

# **Sex – The Drug That Rocks Our World**

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# What is Addiction?

An escalating pattern of out of control behavior over time (6 months or longer) that continues despite negative consequences and significantly affects your life

# 10 Criteria for Addiction

- Loss of Control
- Compulsive Behavior
- Unsuccessful Efforts to Stop
- Loss of Time
- Preoccupation
- Inability to Fulfill Obligations
- Continuation Despite Consequences
- Escalation
- Losses
- Withdrawal

# What is Sex/Love Addiction?

A pattern of out of control behaviors involving sexual arousal, sexual behaviors, or romantic thoughts or attachment, which has existed for at least six months, negatively impacts your life, and continues despite negative consequences.

# Sexual Addiction is NOT . . .

- Homosexuality
- Child molestation/sexual interest in children
- Being sexually active
- Enjoying sex
- Experimenting with different positions/behaviors with your partner that do not put either of you at risk of being hurt, physically or emotionally
- Using sex toys
- Cross-dressing
- Fetishes



# How to identify sex/love addicts

# Sexual Addictions

“Of course they wanted to have sex with me. I can have any female in the company that I want. I am a VP.”

“I seem to be utterly unable to be completely faithful.”

“I sat down to watch porn for 30 minutes and realized hours later that it was 4am and I had completely missed dinner and had to be at work in 3 hours.”

“I love my wife, but the urges come and I can't seem to stop having sex with prostitutes. I know that she might leave me if I act out again, but I don't know how to stop.”

“The fact that they don't even know that I'm watching them turns me on as much as seeing what they are doing.”

“I'd call women listed on Craigslist and make them want to set up a meeting with me. I never showed up for any of the meetings. Just setting them up was my high.”

“I couldn't even make it through the 20 minute drive. I had to pull over and masturbate. I didn't even want to, but I couldn't stop myself.”

# Love Addictions

“I just want to know I’m attractive. It’s not like I do anything with them.”

“I can’t stand the thought of never having another ‘first kiss’.”

“He is everything I’ve ever wanted; everything I’ve ever looked for. I know now why none of my other relationships worked out.”

“She is trapped in a horrible relationship. She’s not strong enough to get out on her own. I know I can save her.”

“I just want to run. I know this is what I always do when things get bad, but I don’t see any point in staying.”

“If he ever finds out who I really am, he’ll leave, so I need to keep my backups ready just in case.”



# Love Addictions (cont.)

“I know my husband loves me, but my affair partner made me feel beautiful and wanted. He’ll always remember me that way.”

“I know he’s meant to be with me. He really loves me, not her, and I can tell he knows that when he looks at me.”

“No one is being hurt. I’m not actually doing anything wrong. It’s not a real affair because I’ve never touched her.”

“I had sex with him again. I know I wasn’t supposed to, but I just felt so alone.”

“If only I was thin enough, then I would be good enough and people would love me.”

“It makes me sick to even think about having sex or even having a boyfriend. I don’t see how people could like sex.”

# Addicts

## Female

- Emotionally based
- Usually starts at puberty
- Significant break (often 10+ years) at time of marriage
- Addictive behaviors often appear to fill desires for natural relational connection (appears to be looking for support)
- Initial exposure to sex often through sexual abuse
- More likely to become a victim of others, including mental health professionals

## Male

- Physically based
- Usually starts at puberty
- Short break (6 months-1 year), if any, from addictive behaviors at time of marriage
- Addictive behaviors often fill desires beyond natural relational interactions (looking for a high)
- Initial exposure to sex often through pornography
- More likely to pose (out of fear) so they control how others see them

# Addicts (cont.)

## Female

- More likely to share too much
- Often viewed by society as unnatural female responses
- Therapy usually driven by fear of being alone (viewed as long-term loss of self)
- Tends to vacillate between victim and rescuer roles
- More likely to have changes in sexual orientation as a symptom of their addiction
- Sex is the means to the end

## Male

- More likely to share too little
- Often viewed by society as natural male responses
- Therapy usually driven by fear of divorce (viewed as failure, abandonment)
- Tends to vacillate between victim and persecutor roles
- Less likely to have changes in sexual orientation as a symptom of their addiction
- Sex is the end

