

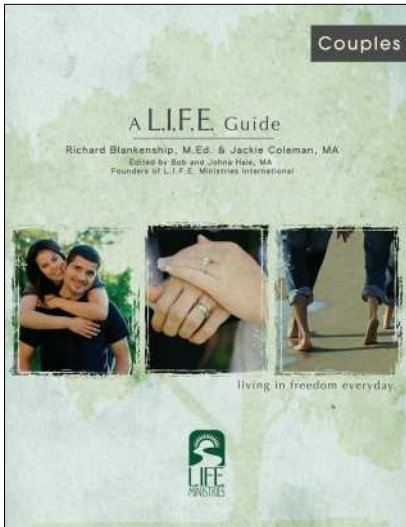
# L.I.F.E. Guide for Couples

Free Introduction and First Assignment

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## Introduction



*“Sexual addiction is an intimacy disorder.”* If you have ever attended a sexual addiction workshop or group with Faithful and True Marriages you have most likely heard these words. Sexual acting out creates the illusion of intimacy. *“Sexual addiction isn’t about sex.”* This is another phrase used in therapy with couples in recovery. If sexual addiction was about sex, the solution would be simple. Male sex addicts could marry female sex addicts, have all the sex they want within the context of marriage, and life would be great. Those who have tried this as a solution understand that it simply doesn’t work.

Sexual acting out, especially Internet pornography, creates a powerful illusion. It’s the illusion of intimacy and connectedness. Acting out temporarily creates a feeling of warmth, excitement, connection, and closeness. It can make a person feel wanted, loved, and desired. Sadly, when the acting out is finished, the illusion disappears. The illusion of intimacy fades quickly. The reality of despair, depression, and hopelessness hits home and the quest for intimacy has failed once again.

We realize that couples who pick up this book will be at different places in their journey of recovery from sexual addiction. Perhaps you have worked through the L.I.F.E. Guide for Men and/or the L.I.F.E. Guide for Spouses. Or maybe you have begun this journey believing that if you can heal the marriage that the problems will be solved. It could be that one of you is willing to work on the marriage, and the other isn’t quite sure. This is why we encourage people to go through the grieving process and do individual work before making a decision on the marriage. Years of experience have shown that couples do much better with intimacy development after completing their individual work first. If you start this book and discover that the exercises are overwhelming, you may need to consider doing more individual work before you continue. The individual L.I.F.E.

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Guides or a professional counselor may be helpful at this point. (The reference section in the back can provide resources). If you have just gone through a disclosure/discovery process, this book will probably not be appropriate for you as you begin the journey. For the spouse in that situation, the grieving exercises in the L.I.F.E. Guide for Spouses would be a great place to start. L.I.F.E. Ministries International cares deeply about you and your family. This is why they are committed to providing the best possible resources, including the most beneficial resource of all—a L.I.F.E. Support Group--to assist you in your journey.

This book can be used in a variety of settings. It may be that you work through it with a mentor couple, in a group, or in the privacy of your home. At some point, you will find it healing to share your story with other couples. Perhaps there is a couple in your church or support group that has a strong marriage. You might want to work through the exercises with them. Do what you can. It may be helpful to go back and repeat the exercises at different points in your journey.

### **Good News!**

There is hope! Couples who walk this journey with courage, faith, and hope often find the intimacy and connection they long for in their marriage. I love working with couples in recovery. They are the most rewarding couples I have experienced in my career as a professional counselor. Faithful and True Atlanta has had around 500 people come through our local groups (not to mention hundreds more through national workshops.) Of the couples who have gone through our groups, we have seen only three divorces in five years. Couples who are willing to do the work (and it's a lot of work!) can experience deeper levels of intimacy than the average married couple. They see the closeness, honesty, and openness that can develop in marriage. I can say from my years of experience that many marriages of couples in recovery are to be envied. In my personal opinion, the average marriage doesn't achieve the depth of intimacy that is experienced through a successful journey of healing from sexual addiction. Pain is an unfortunate but necessary part of intimacy development.

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Couples recovery is a slow and painstaking process. Problems will create opportunities for growth. As you network with other couples in recovery, you will discover that you aren't alone, and that many others have faced the same situations and issues which you are experiencing. Mark and Debbie Laaser write these words based on 12-step recovery.<sup>1</sup> “The experience of many recovering individuals and couples bears out the fact that the peace and serenity of the program and the improvement in one's life may not take place in the first weeks or months of recovery. If your lives together as a couple have been quite problem-filled, the consequences of those behaviors may continue to affect you for some time after you have begun this program. If this happens to you, try not to be discouraged. Try to interpret and use any ongoing consequences as reminders of how difficult your lives were before you began following this Twelve Step program. Use them, too, as encouragement to follow these Steps rigorously.”<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this L.I.F.E. Guide is to offer some of that hope and experience. If you are willing to embark on a life-changing journey, this book is for you. Using the L.I.F.E. Principles, this guide will help you create a vision for your marriage and healing from the intimacy disorder known as sexual addiction. All names have been changed to protect confidentiality. I want to thank those who shared their stories for this book. Out of respect and gratitude, all identifying information has been changed or deleted.

