



Episode 5

The Sex Addict: Integrating the Partner Trauma Model (Part I)

Marnie Breecker 0:02

Hello, everyone. Before we begin today's podcast episode, we want to make an exciting announcement. We know that when couples are recovering from the impact of betrayal on their relationship, there can be a time where they feel stuck in terms of how to move forward with the sexual peace. How do we reintegrate sexuality after there's been betrayal, and that can be a really difficult conversation to have and a difficult process to go through. And so we've gotten a lot of feedback from our listeners who would like more help in this area. And so we're starting a group specifically for couples who'd like to start the conversation about sexual reintegration, and we have a fantastic coach. She's a sex and relationship and intimacy expert. Her name is Zoe Kors. You can learn more about her and the group at our website helpingcouplesheal.com. If this is a fit for you, please don't hesitate to reach out; We'd love to hear from you. Please remember that there's limited space so if you are interested, please reach out sooner than later so you can reserve a spot. Thanks, and we hope you enjoy this episode.

HCH Narrator 1:17

Welcome to the Helping Couples Heal Podcast, a place for healing and hope for couples impacted by betrayal resulting from infidelity and/or sex addiction. Your hosts are Marnie Breecker and Duane Osterlind, licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, Certified Sex Addiction Therapists and founders of respected treatment centers in Long Beach and Los Angeles. Marnie and Duane co-created Helping Couples Heal, the most comprehensive in person and online resource for couples recovering from betrayal, and this podcast series is the first component of the program. Thank you for listening. Marnie and Duane are committed to helping you recover from the devastating impact of betrayal trauma, and are excited to support you wherever you may be in your healing. If you've lost hope, you've come to the right place. Now, take a slow deep breath, and let's begin with the Helping Couples Heal Podcast.

Marnie Breecker 2:12

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to the Helping Couples Heal Podcast. And before we get started, I really want to say that it has been so wonderful to see that so many people have been downloading and listening to our podcast. We have been hearing from a lot of our listeners who are really relating to what we've been discussing, and it's really validated our intention in creating this. So we're really glad you found us, and we hope that we can continue to be a helpful resource to you in your healing.

Duane Osterlind 2:40

Yeah, that is super exciting. And I also say to our audience, too, if you're getting anything out of this podcast, and you think it's really useful, please go to iTunes and rate and review it, it helps get us a lot of exposure, and so other people can find this information as well. We're glad that you're listening, we're glad that you're here, and we're glad that people are finding this really helpful.

Marnie Breecker 3:04

Yeah, thank you. So today, we are going to talk specifically about the addict, or the person who has caused the betrayal. And again, we say this a lot in our episodes, but we are going to refer in this podcast to the person who's caused the betrayal as the addict. So we are actually talking about anyone who has sexually or relationally betrayed their partner. So if you identify as someone who's betrayed your partner, but you do not identify as an addict, please stay, you are in the right place.

Duane Osterlind 3:33

Yeah, I am glad we're gonna be talking about this topic. If anybody's out there listening to this, and they're the ones that have caused the betrayal, this can be extremely difficult to listen to. This can be the difficult part of this healing journey, especially because you are stuck a lot in your own shame and guilt about your choices. And so learning how to be empathetic, learning how to understand partner trauma is going to be crucial to healing the relationship. So we're glad that you're here and you're listening to this.

Marnie Breecker 4:10

Yeah, you know, if you get caught in your own shame, that will actually end up having the opposite impact that you'd like it to have. So what will happen instead is that it would be a major barrier to relational healing, and it will keep you stuck. And we imagine that if you're listening to this podcast, then the last thing you want to do is to stay stuck.

Duane Osterlind 4:30

Right? A lot of times when people come into our offices and are seeking help, the addict is really stuck in that place of "I'm this horrible person", and that's what they feel the most. And what the partner needs is empathy. And I think what happens is that the addict doesn't realize that they're just reflecting back their shame, they're not actually understanding the partner's pain. And I think that comes to our first point, which is why it is so important to integrate the trauma model into the beginning of treatment at the very beginning.