# Specific Challenges for Female Addicts

- Significantly higher chance of abuse from partner
- Often translates abuse as normal relational interactions
- Often translates abuse towards them as their own acting out behaviors
- Power dynamics make it difficult for them to say no or set boundaries with others, including mental health professionals
- Strong belief in their ability to be attractive, combined with low self-esteem

# Specific Challenges for Female Addicts

- Often trapped in relationship due to circumstances (financial, educational, maternal)
- Higher chance of co-occurring eating disorder (75-90%)
- More to likely be married to an addict
- Sexualizes emotions (stress, loneliness, fear)
- Sexualizes any feeling of connection

# Partners

## Female

- More likely to stay in relationship at time of disclosure
- Often the driving force behind therapy
- Strongest reaction to emotional acts of betrayal
- Trauma response more likely to be expressed emotionally
- Forgives more easily; trusts too much
- Tends to vacillate between victim and rescuer roles

## Male

- More likely to end relationship at time of disclosure
- Limited willingness to attend or participate in therapy
- Strongest reaction to physical acts of betrayal (sense of ownership)
- Trauma response more likely to be expressed physically
- Takes much longer to forgive; doesn't trust enough
- Tends to vacillate between victim and persecutor roles

# Specific Challenges for Male Partners

- Two general types
  - “I’m done!”
  - Typical partner response (trapped in trauma responses, inability to advocate for self – looks more aggressive than female partners)
- Lack of available support
- Social mores around males expressing emotion

# Therapeutic Differences

- Relationships between female addicts and male partners are more likely to have abusive behaviors by the partner that necessitate amends
- Female addicts tend to have stronger triggers around safety – past traumas may be triggered by male therapists or therapeutic exercises



**The opposite of  
addiction is . . .**

**CONNECTION**

~~Sexual  
Addiction~~

Connective  
Disorders

# What is a Connective Disorder?

An inability to form healthy connections with other people.

Individuals with connective disorders are unable to foster and maintain relationships in which appropriate levels of connection are possible.

Unable to form connections, they seek connection in unhealthy ways.

**What is the deepest form  
of connection?**

Empathy

**What is empathy?**

Connection to your own  
feelings and to the feelings  
others experience

# Goal for Therapy

Connect clients to  
themselves and to  
others through  
empathy

# Spirituality

Connection to God  
(Higher Power), self,  
and others

# Treating Connective Disorders

- Individual Counseling (for both partners, but with different therapists)
- Couples Counseling (Co-therapy)
- Group Counseling (both individually and as a couple)



# Early Recovery – Emotional Safety



# The Recovery Hill

## Prevention

### Tank

Planning

Coping

### Rituals

Morning

VSE's

Night

Emotions

### Warning Signs (Indicators & Triggers)

- 1) Emotions
- 2) Thoughts
- 3) Behaviors
- 4) Physical
- 5) People, Places, Things
- 6) Relational
- 7) Spiritual

Shore Line

## Intervention (Lapse)

Fire Drill  
Zone

Point of no return

Slip

Slide

Collapse



# Accountability Contract

- ◉ Clearly defines boundaries for both
- ◉ Sets up format for reporting relapses and for responding to those reports
- ◉ Creates safety for both
- ◉ Provides enough information around acting out behaviors to allow the possibility of a more complete disclosure/amends

