

Sexual Addiction is such a complex problem and unfortunately it like all addictive disorders effects the entire family. As I did an in-service last night for professionals that wanted to know more about the disease , I was asked if sexual addiction was a the result of post traumatic stress disorder. Although this can be the case when people use compulsive sex to self soothe the anxieties from the past, I explained that more often post traumatic stress can occur in partners who have repeatedly "discovered" their partner's sexual indiscretions.

Partners report that they experienced recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the discovery and they continue to fear that they will reoccur, so they remain hyper vigilant as if they can control their partner's life and course of events. They fear relaxing and trusting their environment for fear of being hurt again which contributes to their anxiety and further traumatizes the partner who is in recovery "working" on getting better.

This vicious cycle continues to escalate effecting the well being of the spouse. One of my clients asked me some questions to better understand her spouse and his affect on her.

Why is there a sense of entitlement and so much selfishness? Your spouse has a disorder that means he needs to compartmentalize his life so that he can engage in his sexual addiction. He more than likely loves you and the family but his addiction takes over and he compulsively feels like he must pursue his sexual indiscretions like chronic affairs, pornography, exhibitionism, voyeurism etc. This looks like he feels he is entitled to do what he wants when he wants. As a partner you need to have a good sense of boundaries so that you can honor yourself and teach him that you won't accept coming home late or spending \$ your don't have to support his addiction. The addict does feel entitle to act out his indiscretions although the addict is just one part of the partner you married.

When a partner is in recovery it is his responsibility to show you that you and the family come first and you will hopefully see him dong that consistently in the marriage.

I can't get over having felt bullied by my partner for many years. When a person is in his active addiction he has likely learned to turn the tables on you every time that you requested something from him that interfered with his acting out. This often looked like bullying. You likely felt defensive as if your reasonable requests were "out of line" and you questioned yourself repeatedly. If your partner is not in recovery it is imperative that you find ways to take care of yourself and seek support so that you create and maintain healthy boundaries for yourself and your family.

Bullying is never okay and if you are in a marriage where that frequently occurs you need to get yourself into counseling, and attend COSA which is a support group for partners who are addicts. These resources will help you determine your sense of boundaries to keep you safe from the bullying.

I feel like my partner has lost his ability to feel. He seems so lethargic. It is not unusual for people in active addiction to shut down their feelings to cope with all the shame they feel as a result of their behaviors. Once they start the recovery processes they can continue to be emotionally abandoned

because they are inundated and overwhelmed by what they have done to the ones they love and what they are going to need to do to reconstruct their lives. The sex addict has experienced arrested development and will need to work diligently to rebuild his emotional capabilities and that may take 3-5 years of therapy, 12 Step work and patience from everyone he/she has hurt.

What is most important is that partner's of sex addicts take care of themselves by finding safe places to share feelings. You have put yourself on the backburner long enough and now the recovery process requires you to attend to your life and figure out how to feel better regardless of outcome.

Take your own journey "one day at a time" while you work on finding joy and happiness again.