Marnie Breecker 5:03

Yeah, that's a great question. And if he isn't aware that his partner's experience is trauma, then he may continue to insist that she's overreacting or call her crazy, or say all sorts of other unhelpful and hurtful statements to her. But if he learns right away, that his partner is actually experiencing trauma, and that the trauma was specifically created because of his acting out, as well as from these long standing patterns of abuse that she endured during the course of his acting out, which you know, we're going to be talking about a lot in our podcast series, then he'll be able to see that her reactions make sense. And then once he sees that her reactions make sense, this gives the relationship a much better chance at healing, because those addicts who don't understand partner trauma, unintentionally end up doing even more damage, rather than doing the things that will lead to healing.

Duane Osterlind 5:55

Right. I agree with that. I think it's also important to really note how hard this is to do for the person who's done the betrayal. A lot of times, the first thing we want to do when we're feeling guilt and shame is to stop it. If our partner's telling us how hurt they are by our actions, then a lot of times, in a way, we want to lash out and stop that.

Marnie Breecker 6:19

Or be defensive.

Duane Osterlind 6:20

Or be defensive about it. And I think that's what makes it so difficult for the addict to be able to really kind of flip that around and be present for their partner, you're feeling all this shame, you're feeling horrible. And that becomes your primary focus. And really, you can't focus on your partner, and you just want to stop it.

Marnie Breecker 6:42

Yeah. And, you know, I want to add that, for many addicts that are out there getting treatment with, let's say, non partner centric therapists, or addicts that are just going to 12 Step programs, oftentimes, they are being influenced and encouraged to sort of do that whole stay on your side of the street, or I'm not going to participate in your experience here, like you're acting out and lashing out at me, and I'm not going to participate in it, I'm not going to listen to it, and just being resistant. And that's why, you know, Duane and I are very committed to talking about why integrating this piece is crucial early in the addicts treatment and recovery.

Duane Osterlind 7:25

Right, because if you can get them, you can get the couple and the addict to start being empathetic right away, and understand what's going on. They can reframe their own responses and understand that there's something different they can do, giving them the tools to actually change the whole system.

Marnie Breecker 7:44

Exactly. So while abstinence or sobriety, which is what we call, you know, just the stopping of the sexual behavior, is incredibly important, and you really can't heal a relationship without that piece. It's certainly not enough to heal a relationship or resolve partner trauma. So the trauma model has to be integrated into the addict's treatment from the beginning, because it's as important as establishing sobriety and can even help prevent relapse, because when addicts realize the traumatic impact on their partner, it may help them from acting out again, right, and looking at it from this perspective helps them or prevents them from viewing recovery as something that only impacts them, which is really how traditional treatment worked. Right?

Duane Osterlind 8:25

Right. When I look at individuals who are coming in, and this is integrated early in treatment, it really empowers the addict in a new way, they see their behavior differently. And a lot of times just by doing that alone, they have more resolve to say, "Hey, these are the choices, these positive choices are the choices I want to make, because they feel better to me." They're connecting to the power of their actions and the impact that has on others.

Marnie Breecker 9:02

Absolutely. Yeah. So what many people don't understand, even therapists who specialize in betrayal, but are still using that traditional model of treatment, right, that codependency model rather than using the partner trauma model, is that if an addict doesn't fully understand and conceptualize his partner's responses as trauma, then he's not going to think that those responses make sense. And he'll minimize them or he'll deny them all together, right, as we were saying, and so this honoring of her trauma is a crucial component of couples recovery.

Duane Osterlind 9:38

Yeah, and I think that when that happened, that minimization or like, "look, you're overreacting to this," It just amplifies that trauma. It slows down the healing process tremendously. It's painful to watch that.

Marnie Breecker 9:52

It's very painful to watch it and you know, let's be honest Duane, for us, because we are on the outside, oftentimes when couples come in and, you know, I've talked about this, it's sometimes like, we're watching the addict struggle with being able to validate his partner's experience of trauma. And really, it's such an easy thing to do for us, you know, for us to watch it, it seems like it would be so easy. There are so many times when I have sat on the sidelines thinking, you know, just say this, just do this.

Duane Osterlind 10:25

Right?

Marnie Breecker 10:26

Because for us, we've done so much, you know, we've studied so much, and we've been working in this field for so long. But truly, the reality is that for an addict who is caught up in his shame, and dealing with the reality of the discovery of his secret life, and all of that, sometimes doing what seems like these really simple things, is not simple or easy for him.