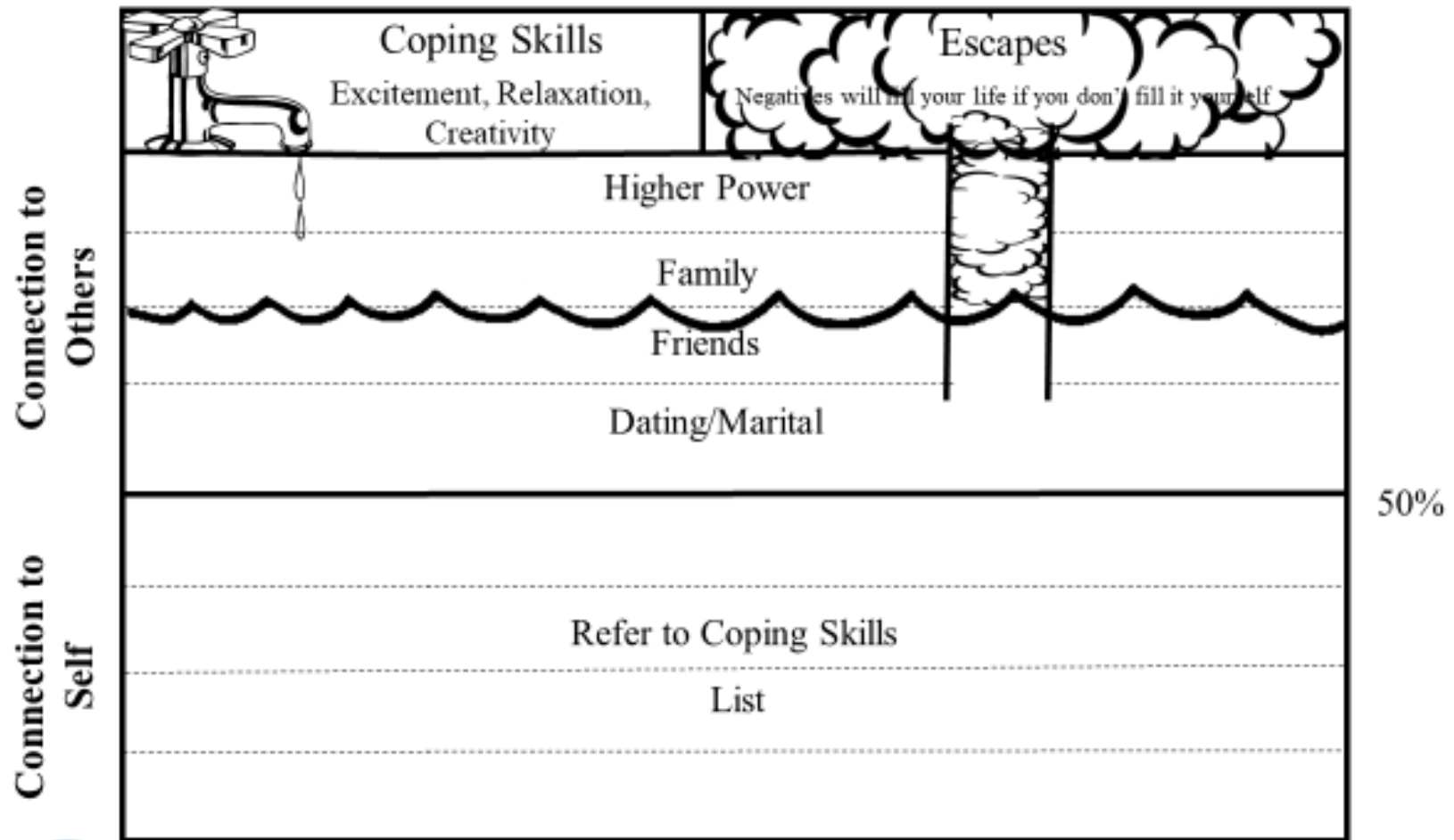
# Shame

- I AM a mistake
- No possibility of repair
- Creates feelings of worthlessness
- Matter of identity
- Hopeless – no growth or learning
- Paralyzing
- Global

# Guilt

- I MADE a mistake
- Possibility of repair
- Affirms values
- Behavioral infraction
- Promotes learning and growth
- Empowering
- Specific

# Personal Tank



# Excitement – Adrenaline

Cocaine

Ecstasy

Speed

Meth



# Relaxation – Endorphins



Marijuana  
Alcohol  
Heroin  
Xanax

# Creativity – Dopamine

LSD

PCP

Peyote

Mushrooms



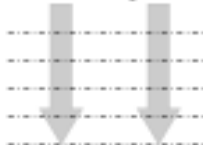
# Connection – Endorphins, Dopamine, Serotonin, Oxytocin





# Trauma Cycle

## Traumas / Genetics



### Painful Emotions

Lonely  
 Uncertain  
 Inadequate  
 Overwhelmed  
 Ignored  
 Empty  
 Afraid  
 Powerless

### Coping Skills

Identify emotions  
 Identify needs  
 Resolve needs

### Trauma Response

Hypervigilance  
 Denial  
 Avoidance  
 Reactivity  
 Anger (Rage)  
 Withdrawal  
 Shock  
 Codependency  
 Depression

### Emotional Consequences

#### Short-term

Work

#### Long-term

Freedom

### Emotional Consequences

#### Short-term

High/Energy  
 Release/Relief  
 Certainty  
 Connectedness  
 Powerful  
 Adequate  
 Accepted

