symptoms. Physical symptoms may include a rapid heartbeat, shallow or difficult breathing, sweating, blushing, stuttering, a shaky voice, nausea or diarrhea, knotted stomach muscles, muscle tension, feeling faint or dizzy, among others. Additionally, socially anxious individuals tend to have specific thoughts about being negatively evaluated by

continued on page 3

A View of Sexual Addiction

Jason is a 36-year-old married man with a wife and two young children. His wife recently discovered hundreds of pornographic pictures and related web sites on his computer.

Martha (43) is married with three children and has been having anonymous romantic and sexualized communication through computer chat rooms with men located in other locations throughout the world.

Thomas (52) is single and has been sexually exposing himself to children and teens for years. He fantasizes about having sex with a child.

What has led these individuals to act out sexually in this manner? Is it really about sex or pleasure or unmet needs? What leads some to engage in these activities and others not?

The work and writings of Patrick Carnes, Ph.D. and Robert Weiss, MSW, CSAT help point us in a direction which may aid in our understanding of these behaviors. They base their theories on the survival needs of infants for nutrition, shelter, and love. If any of these needs are left unmet the infant fails to thrive in a normal manner or even survive. The child grows up believing "I am flawed and unlovable" and "If you really knew me you would abandon me." They experience an intense shame in feeling defective, which was brought about through early attachment deficits and trauma. Through having essential dependency needs denied the child views themselves as being the problem.

"Early attachment disturbances appear to be a key root cause of both narcissism and sexual addiction. Compulsivity and obsession offer some relief from the pain, rage, and fear of the disrupted, empty self in those who never learned how to find comfort in healthy relatedness. The compensating compulsive behaviors eventually take on a life of their own." (Weiss, 2009)

Let us look at how narcissism and sexual addiction may be linked. We have generally come to view the narcissist as



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someone who is loud, grandiose, and requiring excessive admiration. In her book, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, Alice Miller states "It is thus impossible for the grandiose person to cut the tragic link between admiration and love." She notes that the narcissist will insatiably seek admiration but never get enough because admiration can never be the same as love.

These individuals want to love and be loved but fear being dependent on others because of the risk of being abandoned and hurt. At the same time they hate themselves for being so needy. The end result is that they don't learn about their emotions and about how to trust in others. They learn to survive emotionally through self-soothing, distraction and stimulation.

This can lead to compulsive sexual behaviors.

Jason and Martha, like many sex addicts, are narcissistic, sensitive and easily hurt. Their fragile sense of being lovable is less threatened by casual sex than by an intimate partnership. It is safer to risk arrest, disease, or other losses through sex with anonymous partners, prostitutes, and massage parlors, or having virtual sex through pornography and anonymous computer contacts than to risk less controllable threats like emotional abandonment. Sexual acting out keeps the focus on fantasy while they carry out their primary relationship within the family. They live the double life of respectabil-



ity alongside that of hidden secrets and furtive isolation.

Fixated sexual offenders, like Thomas, groom and ultimately seduce children and adolescents in an effort to fulfill needs for recognition, acceptance, validation, mastery and control. It is not the sexual gratification that offers the ultimate satisfaction but the distorted interpretation that getting the child to have sex with him is evidence that the child accepts and cares for him. It's a way to feel important and wanted.

Our concepts about what constitutes infidelity have changed due to the internet and a general permissiveness in society. This can create confusion for spouses and treating clinicians. A new definition for infidelity and betrayal might simply be stated as "any keeping of secrets involving sex and romance". For some, this behavior is a more serious betrayal than a sexual affair. At the same time, sexual secrets carry the most shame and are the least likely to be shared with anyone.

Disclosure can be the key to facilitating an adult to adult relationship...

Sex addicts and sex offenders lead isolated lives. Their intense fear of abandonment keeps them emotionally restricted and unable to share. Disclosure can be the key to facilitating an adult to adult relationship; it reduces shame, and starts the journey on the road to intimacy and emotional health. Such disclosure, however, is best attempted in conjunction with a therapist skilled in setting appropriate boundaries and in helping the addict prepare for the disclosure in an effective and safe manner.