Duane Osterlind 10:47

Yeah, and I think that's true. And I think that's where we really have to have compassion for everyone involved in this whole process. And even the person who has done the betrayal, who has engaged in these behaviors, they almost have to have a safe place as well in order to become empathetic to their partner, because if they become empathetic to their partner, they really have to feel the pain that they've caused. And that's just difficult.

Marnie Breecker 11:17

It's really difficult. I remember, I don't know if I shared the story in another episode or not. But years ago, I think it was about 2010 or so, I was doing the workshop with Dr. Minwalla. And there was a couple that participated, and he had been sober for like 10 to 12 months and had really solid sobriety and was sort of a little bit like the poster child for SAA, you know, he was really working the steps and had a sponsor, and probably had sponsees, and was going to therapy, and group therapy, and couples therapy, and individual therapy. And he got to the workshop. And he was really furious and angry, because he said that this was the first time that he'd heard about the partner's trauma. And his relationship was in shambles at that point, you know, he was doing so great in his individual recovery, but his relationship was falling apart, and in fact, probably getting worse. So that is an example of why it is so important to really, really take this partner trauma piece and integrate it into his treatment. Literally, I cannot emphasize this enough, but from the very beginning, and I mean, even from the very first session, when he walks in the door to our office.

Duane Osterlind 12:27

I would totally agree with that. And through my experience as a therapist and doing this work, I have seen that starting out with this tonality in therapy really does help the couple move forward so much faster and makes the healing process just stronger, and I guess just more - it's extremely helpful.

Marnie Breecker 12:53

Well, yeah, I mean, that's the reason that you and I created this whole podcast. Remember, we were talking after our workshop about how much healing we see happen in the room. And what we're sharing in the room is nothing more than what we're sharing in this podcast, which was all about the partner trauma, and sort of that missing component of relational healing. And when we have the opportunity to work with clients and share this information, we see that it really helps; It makes a big difference. And I actually see, one of the things that I see in the workshop is that the partners develop more empathy, because they also see their husbands or their partners struggling with their own internal shame.

Duane Osterlind 13:33

Yes.

Marnie Breecker 13:34

And, and also they see that oftentimes their husbands are embarrassed too that they've missed it. You know, like in the workshop, it becomes so obvious, that trauma piece, because so many of the women in there, like all the women, it's this universal reaction, they're all saying the same thing. And oftentimes we hear the men that are there, think or not think but but say things like "oh my god, she's been saying this all along,"

Duane Osterlind 13:57

Right?

Marnie Breecker 13:58

Or just, "I just haven't listened" or, "I haven't heard." And that creates more shame. And so in the context of the workshop, I've really seen so much empathy developed by the partner, which I think also is an important part of the healing process.

Duane Osterlind 14:12

Right. So it's just so important to take this stance right from the beginning of treatment. Starting out this way, it becomes the norm for healing in a way. So one question we talked a lot about is "how is the addict's recovery incomplete if we don't integrate this model into it?"

Marnie Breecker 14:33

Yeah, that's a great question. The reason that I would say his recovery is incomplete is because only one part of his recovery is acknowledged. And that would be his sobriety. Right? So that's taken care of, but if he walks in the door to a therapist's office, and he has a partner and he wants to save his relationship with his partner, and we as a therapist fail to bring the partner into the therapy right then and start to teach him about the impact of his behavior on her, and also on other family members, you know, but certainly on his partner, then we might be able to help him get sober. But we're not going to help him be able to take the steps necessary to repair his relationship and to help his partner heal from the trauma that he has caused her.

Duane Osterlind 15:18

Right, definitely. And I also think on an even bigger level, why it makes treatment incomplete is that for the addict, they're learning to be relational, you know, a lot of times referred to sex addiction as an intimacy disorder, the inability to connect intimately with others in a way that's relational and meaningful. And now with this model, they're learning to be with their own shame, maybe their own guilt, and at the same time, be empathetic to their partner, connect with their partner. And that takes work, it takes time, it's not easy. A lot of people need guidance and compassion to work through that and to be able to do that. And I think that becomes an integral part of the healing process for the addict as well.

