

Identifying and Treating Sex/Love Addicts and Partners, Individually and Relationally

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The opposite of
addiction is . . .

CONNECTION

~~Sexual
Addiction~~

Connective
Disorders

What is a Connective Disorder?

An inability to form healthy connections with other people.

Individuals with connective disorders are unable to foster and maintain relationships in which appropriate levels of connection are possible.

Unable to form connections, they seek connection in unhealthy ways.

**What is the deepest form
of connection?**

Empathy

What is empathy?

Connection to your own
feelings and to the feelings
others experience

Goal for Therapy

Connect clients to
themselves and to
others through
empathy

Spirituality

Connection to God
(Higher Power), self,
and others

Treating Connective Disorders

- Individual Counseling (for both partners, but with different therapists)
- Couples Counseling (Co-therapy)
- Group Counseling (both individually and as a couple)

How to identify sex/love addicts

What is Addiction?

An escalating pattern of out of control behavior over time (6 months or longer) that continues despite negative consequences and significantly affects your life

What is Sex/Love Addiction?

A pattern of out of control behaviors involving sexual arousal, sexual behaviors, or romantic thoughts or attachment, which has existed for at least six months, negatively impacts your life, and continues despite negative consequences.

Sexual Addiction is NOT . . .

- Homosexuality
- Child molestation/sexual interest in children
- Being sexually active
- Enjoying sex
- Experimenting with different positions/behaviors with your partner that do not put either of you at risk of being hurt, physically or emotionally
- Using sex toys
- Cross-dressing
- Fetishes

Sexual Addictions

"Of course they wanted to have sex with me. I can have any female in the company that I want. I am a VP."

"I seem to be utterly unable to be completely faithful."

"I sat down to watch porn for 30 minutes and realized hours later that it was 4am and I had completely missed dinner and had to be at work in 3 hours."

"I love my wife, but the urges come and I can't seem to stop having sex with prostitutes. I know that she might leave me if I act out again, but I don't know how to stop."

"The fact that they don't even know that I'm watching them turns me on as much as seeing what they are doing."

"I'd call women listed on Craigslist and make them want to set up a meeting with me. I never showed up for any of the meetings. Just setting them up was my high."

"I couldn't even make it through the 20 minute drive. I had to pull over and masturbate. I didn't even want to, but I couldn't stop myself."

Love Addictions

"I just want to know I'm attractive. It's not like I do anything with them."

"He is everything I've ever wanted; everything I've ever looked for. I know now why none of my other relationships worked out."

"I can't stand the thought of never having another 'first kiss'."

"It makes me sick to even think about having sex or even having a boyfriend. I don't see how people could like sex."

"I just want to run. I know this is what I always do when things get bad, but I don't see any point in staying."

"She is trapped in a horrible relationship. She's not strong enough to get out on her own. I know I can save her."

"If he ever finds out who I really am, he'll leave, so I need to keep my backups ready just in case."

Addicts

Female

- Emotionally based
- Usually starts at puberty
- Significant break (often 10+ years) at time of marriage
- Addictive behaviors often appear to fill desires for natural relational connection (appears to be looking for support)
- Initial exposure to sex often through sexual abuse
- More likely to become a victim of others, including mental health professionals

Male

- Physically based
- Usually starts at puberty
- Short break (6 months-1 year), if any, from addictive behaviors at time of marriage
- Addictive behaviors often fill desires beyond natural relational interactions (looking for a high)
- Initial exposure to sex often through pornography
- More likely to pose (out of fear) so they control how others see them

Addicts (cont.)

