

Family and Childhood Issues

Domestic Violence

What is domestic violence?

- 1) physical abuse or battering
- 2) sexual abuse
- 3) psychological abuse

Possessiveness, sexual jealousy, intrusiveness, and attempts to isolate the victim are typical of people who batter and abuse. The victim withdraws from others until she/he becomes even more dependent on the batterer. Isolation and lack of support makes the victim increasingly vulnerable to the abuser.

Child sexual abuse is a sexual act imposed on a child who lacks emotional, maturational, physical and cognitive development. Authority, power, corruption of affection, and sometimes force enable the perpetrator to easily coerce the child into sexual compliance.

Common reactions to living in an abusive situation include:

- 1) fear of retribution
- 2) fear of losing control
- 3) fear of being blamed
- 4) fear of not being believed
- 5) anger
- 6) self-blame
- 7) shame
- 8) guilt
- 9) depression
- 10) denial
- 11) numbness
- 12) re-experiencing the violence in dreams, thoughts, flashbacks
- 13) avoiding situations similar to those in which violence occurred
- 14) hyper- vigilance
- 15) startling easily
- 16) abusing alcohol and drugs
- 17) behaving compulsively in terms of sex, gambling, eating/starving

How to recover and heal from these experiences:

- 1) Acknowledge the abuse
- 2) Develop a plan to keep yourself safe
- 3) Find available help through resources such as hotlines, shelters, crisis centers, and legal assistance
- 4) Read self-help books
- 5) Talk to supportive others
- 6) Begin therapy
- 7) Join a group of other survivors of sexual abuse

Children of Divorced Parents

Common reactions to divorce:

- 1) feeling guilt or responsibility
- 2) feeling that you lost a part of your childhood
- 3) feeling that either of your parents depends too much on you for support
- 4) finding yourself in the role of “peacemaker” when your parents argue
- 5) feeling that your needs are often overlooked

Basic Guidelines for Survival and Growth

- 1) Don't go through this period alone--support and acceptance by other people is essential during big changes.
- 2) Care for yourself emotionally and physically--make time for contemplation, quiet time alone, find safe ways to blow off steam and release tensions, take time for exercise, rest and recreation.
- 3) Don't become an emotional junkie--take stock of your emotions to see if they are truly expressions of how you feel or if they are habits, ways of getting attention, or ways to avoid other feelings.
- 4) Expect to experience a range of feelings--sharing these feelings with others who have had similar experiences may be helpful.
- 5) Become informed about what is going to happen--focus on what you need to know for your plans, not on information which is more properly in the private domain of each parent.
- 6) Keep clear of unhealthy alliances--you need to clearly and firmly refuse to be put in the middle of arguments.
- 7) Help your parents understand what you are trying to do for yourself--help them understand what your experiences are and how you are taking care of yourself.
- 8) Find out what works for you--reactions to divorce vary widely so pay attention to whatever you find helpful, and try to avoid making major decisions and changes in your life plan.
- 9) Learn to use helping resources outside your family--friends will listen, written materials may help, established groups such as your church, self-help groups, and professional counselors can provide additional support.

Dysfunctional Relationship Patterns in your Family

Types of Dysfunctional Families:

- 1) One or both parents have addictions or compulsions
- 2) One or both parents use the threat or application of physical violence as the primary means of control
- 3) One or both parents exploit the children and treat them as possessions whose primary purpose is to respond to the physical and/or emotional needs of the adult
- 4) One or both parents are unable to provide, or threaten to withdraw, financial care, basic physical care, or adequate emotional support
- 5) One or both parents exert a strong authoritarian control over the children

Resulting problems:

- 1) Inhibiting development of children's trust in the world, others, and in themselves
- 2) Problems with academic work, relationships, and their own identities
- 3) Misinterpreting themselves and developing negative self-concepts

How to make changes:

- 1) Identify painful or difficult experiences that happened during your childhood
- 2) Make a list of behaviors, beliefs, etc. that you would like to change
- 3) Write next to each item the behavior, belief, etc. that you would like to have instead
- 4) Pick the easiest item on the list and begin practicing this alternate behavior or belief
- 5) Once you are able to do the alternate behavior more often than the original, pick another item on the list and practice changing it

Note:

Don't become discouraged if you find yourself slipping back into old patterns of behavior. Changes may be slow and gradual; however, as you continue to practice new and healthier behaviors, they will begin to become part of your day to day living.

Getting Help:

If you are concerned about someone that is presenting these symptoms or behaviors, be aware that many facilities and counselors are available to help individuals deal with family and childhood issues. If you are a University of Louisiana at Lafayette student seeking help these issues, please contact the Counseling and Testing Center at 337-482-6480 for more information. The center offers unlimited confidential sessions free of charge to all university students and staff.