#### Long-term

Hopelessness  
 Stress/Anxiety  
 Uncertainty  
 Loneliness  
 Powerlessness  
 Inadequate  
 Isolated



# Co-Dependency

When our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are dependent on the responses of others

# Rescuing Behaviors

Blocks or minimizes consequences for others – often in order to be needed, wanted, and loved, or to prevent us from hurting when we see others hurt

- Denial
- Enabling = Disabling

# Persecuting Behaviors

Exaggerates consequences for others in an attempt to control their behavior so we won't hurt

- Threats
- Shaming
- Reciprocation
- Controlling and Manipulating

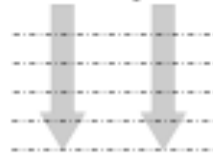
# Suffering Behaviors

Attempts to manipulate someone(s) into rescuing us, as being rescued is viewed as being loved, and it stops us from having to figure out how to deal with anyone else's needs

- Self-condemnation
- Obsessive thoughts
- Remaining a victim

# Addiction Cycle

## Traumas / Genetics



### Painful Emotions

- Lonely
- Bored
- Inadequate
- Overwhelmed
- Stressed
- Empty
- Fear
- Powerless

### Coping Skills

- Identify emotions
- Identify needs
- Resolve needs

### Escapes

- Alcohol/Drugs
- Eating Disorders
- Sexual Addiction
- Rage
- Gambling/Gaming
- Codependency
- Computer Gaming
- Shopping
- Lying

### Emotional Consequences

#### Short-term

Work

#### Long-term

Freedom

### Emotional Consequences

#### Short-term

High

Release/Relief

Connectedness

Powerful

Adequate

Accepted

#### Long-term

Hopelessness

Stress/Anxiety

Isolated/Distant

Powerlessness

Inadequate

Guilty



# Couple Recovery Hill

## Prevention

Tank

Planning

Coping Skills

Rituals

Morning

VSE's

Night Ritual

Daily

Emotional  
Check-ins

Weekly  
Recovery  
Check-ins

Emotions

### Warning Signs (Indicators & Triggers)

- 1) Emotions
- 2) Thoughts
- 3) Behaviors
- 4) Physical
- 5) People, Places, Things
- 6) Relational
- 7) Spiritual

## Intervention (Lapse)

Fire Drill  
Zone

Point of no return

Slip

Slide

Collapse



Shore Line

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$$\text{Trust} = \frac{\text{Behavior}}{\text{Time}}$$



# Boundaries

- ◉ Keep relationships safe for us and others
  - allows us to show up in relationships
- ◉ Not selfishness or threats
- ◉ Negotiable vs. non-negotiable
- ◉ If you do A, then I do B, until you do C –  
Natural consequences

# Disclosure/Amends

Explores your story and takes accountability for the pain you've caused yourself and others

- DO NOT share with your partner throughout the process
- Helps you understand yourself and your story
- Includes enough detail around acting out history to give partners the information they need, but excludes non-essential details
- Includes empathy for pain your behaviors caused others
- Outlines changes you've made to prevent acting out in the future
- Identifies underlying patterns so your partner has a better understanding of "red flags"
- Reviewed by partner's therapist
- Shared only in a structured disclosure session with both therapists present

