Addicted To Love?

When we think of “addiction,” we often think of alcohol and drugs dependency. But there is another form of addiction that quietly runs rampant in the workplace, one that dismantles careers, relationships, and homes with the same destructive force of substance abuse. It’s the addiction to “love” and the sexual behavior that accompanies it.

Addiction vs. Healthy Relationships

Our biology puts us in the hunt for love and sex. It’s natural, and everyone is in the game to some extent. But addicts view the chase differently. They crave that chemical high that literally occurs when new love blooms, as well as the excitement, the rush, the torrid sexuality, and the anticipation. Healthy people enjoy this, too, but as the relationship evolves, these things give way to a deeper grounding that results in intimacy and satisfaction. Addicts don’t let themselves get to that point in a relationship because as soon as the chemical hit dissipates, they find a way to sabotage the relationship and go looking for it elsewhere.

The Pattern of Love/Sex Addiction

Love and sex addicts are serial daters and cheaters, moving quickly from one relationship to the next. Once the initial impression of confidence and swagger has worn off, they are quickly exposed as insecure and needy, which serves their need to sabotage the relationship so they can hunt for another one. Addicts have an agenda wherever they are – they are looking around to see who is a prospect, who they might score a date with or sleep with. They keep score, and the extent to which they “win” defines their self-image and self-worth. They need the ego reinforcement of being attractive. Whereas healthy people grow within a relationship, addicts need constant validation of self which stem from an deep belief that if alone, they are not adequate persons. Their relationships are marked by instability, neediness, and abuse, but not in the initial, dreamy state of their new relationships. It is that rush of a new relationship to which they are drawn, and which always dissipates over time, thus creating a cycle of addiction.

Treatment for Love Addiction

Many love addicts live their life of despair and frustration because they don’t realize they are actually addicted to something that seems so natural, and they never discover a means of help. Like any addiction, the first step to getting help is awareness of the signs and symptoms. For love addicts, “love” is characterized by:

- Consuming and obsessive behavior
- Superficiality and conditions
- A lack of true intimacy
- Manipulation
- Dependency and fear of losing the lover
- Demands and self-centeredness

The treatment for this type of addiction is similar to the disease model of addiction and involves counseling, as well as participation in a 12-step program or other support group that takes the addict through various stages of self-awareness and growth. The addict learn to recognize patterns in their life – how they dress, how they speak, what they think and do. The goal is to recognizing these patterns, behaviors, and thought processes impede their recovery, and practice new ones that move them toward having a healthier life. Counseling also provides an environment for the addict to develop a healthier sense of self-worth without relying on the object of love for validation.