Marnie Breecker 16:11

Yeah, cuz like you said, even though it might come easy to other people, sex addiction is an intimacy disorder. So addicts have trouble with intimacy and with knowing how to do these very things that we're talking about. So yeah, let's throw out some empathy and understanding right now to those of you who are struggling with addiction and want so much to heal your relationship. But really, you don't have the skills at this point, or the tools necessary to be able to do that. We know that it can seem really easy to many of us, and partners, to be honest, often feel like, "you know, I've heard this", a lot of partners say, "if I did this to him, I would be on my hands and knees, begging him to forgive me, I would be apologizing, I would say, I will do anything in the world, whatever it takes to earn back your trust. Why can't he do that? Why is he continuing to blame me or deny or minimize or make excuses?" Right? So we understand that this whole process is incredibly complicated and difficult, but maybe this is a good time to talk specifically about what it means? Or what does it look like to integrate the trauma model into the addict's treatment?

Duane Osterlind 17:22

Right? I think that's so important. What are the actual steps that you're going to do to be able to start to work towards empathy, or at least begin to model empathy for your partner? I think that starts with the partner sensitive recovery plan developed by Omar, and do you want to talk about how that was created? Because I think it's a great story.

Marnie Breecker 17:48

Yeah. So Pat Karns, who's the leading expert in the field of sex addiction, and he is the person who Duane and I were trained under, and he created the circle plan years ago which identifies, you know, three circles. So the inner circle are the behaviors that the person is going to be abstaining from completely. So the troublesome problematic behaviors, and then the middle circle are those triggers and thoughts and feelings that might lead the addict closer to his inner circle behaviors. And then the outer circle was all about the wellness, and therapeutic and healthy behaviors and coping skills that would keep him as far away from his inner circle as possible. And that's a wonderful plan. And it was definitely and is effective for establishing sobriety and for avoiding relapse. However, it wasn't relational in design, and therefore it didn't take into account the impact of the person's recovery on his partner, and also on other important people in his life. So Dr. Minwalla added the other circle, which is a play on words, because it is the other circle, but it also refers to the others who are directly impacted by the person's recovery plan. So another way to look at that is, he will put people in that circle, who will be hurt if he acts out again. So that may include a partner, children, other family members, friends, employers, co workers, and I've actually also seen people put pets in the other circle, because they acknowledged that when they were acting out, they were neglectful of their pet.

Duane Osterlind 19:20

So in a way, it really helps the person who's struggling with that intimacy and relational component start to think relationally. So I guess it helps them really be relational in their thinking when they do this recovery plan.

Marnie Breecker 19:34

Yeah, exactly. It prevents the ability of seeing recovery in a vacuum and looking at it from a framework of "Oh, nobody else is hurt by this. This is just about me. You know, my recovery is about me and not about anybody else." And you know, I want to say that when you and I first talked about doing an episode on this topic, I had been under the impression that more and more therapists are using this partner sensitive circle plan now as opposed to the one that you and I learned about, the three circle plan. And I thought that was really great news, but I have to say that I've had some experiences recently, you and I've talked about them, and we will go into them more in another episode coming up. But I've learned that actually not nearly as many therapists as I thought are using that fourth circle, which to be honest, is concerning to me. I know that I've expressed that to you, as well, I felt a little shocked when I had that discovery. So I do encourage you, if you're working with therapists who are not using that fourth circle, I think it's okay for you to go in - we actually will put the fourth circle plan on our website and in the show notes. And, you know, feel free to take that and bring that into your therapist, if this feels to you like it makes sense and resonates and would be helpful.

Duane Osterlind 20:49

Right, definitely, to be able to use that.

Marnie Breecker 20:51

So in addition to the partner sensitive circle plan, there are some other important areas and ways that you can integrate the trauma model into the addict's treatment. So I would say that the important things would be focused education on partner trauma. And this is twofold. This is education about the partners experience of trauma specific to the sexual betrayal, but also her experience of trauma that results from the relationally offending behaviors. So those are those chronic patterns of abuse that accompany the addiction. So the lying, the deceit, the manipulation, the crazy making, or gaslighting, because most often partners report that they can get over the sexual behavior or the sexual betrayal a lot easier than they can get over the abusive component of this, of this whole addiction.