Female

- More likely to share too much
- Often viewed by society as unnatural female responses
- Therapy usually driven by fear of being alone (viewed as long-term loss of self)
- Tends to vacillate between victim and rescuer roles
- More likely to have changes in sexual orientation as a symptom of their addiction
- Sex is the means to the end

Male

- More likely to share too little
- Often viewed by society as natural male responses
- Therapy usually driven by fear of divorce (viewed as failure, abandonment)
- Tends to vacillate between victim and persecutor roles
- Less likely to have changes in sexual orientation as a symptom of their addiction
- Sex is the end

Specific Challenges for Female Addicts

- Significantly higher chance of abuse from partner
- Often translates abuse as normal relational interactions
- Often translates abuse towards them as their own acting out behaviors
- Power dynamics make it difficult for them to say no or set boundaries with others, including mental health professionals
- Strong belief in their ability to be attractive, combined with low self-esteem

Specific Challenges for Female Addicts

- Often trapped in relationship due to circumstances (financial, educational, maternal)
- Higher chance of co-occurring eating disorder (75-90%)
- More to likely be married to an addict
- Sexualizes emotions (stress, loneliness, fear)
- Sexualizes any feeling of connection

Partners

Female

- More likely to stay in relationship at time of disclosure
- Often the driving force behind therapy
- Strongest reaction to emotional acts of betrayal
- Trauma response more likely to be expressed emotionally
- Forgives more easily; trusts too much
- Tends to vacillate between victim and rescuer roles

Male

- More likely to end relationship at time of disclosure
- Limited willingness to attend or participate in therapy
- Strongest reaction to physical acts of betrayal (sense of ownership)
- Trauma response more likely to be expressed physically
- Takes much longer to forgive; doesn't trust enough
- Tends to vacillate between victim and persecutor roles

Specific Challenges for Male Partners

- Two general types
 - “I’m done!”
 - Typical partner response (trapped in trauma responses, inability to advocate for self – looks more aggressive than female partners)
- Lack of available support
- Social mores around males expressing emotion

A red triangle graphic is located in the top right corner of the slide, pointing towards the center.

Early Recovery – Emotional Safety

1) Time-Out

2) Soothe/calm

3) Emotions

4) Tools

5) Reconnect

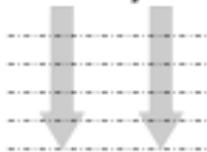
A) I feel (emotion) because .

B) When you did , I felt
 (emotion) .

And **Plan B's.**

Trauma Cycle

Traumas / Genetics



Painful Emotions

Lonely
Uncertain
Inadequate
Overwhelmed
Ignored
Empty
Afraid
Powerless

Coping Skills

Identify emotions
Identify needs
Resolve needs

Trauma Response

Hypervigilance
Denial
Avoidance
Reactivity
Anger (Rage)
Withdrawal
Shock
Codependency
Depression

Emotional Consequences

Short-term

Work

Long-term

Freedom

Emotional Consequences

Short-term

High/Energy
Release/Relief
Certainty
Connectedness
Powerful
Adequate
Accepted

Long-term

Hopelessness
Stress/Anxiety
Uncertainty
Loneliness
Powerlessness
Inadequate
Isolated



Healing & Recovery

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Co-Dependency

When our emotions,
thoughts, and behaviors
are dependent on the
responses of others

Rescuing Behaviors

Blocks or minimizes consequences for others – often in order to be needed, wanted, and loved, or to prevent us from hurting when we see others hurt

- Denial
- Enabling = Disabling

Persecuting Behaviors

Exaggerates consequences for others in an attempt to control their behavior so we won't hurt

- Threats
- Shaming
- Reciprocation
- Controlling and Manipulating

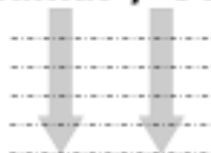
Suffering Behaviors

Attempts to manipulate someone(s) into rescuing us, as being rescued is viewed as being loved, and it stops us from having to figure out how to deal with anyone else's needs

- Self-condemnation
- Obsessive thoughts
- Remaining a victim

Addiction Cycle

Traumas / Genetics



Painful Emotions

Lonely
Bored
Inadequate
Overwhelmed
Stressed
Empty
Fear
Powerless

Coping Skills

Identify emotions
Identify needs
Resolve needs

Escapes

Alcohol/Drugs
Eating Disorders
Sexual Addiction
Rage
Gambling/Gaming
Codependency
Computer Gaming
Shopping
Lying