# Impact Letter

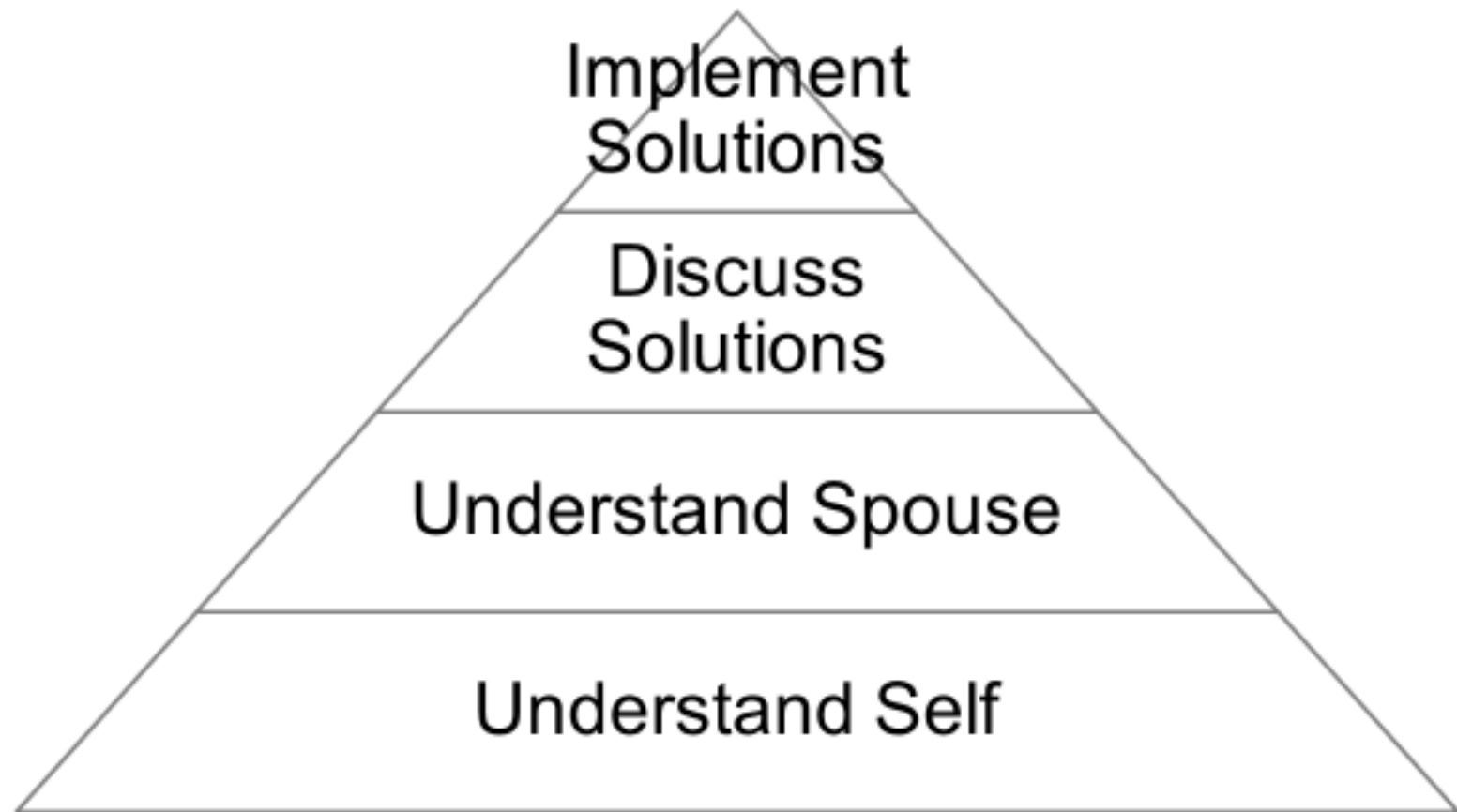
Explores your story and expresses the way your life has been affected

- DO NOT share with your partner throughout the process
- Express unfiltered anger – releases energy and reveals areas that need further processing (will be processed before sharing)
- Explore primary emotions behind the anger – allows you to understand and communicate the extent of the pain you've experienced
- Recognize the good – allows you to see a more complete picture
- Acceptance – comes when you understand yourself and your experience and have the boundaries you need to be safe
- Shared only in a structured session with both therapists present