Duane Osterlind 21:47

So for me, in working with a lot of the addicts, this is such important information about what their behavior actually looks like. So understanding gaslighting, and understanding how that actually works, understanding what minimization is, really looking at these and dissecting it and slowing it down, they can really see like, "oh, okay, I can see how I do that." A lot of times, I think addicts are in a lot of their shame and guilt, and these behaviors are just so automatic, they don't even realize they're doing them. So being able to really educate them about this, and help them see it and name it and illustrate it really helps the addict go, "oh, I can see what I'm doing." And then giving them alternatives to this way of being so they can learn new ways of expressing themselves in a way that's relational and healing and compassionate.

Marnie Breecker 22:49

Absolutely. So we would say that this, what we've just talked about, let's call all of this focused education, right? Like that would be the first step, I think, in helping to integrate this piece into his treatment. So the second piece of focused education would be specifically on empathy, and the role of empathy in relational healing.

Duane Osterlind 23:11

Right.

Marnie Breecker 23:12

And then the last piece of focus education would be ways of creating safety. So this would really mean being able to hold space for your partner's pain without any of that defensiveness or anger or shame that we've been talking about through this entire episode.

Duane Osterlind 23:26

Right? So they'll be able to incorporate these learnings into their relationship.

Marnie Breecker 23:31

Yeah. And I think that it is crucial that you see your partner from the beginning as a trauma survivor. She is a trauma survivor. And most of the time, her initial symptoms and her reactions are trauma survival responses, and what is a trauma survival response? That's a natural and expected response to trauma. It is a way for a person to try to cope and survive when she has experienced trauma, it's a way for her to try to adapt and survive. And so for you as an addict, again, understanding her experiences, trauma will allow you to see her emotions, and reactions make sense. So your partner needs to see that you understand the depth of her pain, and that you take responsibility for your addiction or your sexual behavior and that you're working to change. She really needs to know you get it. In fact, remember, Duane, today you sent me an email from someone, one of our listeners who wrote in, and she specifically used that term, she said, "My husband, still it's been six years and my husband still doesn't get it."

Duane Osterlind 24:33

Right, even that long. And that's just so sad. So this brings us to the next point that we want to address, which is how do we know that - how do you know that your partner gets it? And what are the indicators that your partner understands this trauma?

Marnie Breecker 24:50

Yeah, so if you are an addict, your words mean very little right now. Right? Which means that you cannot tell her how well you're doing, you have to show her, your partner cannot trust you now, but she will in time, if you can demonstrate that you're on a healthy path, and that is specifically by the actions you take, as opposed to the words that you say. And so, right, the most important indicators that you get it and that you're changing is the capacity to show accountability and integrity and empathy.

Duane Osterlind 25:22

So let's talk about accountability. What does that look like? How would a partner know that their partner is accountable?

Marnie Breecker 25:28

So basically, you know, accountability is a willingness to accept responsibility. So if a partner is talking to her husband, and he is continuing to minimize or deny, or make excuses for or transfer the blame, or engage in any other kind of, you know, crazy making or abusive behavior, then that's a pretty clear indication that he doesn't get it and that he is not accountable. If however, he says something like, "I understand why you feel that way. Your feelings make sense. I did not make a, you know, I made really awful decisions, I hurt you, I caused trauma, I betrayed you, I will do whatever I can to earn your trust back", you know, things like that, that shows accountability.

Duane Osterlind 26:10

Right. In a way you can see it in them, their tone changes. And so then the next part of this, when we find out if our partner gets it, is integrity. What does that mean? What does that look like?

Marnie Breecker 26:25

So integrity is all about being honest, and having strong moral principles. And as hard as it may be for you to hear this, if you're the one who has caused the betrayal. The reality is that after discovery, your partner likely feels that as a result of what you have done, you lack integrity. So it makes sense then, that in order to heal your relationship, you have to show her that not only do you value integrity, but that you will do everything you can to embody the qualities of honesty and trustworthiness moving forward.

Duane Osterlind 26:55

Right. And for addicts that are building that integrity back, that means being really open, your word really has to count for what it means. So if you say you're going to be somewhere at five o'clock, you are there at five o'clock, if you say, "Look, you want to check my email, here it is, you can look at it". You have to do it by your behavior that shows that your word is your bond, and you solely have to repair that over time.