Ref: Weiss, R. (2009). *Untangling the Web: Treating Sex and Porn Addiction*. The Sexual Recovery Institute

Flip Side of Boundaries (continued from front cover)

the situation, had instead had the affect of throwing gasoline on fire. Now not only was Claudia distant, she was also talking about leaving him and taking the children.

What should Sam do?

Sam needs to stop trying to fix Claudia. His attempt to be assertive and set boundaries was doomed to fail, not because boundaries are bad, but because they were misunderstood and used out of context. Boundaries are only effective at repairing a relationship if they are used in the context of love and mutual respect.

Sam needs to spend more couple time with Claudia and start listening to not only what she says, but how she feels. To set boundaries without first having taken the time to nurture his relationship

with Claudia sends her the message that getting his way is more important to him than she is. Predictably she will feel controlled and be resentful.

Sam especially needs to be Claudia's partner, her equal. Her concerns and feelings about any given situation must be as important to him as his own concerns and feelings. He may not necessarily agree with her perspective on every issue, but because how she feels is important to him, she gets the message that she herself is important to him. If Claudia knows that Sam loves and respects her, she will trust him and his motives. Only then, when trust, love and respect are present, will Sam and Claudia be able to work out their differences in a way that satisfies both.

Social Anxiety (continued from front cover)

others or disapproved of in some way. Typically, the person fears that what they talk about will be viewed as "boring" or "stupid," resulting in their being rejected by others.

Individuals with social anxiety are also greatly concerned that their anxiety symptoms (e.g. sounding nervous when they talk, blushing, or perspiring) will be noticed by others and would be a further reason for others to dislike them. Because of the intensity of physical symptoms and thoughts experienced in social situations, individuals with social anxiety frequently avoid the very situations that cause them anxiety.

The types of situations in which people experience social anxiety vary. For example, some individuals are comfortable with the people that they interact with regularly, such as friends and work colleagues, and have greater difficulty interacting with strangers (e.g., the bank teller,) or someone they may have just met (e.g., a new person on their hockey league). Others feel more confident in talking with a stranger and struggle to make new friends or develop romantic relationships. Other individuals primarily experience anxiety when giving a public presentation or interacting in a group. Consequently, the impact of social anxiety on a person's life

varies from mild to extremely disabling; it may prevent an individual from attending certain social functions (like the annual work Christmas party) or extracurricular activities or make it impossible to even go to work. The restrictive effects of social anxiety can lead to tremendous isolation and feelings of loneliness.

Interestingly, many individuals who suffer from social anxiety do not seek help for this condition. Perhaps they have lived with this condition for much of their life and do not recognize that they are experiencing social anxiety or even believe that this condition can be changed. Others may find it difficult to attend therapy, because they feel self-conscious in talking to a therapist.

So, what to expect if you do seek counseling for social anxiety? Typically, your therapist will be working with you to address the physiological, mental, and behavioural aspects of social anxiety. For example, you would learn various relaxation exercises to help calm the mind and body and diminish the physiological symptoms of anxiety. Additionally, your therapist would likely use a cognitive therapy approach to help you address and challenge some of your thoughts and beliefs about how you assume others perceive you. It is often

Books

**Marriage Can Be Great!
...no really**

by Denis Boyd, R.Psych.

**Parenting Teens Without
Power and Strings**

by Rick Hancock, R.Psych.

discovered that many of these thoughts are *not* accurate and new, more self-affirming thoughts and beliefs are gradually developed. Finally, with the therapist's help, you would be encouraged to gradually attend some of the situations that you have previously avoided, as the avoidance tends to only maintain your anxiety.

With the assistance of a qualified therapist, individuals suffering from social anxiety can make great changes in their lives. Although therapy may feel like hard work, the "payoff" would be a much freer and less restricted life, and a greater sense of confidence in oneself.

