**Marriage Essentials**

**The Top 9½ Marriage Busters**

How to avoid them and build a lasting, fruitful marriage

**Buster No. 8: Addictions**

Part 1: What constitutes and addiction, and how addictions impact marriage

Paul and Teri Reisser – April 7, 2024

The most important questions to answer if one or both people in a marriage are dealing with an addiction:

* 1. Does my spouse, or do I, have an addiction? How would I know?
  2. How does addiction destroy a marriage (whether or not a divorce happens)? Let us count the ways.
  3. How do addictions get established?
  4. What are the forces that perpetuate addictions?
  5. How do I recover from an addiction?
  6. How do I help my spouse recover from an addiction?
  7. How can we in the church (the Body of Christ) help people with addictions? (And how can we do better at this?)

We will divide our sessions into three parts:

* Part 1: What constitutes an addiction, and how addictions impact marriage. (Questions 1 and 2)
* Part 2: How addictions become established -- physiological, psychological, generic, environmental and spiritual factors – and what perpetuates them. (Preview: Shame and secrecy play a big role.) (Questions 3 and 4)
* Part 3: All about recovery. (Questions 5, 6 and 7)

**What constitutes an addiction?**

Definition from Psychology Today’s website in 2013:

Addiction is a condition that results when a person ingests a substance (alcohol, cocaine, nicotine) or engages in an activity (gambling) that can be pleasurable but the continued use of which becomes compulsive and interferes with ordinary life responsibilities, such as work or relationships, or health. Users may not be aware that their behavior is out of control and causing problems for themselves and others. [http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/addiction]

From Dictionary.com: *Origin:*1595–1605;  < Latin addictiōn-  (stem of addictiō ) a giving over, surrender.

A definition that Paul has used many times in his medical office – “A condition in which a particular substance or behavior becomes the tail wagging the dog.”

**What are the primary forms of addiction?**

Substances

Tobacco

Alcohol

Prescription or legal substances

(Opiates, anti-anxiety drugs, stimulants)

Illegal substances

(Opiates, methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, “club drugs,”

inhalants, dissociative drugs)

Behaviors

Gambling

Sex / pornography

Shopping

Eating

Video games

Borderline areas

Exercise

Sports

Relationships

Making money

Music

**According to estimates from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, of all Americans aged 12 years or older...**

* **How many people had a substance use disorder?**

**20.3 million people** **had a substance use disorder related to their use of alcohol or illicit drugs in the past year.**

* **How many of these people had an alcohol use disorder?**

**14.8 million people** **had an alcohol use disorder in the past year.**

* **How many of these people had an opioid use disorder?**

**2.0 million people** **had an opioid use disorder in the past year.**

**A note on terminology (Watching our language…):**

In professional literature, there has been a definite shift in terminology *away* from words that are to any degree pejorative or imply moral judgment. Use of words such as alcoholism, alcoholic, substance abuse and substance abuser are discouraged in favor of terms such as “substance use disorder” or “person with substance use disorder.” Terms such as “in recovery” are preferred over “sober,” and “relapse” is supposed to be called “return to use.” However, the term “addiction” is still widely used in various contexts, while the word “addict” is discouraged.

Comment: On one hand, referring to people with pejorative labels (in other words, name-calling) hinders access to treatment and progress toward recovery in professional settings. In relationships (including marriage) this can at the very least prevent a spouse of family member from grasping all of the components of addiction (especially the neurophysiology involved), and at worst unleash contempt -- one of the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” that destroy relationships. On the other hand, attempting to remove any moral judgment whatsoever from the behaviors associated with addiction essentially invalidates legitimate grievances of those who are affected by it. In this regard, the Twelve Steps – which include a “searching and fearless moral inventory” of ourselves,” “humbly asking God to remove our shortcomings,” and making “a list of all persons we had harmed” and becoming willing to make amends to them all -- are on more solid ground than the shifting sands of ideologies promoted by professional organizations.

**What are the characteristics of addictive behaviors?**

The following are haracteristics of substance use disorder (or by extension addictive behaviors) and criteria for severity, according to the DSM-V – the fifth and most recent revision of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* that is the professional Bible for identifying and categorizing psychological and behavioral disorders.

**Impaired control:**

* **1 Taking more or for longer than intended**
* **2 Unsuccessful efforts to stop or cut down use**
* **3 Spending a great deal of time obtaining, using, or recovering from use**
* **4 Craving for substance**

**Social impairment:**

* **5 Failure to fulfill major obligations due to use**
* **6 Continued use despite relationship problems caused or exacerbated by use**
* **7 Important activities given up or reduced because of substance use**

**Risky use:**

* **8 Recurrent use in hazardous situations**
* **9 Continued use despite physical or psychological problems**

**Physiologic adaptation:**

* **10 Tolerance to effects of the substance**
* **11 Withdrawal symptoms when not using or using less**

The more criteria one manifests, the more severe the problem:

2 to 3 = Mild 4 to 5 = Moderate 6 or more = Severe

**Table discussion:** Name, how long you’ve been married. Was there someone in your **family of origin** who had an issue with substance abuse or addiction (of any kind)? What effect did it have on you?

**The marriage issues**

1. Behaviors that are not unusual for the person with the addiction:
   1. ***Lying*** to varying degrees is universal
      1. Secrecy
      2. Denial that there is a problem.
      3. Loss of intimacy and transparency
      4. The end result -- ***loss of trust***, the most basic building block in a marriage.
   2. Erosion of the relationship
      1. Disengagement
      2. When intoxicated, communication is meaningless and worthless.
   3. Irresponsible behavior
      1. Missing work / losing employment
      2. Squandering family resources
      3. Inattention to parenting relationships and responsibilities
   4. Overt infidelity arising from sexual addiction
   5. Abusive or violent behavior
2. Behaviors that are not unusual for the spouse of the person with the addiction:
   1. Enabling the person to continue unhealthy behaviors, for whatever reason. (“Codependency”)

“Codependency is a dysfunctional relationship dynamic where one person assumes the role of “the giver,” sacrificing their own needs and well-being for the sake of the other, “the taker.” The term “codependency” first appeared in [substance abuse](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/addiction) circles to describe a lopsided relationship that has been consumed and controlled by one person’s addiction.”  Unconsciously, this arrangement may meet one or more needs of the one who is in relationship with the addict.

* + 1. They may be afraid of rocking the boat—disrupting whatever peace may exist at home or risking the breakup of a relationship.
    2. They may be intimidated or even terrorized by a user who is verbally or physically abusive.
    3. Users may repeatedly express remorse over their behavior, and loved ones desperately want to believe that “it won’t happen again.”
    4. Family members or friends may also have a drinking/drug problem.
    5. Family members—for example, mothers with young children—may not have the funds or support to go elsewhere if users refuse to stop.
    6. Access to treatment resources may be limited.
    7. The drama triangle – locked into cycles of drama and making up.
  1. Building the family dynamics around the addiction
     1. Making the addict the scapegoat
     2. Everyone is adapting to the behavior of the addict
  2. A spouse not wanting to give up the moral high ground (and thus undermining recovery)