## **Intimacy**

Understanding intimacy is difficult, especially in a culture where many illusions of intimacy exist. Defining intimacy is difficult because it is multidimensional. There are emotional, spiritual, physical, relational, and behavioral elements. Emotional and spiritual dimensions of intimacy aren't easily defined in written form (cognitively). People have tried to present intimacy through clichés and acrostics, most of which leave couples feeling empty and without direction.

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<sup>1</sup> The L.I.F.E. Principles are a Christ-centered version of the 12 steps. The workbook “Open Hearts” contains numerous references to 12-step recovery. This can be easily translated into the Seven L.I.F.E. Principles.

<sup>2</sup> Open Hearts, Laaser, Mark & Debra, Carnes, Dr. Patrick, bibliography info, p. 224.

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As a marriage and family counselor, I've seen hundreds of couples come in asking for help with issues like communication, finances, religious differences, and sexuality. In the majority of cases, these are symptoms of the real problem – the failure of the couple to establish a bond of true intimacy.

Intimacy has been falsely equated with sex. Sexual intercourse in marriage will ideally flow out of the intimate relationship of a husband and wife. People talk about “being intimate” as a way of saying they had sexual intercourse.

A challenge that couples in recovery from sexual addiction face is developing non-sexual expressions of intimacy. Take a moment and write down your definition of intimacy.

One of the best definitions I heard of intimacy came from a 16 year old high school student. He defined intimacy as “the ability of two people to be real with each other.” He described relationships he had observed as “fake” and “superficial” and “without content.” As I listened to Jim, I could sense his frustration and the longing for a relationship in which he could be real. No lying, false masks, pretending to be someone he's not and not having to maintain two identities. Jim has a desire to be who God created him to be and to grow in relationships with people.

“Knowing and being known” has been presented as a definition of intimacy. It's also one of the greatest fears of couples in recovery. It ties into one of the core beliefs of addicts and spouses as presented in the work of Dr. Patrick Carnes. It's the belief that if people know the truth about you, that you will be rejected and isolated. Part of intimacy knows

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that your partner has serious struggles, yet you stay in a relationship with them and work through the issues. Intimacy is allowing the truth to be known about you. There is no intimacy without transparency and honesty. Keeping secrets is a barrier to intimacy. This is why honesty is critical to intimacy development.

My favorite conception of intimacy came from a couple that went through a Faithful and True Atlanta couples group. For a year I met with a group of couples and on the last night, one couple brought in this definition that has changed me, and has changed the lives of many people who have come through my office.

**“Intimacy is when I give the other the very weapons of my destruction (in my case, the knowledge of and truth about me.) Then, after taking the risk to share, the other uses the weapons of my destruction – not to destroy me, but to defend me.”**

- Adapted from the work of Claudia Black

Intimacy is possible when people know the truth, and love you anyway. Intimacy with God is possible because He knows the truth and loves you anyway. Safety comes in relationship when you know that you can be transparent, share the good, the bad, and the ugly, and still be accepted. This doesn't mean ignoring addiction or any other behavior. These boundaries are covered in other L.I.F.E. guides. God knows me better than I know myself. Somehow, He still loves me and has a place for me in heaven. It's a type of intimacy that I will never be able to completely grasp and explain, yet I know it's real. God knows I have doubts and even question Him at times, yet He doesn't abandon me. When I think of my best friend, the thing that makes that relationship priceless is that we know the truth about each other. We know the past traumas, character problems, behavior problems, temptations and struggles. Yet, we have a covenant with each other

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that we are there for the “long haul”. We love each other anyway. The relationship is special, because we know the truth. A relationship with God is special because He knows the truth, and still sent His son to pave the pathway of intimacy and reconciliation.

Intimate relationships are sacred and need to be protected. This workbook will show you how to create your sacred space as a couple. As you begin thinking about intimacy, consider what it will take to become a protector of your marriage relationship.

