

ARTICLES

COUPLES IN RECOVERY

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One of the great challenges to recovery from sexual addiction is restoring or building an intimate relationship with a committed partner. Regaining trust can be very difficult. And yet, it is possible. Not only is it possible, the work you do in recovery can take you to a level of emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy that is greater than any you have ever known. The key to achieving this higher level of intimacy is teamwork. Each partner must commit to his/her own growth as an individual as well as to the growth of the relationship.

Sexual addicts and their partners or co-addicts are like heat-seeking missiles! It is no accident that you came together and chances are high that if you end this relationship you will only go on to another one just like it. Understanding why this is true is the first step towards recovery.

Dr. Patrick Carnes found in his classic study that sex addicts had all experienced abusive childhoods: 81% had experienced sexual abuse, 72% physical abuse, and 97% emotional abuse. And, amazingly enough, their partners had also experienced abuse in almost identical percentages! Unconsciously, wounded hearts are drawn together in an effort to find love and healing with each other.

Initially, the excitement and passion of the "courtship stage" of relationship can overcome fears of true emotional and sexual intimacy. However, once this stage is over each person retreats to a sexual and emotional distance that feels safer. This can leave the couple feeling worlds apart and cause one or both to think that they have fallen "out of love." Now, the couple will develop a unique "dance" of intimacy- one of "approach-avoidance" or of just keeping a safe distance from each other. The conflict or coldness in the relationship becomes more and more painful. One or both escape into some form of addiction (i.e. alcohol, drugs, work, food, spending, sex, etc.).

To recover each partner must work on understanding the childhood issues that are affecting his/her ability to be in intimate relationship. Together, you need to explore the history of the relationship and become clear about how sexual and emotional distance occurred. Blaming is not useful. The challenge in couples work is for each person to take responsibility for his/her own actions within the relationship and to be willing to change.

Together, you can learn how to be completely honest with one another, to be direct with what you want and need, and to constructively resolve difficulties as they arise. You can heal your relationship and achieve a greater level of emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy than you ever thought possible. Together, you can do it!

Books:

- Bader, E. & Pearson, P.T. (1988). *In Quest of the mythical mate*. NY:Brunner/Mazel.
Carnes, P.J. (2001). *Facing the Shadow: Starting sexual & relationship recovery*. Gentle Path Press.
Carnes, P.J. (1991). *Don't call it love: Recovery from sexual addiction*. NY:Bantam.
Schneider, J.P. & Schneider, B. (1991). *Sex, lies, and forgiveness*. Center City, MN:Hazelden.

12- Step Support: Recovering Couples Anonymous: www.recovering-couples.org