Marnie Breecker 27:23

Right, and little things that in let's say, a healthy relationship that hasn't been traumatized by betrayal that either partner might get away with or that wouldn't be big ruptures, right, those will become huge ruptures. So yeah, walking, walking in late from work in a relationship where there's no, there's no trauma, there's no problem is probably not going to create a lot of upset.

Duane Osterlind 27:45

Right.

Marnie Breecker 27:45

But somebody walking in five minutes late when they have a history of acting out and not coming home after work and being late consistently and a partner finding out it's because that he was out with his acting out partner, or sexually, you know, cheating or behaving in that way. That is unacceptable in the recovery process, or the relational healing process. So to say, "Come on, it was only five minutes" totally minimizes it. And the truth is, it's crazy making because she has every reason to be concerned if you're five minutes late, after finding out your history and what has really occurred, right?

Duane Osterlind 28:18

Yeah, I tell addicts who are in the process of trying to heal their relationship, sometimes life comes up, and you are going to be five minutes late. But what you do is you reach out to your partner, you say, I'm going to be five minutes late. This is where I'm at, this is what's going on, you have to almost go for the attic, a lot of times it feels over the top. But that will show that your word matches your actions. And that builds that sense of integrity.

Marnie Breecker 28:46

Yeah. And I think it's worth mentioning that the things we're talking about are not things that you're going to have to be doing for the rest of your life. I mean, you do want to have integrity for the rest of your life. However, you can be five minutes late because we're you know, you're human, you know, all of us make mistakes. But, you know, I think Rob Weiss does a good job of addressing this in his book 'Out Of The Doghouse'. There's this idea that at the beginning, you have to be willing to be in the doghouse. You've earned that place in the doghouse.

Duane Osterlind 29:16

Right.

Marnie Breecker 29:16

But you can also earn your place out of it. But part of the recovery piece is willing to be willing to fall on your sword. And being willing to recognize that every sort of misstep that you take right now is under the microscope. And to a traumatized partner, that's not going to help her develop trust and security back in a you know, in a traumatized relationship.

Duane Osterlind 29:41

Right. And I have a question that I'll ask you as well because this comes up a lot for addicts who might be listening to this is like, at what point is enough enough? You say fall on my sword. When do I not fall on my sword when it impacts my own self worth? I guess that is the question I'm asking. A lot of addicts say things like, "there comes a point, I've done this for three years now, I feel like I've really put everything into it. Yet I'm still falling on my sword and she's still angry at me."

Marnie Breecker 30:13

Yeah, I think it's a really great question. And to be honest with you, I feel like it deserves its own episode, because that's a really big topic. I do want to make it clear that if people follow the sort of relational healing guidelines, and are living their life in a state of accountability and integrity, and empathy is what we'll discuss in another minute, I think that it does get to a point where organically the relationship starts to stabilize, and where he feels that he's not going to be compromising his self worth and falling on his sword in a way that's going to be hurtful to him in some way. And nor do I feel that the partner at that point would expect that from him or want that from him in a healthy recovery relationship.

Duane Osterlind 30:57

Right. So another part of this knowing if your partner gets it is empathy. And this is, this can be a little bit more difficult for addicts to be able to do and they're probably not going to start off just being empathetic, it's something they're going to have to learn how to do as they learn to cope with their own shame and, and guilt.

Marnie Breecker 31:19

Which, by the way, I think is one of the reasons why at the beginning, after the initial discovery, why couples are in such a state of crisis, or one of the reasons is that that very early state, what she needs the most right then and there, is for him to tend to her wounds.

Duane Osterlind 31:35

Right.

Marnie Breecker 31:35

For him to empathize. Right? Empathy is probably the most crucial component, but because addicts struggle with it so much, usually more damage is done in the beginning at those early stages.

Duane Osterlind 31:47

Right.

Marnie Breecker 31:47

Because he hasn't learned yet how to have empathy. And so just so we're all on the same page, when we're talking about empathy. This is the capacity to attune to another person's feelings based on what they have said.

