

Don't Fall For It - Avoiding a Love Addiction

by Linda Culver, Addiction & Mental Health Counselor

It happens. It starts out as an innocent friendship, working elbow to elbow, solving problems, offering support and listening to each other's problems. But, the next thing you know, you have developed feelings for this person who is not your significant other. How could this happen? "I'm married, in a committed relationship." *So, how did it happen?*



There is no greater joy than "falling in love." When that happens, your brain chemistry alters and you feel a tremendous "high," joyfully ecstatic, and have a lot of energy. But, brain chemistry can wreck havoc on a person's life and relationships, when the innocent flirting becomes an addiction. And just like any other addiction, even if it's from an unseen brain chemical, it has the propensity to destroy relationships.

There is a whole realm of sexual and relationship addictions that have been flying under the radar for many years. Consider "gambling addict." They do not need to consume alcohol or a drug to become physically addicted, but none-the-less they feel a strong "pull" to gamble in spite of the risks and potential problems. Sex and relationship addictions have that same kind of "pull" which is one of the hall-mark signs of addiction.

We've known for years that alcoholism knows no boundaries. It can affect a minister, a teacher, a doctor. Relationship addiction (often referred to as "love addiction") is no different. An alcoholic can justify a drinking episode with many excuses, such as "I'm stressed out and needed to relax," or "they didn't serve any food at the party." As with all addictions, a person can "con" themselves into believing that their behavior is a positive force in their life. When a love addict perceives their "relationship" as something positive in their life, it is easy to rationalize or make excuses for their behavior.

Sex or relationship addiction, just like alcoholism, can creep in from what initially appears relatively harmless, innocent or may seem even necessary. It becomes problematic when "*I have to see the other person*" because you are neighbors, you work together, or you are on the same church committee changes to "*I want or need to see them.*"

Because the addict believes there is nothing wrong with their behavior, sometimes they create a "secret world." In the addict's mind, others would not approve of their behavior or they would be embarrassed by it. So the addict goes underground. The relationship progresses into full blown lies and deliberate planning to see the other person.

Just like other addictions, it becomes critical that the addict see the truth and change direction. If you or someone you know are in this situation and you find that you are unable to change direction or are struggling with the "pull," then a fall is almost inevitable. Before this happens, or if it already has, seek help.

There are 12-step programs and various other support groups, in addition to individual counseling that can provide help.



For more information, call
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