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### **Barriers to Intimacy<sup>3</sup>**

Being intimate involves mutuality. In First Corinthians chapter 7, Paul writes about the sexual relationship of the husband and wife. Addictive relationships have one-way intimacy. This involves one spouse doing most of the giving and the other the taking. This behavior creates selfishness, frustration, and results in a lack of empathy towards one another and ultimately creates a barrier to intimacy.

#### **Emotional Dishonesty**

Emotional dishonesty is a barrier to intimacy. Saying that things are ok when they aren't is an example of emotional dishonesty. Telling your spouse that you aren't angry when you feel ready to explode creates a barrier to emotional connection. Developing emotional honesty is important to intimacy development.

Couples need to be able to express feelings from all parts of their lives: anger, worry, elation, sorrow and other emotions, as well as one's aspirations, dreams, and doubts. Couples in troubled marriages have difficulty being intimate with each other. They often struggle being intimate because of beliefs similar to the following:

"My spouse is the person I've selected as the most likely to fulfill my needs for love and affection. She's also the person I'm most afraid of losing. If she really knew me, she wouldn't really like me, and she'd want to leave me.

So I don't *dare* tell her who I *really* am."

This way of thinking leads each spouse to avoid bringing up problems and painful parts of their marriage — the very areas that must be openly dealt with if intimacy is ever to develop and the marriage is to survive. Where troubled marriages most need honesty, they have dishonesty, fear, and hiding.

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<sup>3</sup> Portions of this section are from the workbook "Open Hearts" by Mark and Debra Laaser and Patrick Carnes.

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Both spouses further assume that if the other person really loved them, that person would tell the truth. They both experience this lack of honesty as intentional lying and deceit. As a result, both withdraw, reveal even less about themselves, and become more dishonest and hidden. Feelings of being abandoned by the other person grow, creating an ever-deepening, destructive cycle.

Many of the lies, manipulations, and other secretive behaviors in troubled marriages really stem from an inability to be intimate. As couples begin to heal, they must face this deep-rooted anxiety that says, "If I really reveal myself, my spouse will hate me." This core belief must be overcome if there is to be a fulfilling marriage.

### **A Critical Spirit/Verbal Abuse**

“But it’s *constructive* criticism!” It doesn’t matter. Try taking it for a week and see if it is still constructive. Human beings can’t survive under a microscope. A critical spirit will destroy intimacy development. Verbal abuse destroys intimacy. Name-calling, accusations, blaming, tearing each other down, and living in an environment of constant criticism will destroy your spirit and rob you of hope.

### **Cultural Pressure**

There is little support for families in our culture. Our electronic, hi-tech, digital society has made people less relational. As I am writing this section, I’m looking at my new smartphone. It has all kinds of wonderful features. Email, cell phone, text messaging, and probably dozens of things my computer illiterate brain can’t grasp. All of these modern conveniences can prevent me from sitting down face-to-face with another human being and building a relationship.

We go off to work and our children go off to school. Everyone arrives home exhausted. We might eat together, but many families have schedules that don't allow this to happen. Then the adults scramble to do housework and other projects — or plop down on the couch and watch TV. The children do homework and play on the computer.

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It doesn't take too long before family members really don't know much about one another's lives anymore, because they don't share much of their lives. They have few common experiences. Because intimacy is based on shared common experience, many families have little intimacy.

Studies of U.S. family life reveal an astounding fact. Voice-activated tape recorders were set up in participants' homes which monitored all the conversations in the household. The results showed that the average couple spends less than 27 minutes *a week* in any kind of emotionally intimate conversation.

In past years, everyone in a town knew all the children who lived there. If a child was causing trouble, any adult would feel obligated, and within his or her rights, to correct and guide that child, because they knew that individually, and as a community, they had an investment in that child. This meant that all the pressure for raising and disciplining children didn't rest solely on parents, as it does in contemporary society. The saying “it takes a village to raise a child” contains much wisdom.

For a marriage to survive and become healthy and fulfilling, a couple must first attend to their individual problems and issues. That may mean attending group meetings, seeing a counselor, or taking whatever steps are needed to heal themselves. Beyond that, each spouse needs to turn individual attention to the collective identity known as their *marriage*.



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What barriers to intimacy are currently affecting your marriage?
Husband
Wife

### **Our Unwillingness to Take Risks**

Healing depends on trust, and that means risk. Trusting is risky. Even without addiction, choosing to extend trust to another imperfect human being can be risky. Building trust as a couple will be discussed in this book. One of the most profound paradoxes of recovery is that in order to recover your marriage from sexual brokenness, in order to have it be healthy, you have to be willing to risk losing it completely. Most troubled couples would agree that they have nothing left to lose and nowhere to go but up. To find intimacy, both spouses must completely surrender control of their marriage. Surrendering control is tough on addicts and spouses. In acting out (as addicts and spouses) there is a strong motivation to take control.