# **Middle Recovery – Empathy and Connection**

# Communication and Trust Pyramid



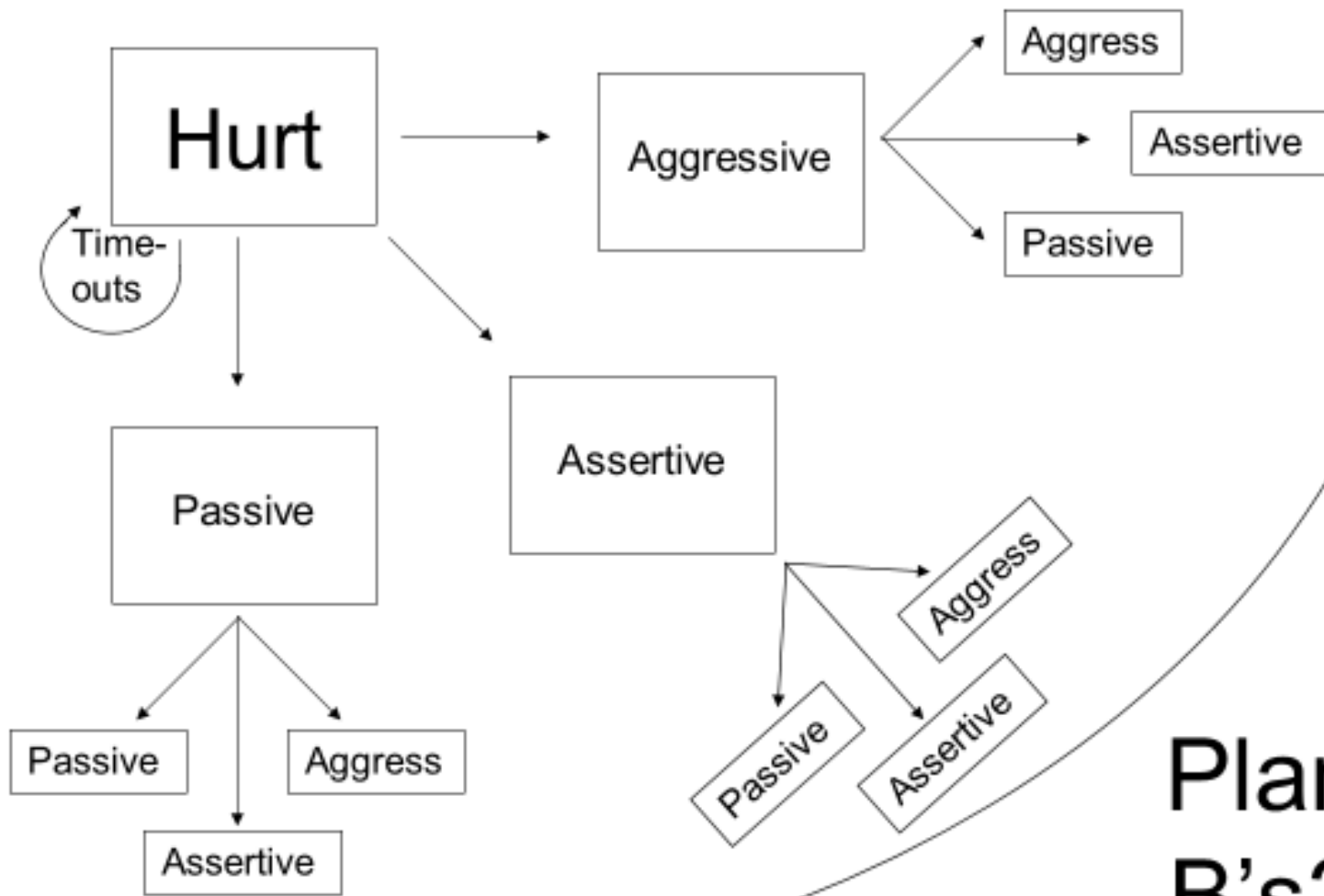
# Empathy

Hearing and understanding the experience of someone else

- You have to experience and tolerate your own feelings first (self-compassion breeds compassion for others)
- Emotions are NOT based on subjective reality – don't argue facts
- You have to share painful emotions (in a safe way) for someone else to be able to connect to them

# Intimacy (In-to-me-see)

- If I want to be connected to you, I need to let you see into my world
- I must first understand myself
- Intimacy = feeling seen, connected, and valued
- I must know how to keep myself safe emotionally
- Plan B's



Plan  
B's?







# Late Recovery – Healthy Sexuality

# Healthy Sexuality

- ◉ Sexual intimacy is a powerful and important part of human experience and an important need
- ◉ It is about connecting, true intimacy, serving each other, and being present
- ◉ It is a choice
  - > Options for connection (levels)
  - > Not the domino effect
- ◉ Sensate Focus

# Sexuality

## Healthy

- is pure (no ulterior motives) and safe
- is comforting
- acknowledges you (that I'm seen and matter)
- makes you feel accepted/loved
- feels good
- is given to you
- provides relief from stress/tension
- makes you feel more whole
- connects you emotionally
- builds trust

## Unhealthy

- is manipulative/coercive and unsafe
- is pressuring
- makes you an object (I don't matter)
- makes you feel used (and abused)
- creates disgust
- is taken from you
- adds tension
- makes you give yourself up
- forces you to be more vulnerable than you feel safe to be
- creates fear and distrust