Emotional Consequences

Short-term

Work

Long-term

Freedom

Emotional Consequences

Short-term

High
Release/Relief
Connectedness
Powerful
Adequate
Accepted

Long-term

Hopelessness
Stress/Anxiety
Isolated/Distant
Powerlessness
Inadequate
Guilty



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The Recovery Hill

Prevention

Tank

Planning

Coping

Rituals

Morning

VSE's

Night

Emotions

Warning Signs (Indicators & Triggers)

- 1) Emotions
- 2) Thoughts
- 3) Behaviors
- 4) Physical
- 5) People, Places, Things
- 6) Relational
- 7) Spiritual

Shore Line

Intervention (Lapse)

Fire Drill
Zone

Point of no return

Slip

Slide

Collapse



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Accountability Contract

- ◉ Clearly defines boundaries for both
- ◉ Sets up format for reporting relapses and for responding to those reports
- ◉ Creates safety for both
- ◉ Provides enough information around acting out behaviors to allow the possibility of a more complete disclosure/amends

Shame

- ◉ I AM a mistake
- ◉ No possibility of repair
- ◉ Creates feelings of worthlessness
- ◉ Matter of identity
- ◉ Hopeless – no growth or learning
- ◉ Paralyzing
- ◉ Global

Guilt

- ◉ I MADE a mistake
- ◉ Possibility of repair
- ◉ Affirms values
- ◉ Behavioral infraction
- ◉ Promotes learning and growth
- ◉ Empowering
- ◉ Specific

Couple Recovery Hill

Prevention

Tank

Planning

Coping Skills

Rituals

Morning

VSE's

Night Ritual

Daily

Emotional
Check-ins

Weekly
Recovery
Check-ins

Emotions

Warning Signs (Indicators & Triggers)

- 1) Emotions
- 2) Thoughts
- 3) Behaviors
- 4) Physical
- 5) People, Places, Things
- 6) Relational
- 7) Spiritual

Intervention (Lapse)

Fire Drill
Zone

Point of no return

Slip

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Collapse



Shore Line
Healing &
Recovery

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$$\text{Trust} = \frac{\text{Behavior}}{\text{Time}}$$