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Reflections on your marriage – What keeps you from taking risks and sharing deeply about yourself with your spouse?

Husband


Wife


What is one thing you can do to begin the process of making your marriage safer for intimacy development?


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**New Rules for Relationships<sup>4</sup>**

As you begin the activities in this workbook, be aware that it will bring up a variety of feelings. The journey of recovery is a process. Your feelings will change as you move through these activities. These guidelines will help you to navigate the activities in this book.

**1. It is OK to feel.**

As you use this workbook, you may find that old and sometimes forgotten memories will surface. Some of you will be familiar with the emotions these memories elicit, but for others, this will be a relatively new experience. There will be times when you'll feel anger, sadness, or anxiety about the problems you are discussing. It is perfectly OK to both feel the emotions that arise, and to talk about them with each another.

Occasionally, some of your feelings may seem "stuck" or "blocked;" in fact, one of your difficulties as a couple may be that one or both of you are not able to feel emotions. At other times, you may feel like your emotions are simply overwhelming you.

Your work here may also trigger the memory of some type of abuse you experienced in the past. If it does, an overwhelming feeling of sadness or anxiety or anger will likely surface. As these memories and feelings surface, we encourage you to take time out from the workbook and talk over your feelings with your spouse, your therapist or a safe person in your support network.

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<sup>4</sup> This section is adapted from Open Hearts, p. 51-53.

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You have permission to feel your emotions. You can trust that your body/mind will allow you to feel only the level of emotion you are capable of handling at a given time. Try not to judge one another's feelings. Feelings are never "right" or "wrong;" they are simply your feelings — real for you at the time you are feeling them. Remember that it's always OK to feel.

### **2. It is OK to have conflicts.**

At this point in your marriage, many of you have problems which you've been unable to resolve. Perhaps they remain unsolved because you've been unwilling to endure the conflict you knew would arise by facing them. Conflict management will be addressed later in the workbook.

If you reach a point where the conflict you're experiencing is getting out of control, you may have to take a temporary time out and contact your therapist or someone you can trust. They can help you put limits on it so that it doesn't become destructive to either one of you.

### **3. It is OK to have needs.**

It's all right for you to have needs. It is OK, for example, to need your spouse to listen to you or to need help with a problem. Begin to recognize your needs, and begin expressing them to your spouse.

That is not to say that you can expect your spouse to have the ability to meet all your needs. No marriage can meet all of anyone's needs. There will always be some needs which have to be met in other places, regardless of the level of intimacy with your spouse.

*Also, while using this workbook, you must respect your spouse by following these rules:*

### **4. No self-righteous statements.**

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This means no declaring how wonderful you are, or how well you do things, in comparison to your spouse. It's not fair to build "points" by putting your spouse down. You can begin by looking at the times you blamed your spouse for the state of your marriage.

### **5. No baiting or "button pushing."**

By this point in your marriage, you are undoubtedly aware that certain things you do or say to each other will automatically create a reaction. For example, you know which statements can make your spouse cry or become angry. It's time to start identifying these "buttons" and stop using them.

### **6. No "case-building."**

Many spouses engage in "case-building" repeating past events which "prove" one spouse's case for why the problems of the marriage are the other spouse's fault. For example, if your spouse forgot to give you a present on your birthday eight years ago, this incident should not be resurrected now as an example of how he/she really doesn't care for you!

### **7. No taking of, or sharing, your spouse's inventory.**

As another way of respecting your spouse, don't assess your spouse's needs, feelings, or problems. Avoid trying to gauge your spouse's strengths, weaknesses, or abilities. Try not to make assumptions or interpretations about your spouse's family of origin. Your job in working this workbook is to take only your own "inventory," not your spouse's.

### **8. Respect yourself.**

Pay attention to what the little voice in your head is saying. Try to be more aware of the times and ways you put yourself down, and, more importantly, try to stop doing so. Try to build yourself up by being aware of, and acknowledging, your positive traits and actions. Here are other things that you can do to respect yourself:

**9. Take responsibility for your "story" — the actions of your past.**

It is important for you to begin taking responsibility for your story — your family, your actions (both positive and negative), your accomplishments, and the consequences of your behavior.

