

SCA DC NEWSLETTER

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By SCA Metro DC Intergroup

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My Story

By Ron L.

I have been in recovery for sexual compulsive behavior for 9 + years since I attended my first SCA meeting in 1987. Actually, my view is that I've been on a journey of self-discovery and recovery all of these years. When I wasn't attending SCA meetings or actively working a 12-step program, I've noticed I have integrated certain principles into the fabric of my ongoing journey: the practice of the Serenity prayer at difficult moments; acknowledging my powerlessness over certain people, places, and things; being wary of isolating behavior; letting go and letting higher power; trusting that if I "act as if," I will find clarity in time; etc.. Recently, my life has taken a turn so that these basics are a lifeline for me on a daily basis.

A couple of months ago, my partner of 10 years and I separated; he moved out of our house into his own place. This separation has been a difficult process over the last couple of years. My partner is like a member of my family. It's almost impossible to imagine a future without him, even though the separation is a step toward protecting my health and the probability of more peace in my life. Our future together is completely uncertain; in the end, we could divorce, develop a different sort of a loving relationship, or rebuild a partnership on new terms.

I really feel like I am living my life one day at a time, in the sense that I'm focused on meeting the basic responsibilities of my life and getting enough rest. And my sexual recovery is completely confusing and unclear to me. When I was in my relationship, my bottom line was relatively simple: no sexual activity, virtual or otherwise, with anyone other than my partner. And I had enough years of sexual sobriety under this plan that maintaining my sobriety was fairly uncomplicated. But now, I am very confused about what I want for myself sexually. I'm certain I have no interest in dating now; I'm in too much pain and I am not in a place to even know if I'd want to relate to another man in that way. (Plus, the thought of dating as a man in his 50s is terrifying!)

But I do want to be sexual in some way. I have a very undeveloped sense of my bottom line: I know I don't want to

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Codependency

By Doug P.

Someone says he enjoys being devoted to a relationship. "I suppose that makes me codependent," he says, apologetically. "No," one might respond. "It means you like being in your relationship." When it comes to codependency, some people are confused.

We might associate codependent behavior with boiling-hot Fatal Attraction behavior. It's easy to confuse codependency with Obsessive-Compulsive behavior.

Many behaviors—such as worrying or controlling—are what ordinary people do from time to time. Where we are in trouble is when these behaviors become something we can't stop—exactly the same plague as with our primary compulsions or addictions. In a way, codependency could be viewed as normal behavior – plus. We might do too much, care too much, feel too little, or overly engage. We forget where the other person's responsibilities begin and our responsibilities stop. We get busy worrying about the world and neglect ourselves.

Melody Beattie, an author noted for her book, "Codependent No More", defines codependency as "one who has let another person's behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behavior." It is more than that, but obsession and controlling certainly are good places to start.

For many sexual compulsives, there are codependency issues underlying the compulsion/addiction. The behaviors associated with codependency make perfect sense if we look closely enough. It's understandable that we would confuse control with love when control is all we've known. It makes sense that we think controlling will keep us safe because it did—for a while. All codependent behaviors make sense if traced to their origins. The behaviors—from controlling to caretaking—are behaviors that saved our lives when we didn't know what else to do.

Codependents (remember I'm saying they may be us as well as people/loved ones around us...) may be smothering, clinging, and needy (they/we kill with kindness and try to please until it can't be stood anymore).

Most recovering addicts have codependency underneath.

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SCA NEWS & EVENTS

SCA Fall Retreat – Sept 25-27: Our Fall retreat is at Claymont Retreat Center, Charles Town, WV. The theme is **Out of Isolation: Stepping into Recovery** and focuses on program basics including sponsorship and the twelve steps. We will be joined by guest speaker, Robert Weiss, Executive Director of The Sexual Recovery Institute of LA and author of *Cruise Control: Understanding Sex Addiction in Gay Men*. Registration fee is \$90 and is due July 31. Pick up a brochure at a DC SCA meeting.

My Story continued

have sex in clubs or public places and I don't want to engage in sexual activities to the point of withdrawing from my life or giving up on valued priorities in my life. This leaves a lot of gray area that's been challenging to sort through. Over the last couple of months, I've been experimenting with casual sex. I haven't felt very comfortable talking about this when I attend meetings except at a very high level. I have found I am more at ease talking about my experience with my therapist, my sponsor, and in some individual conversations with program friends where I feel very safe sharing certain details of my experiences and my confusion.