Duane Osterlind 32:01

And I think that goes back to our point we made earlier why it's so crucial that partner trauma sensitive therapy starts at the very beginning of treatment, like you said, in the first session, because it's crucial that even if the addict is feeling overwhelmed with his own shame and guilt, he can at least learn how to respond empathetically.

Marnie Breecker 32:23

Yeah, you can do this, you can learn this, this is what we teach, we know that it's hard work. And it takes a lot of time and energy. But empathy is a skill that can be learned. So, you know, we believe in you. And we know that you can do it, and we're here to support you.

Duane Osterlind 32:39

Right.

Marnie Breecker 32:40

Maybe this would be a good time for us to talk about common mistakes that addicts in recovery make in trying to fix their relationships.

Duane Osterlind 32:47

Yeah, I think this is helpful because it gives some concrete examples of what we seen and what it looks like. Here's a few: getting caught up in your own shame. And saying something when your partner says to you, "oh, you know, you hurt me, your behavior hurt me so much". And you go, "Well, why are you even with me? I'm such a horrible person. And I've destroyed your life." In that moment, you're now talking about yourself, and you're not with your partner's pain. So that's one mistake. Another one is constantly saying you're sorry, but not changing your behavior. It doesn't work. They have to really see your behavior change.

Marnie Breecker 33:23

Yeah. And making excuses or rationalizing or justifying or continuing to minimize the impact.

Duane Osterlind 33:29

Yeah. And also a lot of times hearing the addict say, "Look, I've been in recovery for X amount of months, years, you should be over this by now."

Marnie Breecker 33:38

Yeah, saying pushing your partner to move on, I would say is probably one of the biggest mistakes you can make in this process of healing the relationship.

Duane Osterlind 33:45

So Marnie, you want to give some things that might be different that might work, that might be more helpful?

Marnie Breecker 33:51

Yeah. So I think that probably the most important thing are empathic statements using empathy, to show your partner that you get it. So let's see, some of those kinds of statements could be like, "based on what you said, I imagine that you might feel really hurt or you might feel really scared, I understand that you're angry, and that really makes sense. And I see that you're in so much pain, is there anything that I can do to support you or what can I do to support you?" And perhaps the most validating statement that you can say is simply "I hear you", you know, without following that up with but, or going back to explanations. Just "I hear you, you make sense, your pain makes sense. I see you." If you can communicate authentically to your partner, that you see her pain, and that you also are accountable for causing the pain. You know, if you can accept responsibility, and be empathic, that's what she needs the most. If you can do that, then you will really be able to move your relationship in a direction of healing.

Duane Osterlind 34:56

Definitely. One thing I wanted to talk about too, is that a lot of times, addicts will say, "I've said all those things, and she's still upset." Or "I said that and she didn't calm down or didn't change, she was still angry." And it's learning that this takes time. That just because you say this a few times, doesn't mean it just takes her feelings away. You're giving her time to process, you're giving her space to process, you're not trying to change her emotions. So in that moment, you're just being there.

Marnie Breecker 35:30

That's such a great point. Because I think what happens sometimes is when people do try that over and over again, and their partner seems to stay mad, then they get mad. And they're like, "look, I'm doing all of this, and I'm trying to make it better, and you're still angry," that is actually going to make things worse, as opposed to really being committed to doing it until it works, you know, continue to do it. Keep doing it, don't stop doing it just because you're not getting the result in the moment that you want.

Duane Osterlind 35:57

You have to think in a long term view that this takes time to change. It doesn't just change with a few statements.

Marnie Breecker 36:05

Exactly.

Duane Osterlind 36:06

Alright, everyone, we were editing this episode, and we realized that it had become quite long, and we didn't want to overwhelm you with so much content. So we decided to stop here, split it up and continue the conversation on the next episode. So in the next episode, we are going to pick up with the topic of empathy, which is the third indicator to show your partner that you really get it, that you get her trauma and are changing.

Marnie Breecker 36:37

Yeah, and empathy really is so incredibly important that it does deserve an episode of its own. So it worked out in the end, and I'm really glad that we're splitting up this topic into two episodes.

Duane Osterlind 36:46

So stay tuned for the next episode, and we're going to continue this conversation.

Marnie Breecker 36:52

Thanks again for listening. We'll see you soon.

HCH Narrator 36:56

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