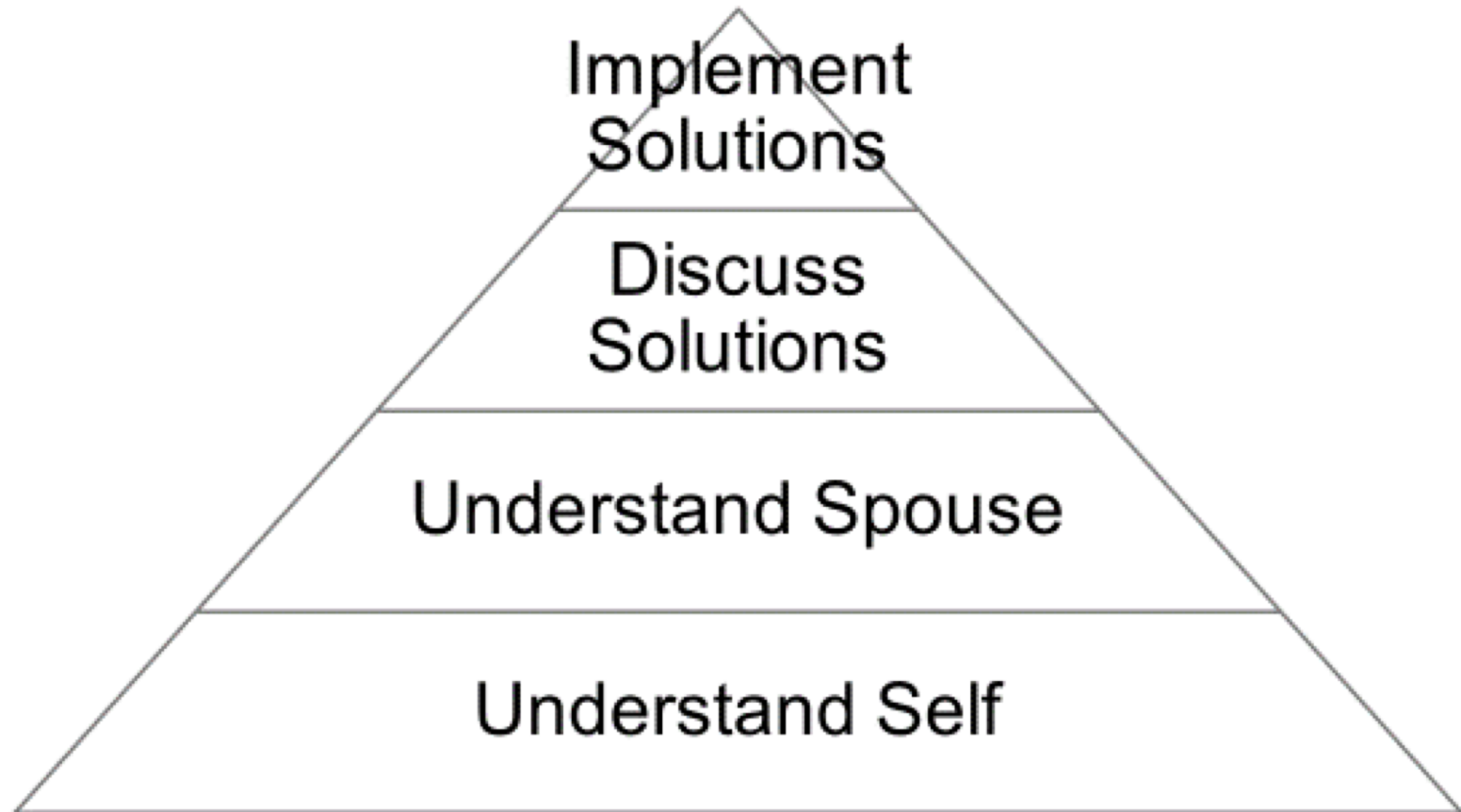
Boundaries

- ◉ Keep relationships safe for us and others
 - allows us to show up in relationships
- ◉ Not selfishness or threats
- ◉ Negotiable vs. non-negotiable
- ◉ If you do A, then I do B, until you do C –
Natural consequences

A red triangle graphic is located in the top right corner of the slide.

Middle Recovery – Empathy and Connection

Communication and Trust Pyramid



Healing &
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Empathy

Hearing and understanding the experience of someone else

- You have to experience and tolerate your own feelings first (self-compassion breeds compassion for others)
- Emotions are NOT based on subjective reality – don't argue facts
- You have to share painful emotions (in a safe way) for someone else to be able to connect to them

Intimacy

(In-to-me-see)

- If I want to be connected to you, I need to let you see into my world
- I must first understand myself
- Intimacy = feeling seen, connected, and valued
- I must know how to keep myself safe emotionally
- Plan B's



Late Recovery – Healthy Sexuality

Healthy Sexuality

- ◉ Sexual intimacy is a powerful and important part of human experience and an important need
- ◉ It is about connecting, true intimacy, serving each other, and being present
- ◉ It is a choice
 - > Options for connection (levels)
 - > Not the domino effect
- ◉ Sensate Focus

Sexuality

Healthy

- is pure (no ulterior motives) and safe
- is comforting
- acknowledges you (that I'm seen and matter)
- makes you feel accepted/loved
- feels good
- is given to you
- provides relief from stress/tension
- makes you feel more whole
- connects you emotionally
- builds trust

Unhealthy

- is manipulative/coercive and unsafe
- is pressuring
- makes you an object (I don't matter)
- makes you feel used (and abused)
- creates disgust
- is taken from you
- adds tension
- makes you give yourself up
- forces you to be more vulnerable than you feel safe to be
- creates fear and distrust