I have learned a lot about myself during this time. My interest in being sexual ebbs and flows, which seems normal. I've rediscovered the power of the internet to consume a frightening amount of my time. I haven't felt it necessary to think about a Net Nanny at this point, but I've begun setting boundaries around the days and amount of time I can spend on certain web sites. I also have relearned something that has been very basic to my recovery: I don't want to have sexual experiences where I feel bad about myself. Part of the energy behind my interest in being sexual is that I'm afraid no one would want to have sex with me. In contrast, I've discovered there are people who have been interested in me. I've met a couple of people that I can imagine spending time with and getting to know, though I am still not interested in dating. These experiences have begun to neutralize some of my fears for the future.

I am still intimidated by this phase in my sexual recovery. Sometimes it seems like not being sexual at all would make things simpler. Part of what is challenging is that it seems like I need to be willing to risk failure in order to find growth. I much preferred the clean, bright bottom line of when I was in a monogamous relationship. This seems so much riskier, because I cannot always tell prior to a sexual experience if it's appropriate for me. Sometimes, it's hard to sort out even after the experience! I find it is mostly shades of gray rather than clearly black or white.

It's been a gift of my recovery that some well worn lessons have come up pretty readily to guide me. I know I don't want to lose myself in compulsive behavior that gobbles up my time and sense of peace. I don't want to lose my life at all; I want to figure out a way for my sexuality to complement my life. I've quickly rediscovered the sort of people, places, and things I choose to avoid in order to protect my recovery and well-being during a rocky time. And I know that I don't have to have all of this figured out today. I can take one day at a time, knowing that in time clarity and understanding will come if I'm willing to let go and let higher power.

Codependency continued

Sometimes, we can't get sober until we deal with codependency

first. We might call it "the Second Great Surrender," when we let go of all illusion of control. This surprised me in my 4th year of SCA fellowship, 9 years of alcohol sobriety. I was sober, but still got laid off, my family didn't get put together as I'd imagined (and tried to control), etc.; I hit a new plateau of turning things over and letting go – I was still obsessed about control and I was still, in many ways, a pleaser.

Recovery for codependency exists today in many forms. Today there are support groups for caregivers of people with almost every problem—not just for the person who has the problem and not only when the other person's problem is a compulsive or addictive disorder.

I spent about 2 years going to CODA (Codependents Anonymous). I'm not sure what drew me there at first, except maybe some issues between me and my family, gathering around shame, guilt, and difficulty with forgiving myself. I still had issues with doing things to manipulate peoples' approval. In my primary recovery, I became aware of this life-long doormat behavior that vested my entire self-image in others' approval of me.

Codependency is about crossing lines. How can we tell if what we're doing is codependent? Many of the same indicators that we practice in our primary 12 step-work apply. When we cross the line into the codependent zone, we usually have an ulterior motive for what we do, and what we're doing hurts; it doesn't work.

The classic codependent, some say, becomes addicted to being surrounded and victimized by addicts and compulsives. That energy and way of relating becomes miserably comfortable. To the codependent, it feels like love. Here's some guidance for evaluating yours and others' behaviors:

- Healthy dependency on anything improves while addiction destroys quality of life and ability to function
- Loss of control accompanies addiction

There is a bright side! Once issues are worked through, our defects can quickly become assets. Our experiences help us become successful entrepreneurs; we may handle stress significantly better than others; we keep going when people around us who had it easier fold. We may become "super-achievers." Two positive codependency traits, solving problems and possessing endurance, are second nature to people who have already been through the fire.

This is all to say that when we start taking care of ourselves, indeed—the long term benefits of recovery—the deficits of the past transform into assets. Many with codependency issues are loyal and dedicated (of course, to a fault until their issues are grappled with). They get the job done. They obsess but they work that into perseverance. They become leaders, agents for positive change, and fearless about it.

Melody Beattie views the issues of codependency as issues of awareness, caretaking, control, letting go, gratitude, acceptance, surrender, boundaries, feelings, dropping the victim role forever, and learning how to love ourselves. At the most fundamental level, the issue is: **KNOW YOURSELF.**