**10. No self-pity.** Respecting yourself also means not indulging in self-pity. That means giving up feelings about how hard your life has been compared to others, about how unfairly you've been treated at some time, and so on. If you are a victim of various types of abuse, you will recognize that it's easy to get stuck in the victim role. One way to know if you're stuck is that you experience ongoing anger. If this is the case, ask your therapist to help you move out of this state and to stop feeling like a victim. It's very difficult to have a relationship with your

spouse if you are continually blaming her or him for things that happened to you at the hands of others. While your past certainly plays a role in your present life, it will be very difficult for you to move ahead until you learn from your past and move on.

**11. What you say to one another and write in this workbook stays here — it's between only the two of you.**

As you work through this workbook, some of the discussions you will have with your spouse will undoubtedly be extremely sensitive. If you have close friendships outside this marriage, we encourage you to respect the anonymity of the process on which you are about to embark. Sharing your spouse's story, or the process that you are going through, with a co-worker or friend is *not* appropriate.

This information must be kept confidential unless you give one another permission to share it. Some of the people you've chosen to help you work through this workbook may be privileged to some of these conversations, but even then, you must both agree before either of you can divulge anything.

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### **12. Rid yourself of expectations.**

Finally, try to rid yourself of specific expectations for how this process will work. It will take on a life of its own as you move into it. There is no set timetable for working through this workbook. You may work intensively for days or weeks at a time, and then back off for a while to digest what you have learned. At other times, you may need to seek individual help for issues that arise. Sometimes you might simply need a vacation from the intensity of the process. Conversely, you may find you've gotten away from the process for a while, and that you need to recommit to it. Don't criticize yourselves if it all seems to be taking longer than you had anticipated. Remember, there is no quick fix for marriages.

## **Principle One**

*Transforming our marriage: We must surrender our marriage to God and understand how we got to where we are.*

Uh-oh.

The “S” word.

***Surrender.***

Don’t you hate that word? You heard it the first time you came into a L.I.F.E. group meeting and it made you cringe. You heard things like “your best thinking is what got you where you are.” It goes against your nature. After all, you are fighting the battle of a lifetime. Why would anyone wave a white flag and surrender?

Victory comes through surrender in the battle with sexual addiction. It’s the surrender of control. It’s giving up the idea that you can manage this battle on your own. It’s surrendering the arrogance and allowing humility to grow in your life. And now, as a couple, it’s surrendering the old marriage and accepting that you won’t be able to do it the way you have been doing it. The scary part is that it’s letting go of a predetermined conclusion.

The good news is that surrendering the old marriage allows you to start building a new life together. It’s an opportunity to use the principles you’ve learned through recovery in marriage.

As you begin, surrender the process of marital healing. There is no timetable for completion of this workbook. When couples try to rush the process of marital recovery, they miss key elements of the journey. Let God determine how long it takes and surrender the timetable to Him.

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Intimacy development is an adventure. Adventures are exciting, joyful, frightening, challenging, and hopeful. A couple's counselor decorated his office with a powerful message. As they sit on the sofa, they see two posters that inspire them to develop a vision for their future. The posters contain images of "challenges" and "possibilities." Above the sofa is a large picture of a protective guardian angel. As you begin working these exercises, allow yourself to fully experience the challenges and possibilities that exist in your life. As you face the challenges and experience the different emotions, take comfort in the presence of God and His guardian angels as you embark on the journey of a lifetime.

### **Activity One – Understanding our Story**

Have you wondered what makes us choose the person we marry? When couples are asked what attracted them to each other, they often respond with answers such as:

- Good looks
- Great personality
- We had fun together
- We were meant to be with each other

While these may be important qualities, they apply to many people.

Selecting a mate isn't an accidental process. It is more unconscious than conscious. We choose the person we marry for a reason. It may be that there are wounds from the past that you are looking for someone to heal. Perhaps you have believed the myth that there is one "magical" person who can make you whole. Mate selection may have been dictated by family of origin expectations or examples. I remember as a youth minister attending several high school football games. One night I was watching several of the young men in my youth group and the people they were dating. Many of their parents were in the stands, and I began to notice how the young men were dating young women

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who looked like their own mother. We are creatures of habit and will move towards the things that make us feel comfortable.

Disappointment sets in when we discover that there is no single person on the planet who can heal every wound from your past. Part of the journey of a couple's recovery involves looking at the "baggage" each brings into the relationship and how it plays out in the relationship.

Marriage is a place where the best and the worst of two histories come together. Carl Whitaker, a renowned leader in the field of marital therapy, once said "two people don't get married, two families send out scapegoats to reproduce themselves."<sup>5</sup> Rules, roles, and other issues converge as a couple begins their journey. Expectations are shattered and disappointment sets in.

### **Family Rules**

All families have them. Rarely are they ever spoken. You discover their existence when you unknowingly break one of them. It may be that you discovered the rule when you tried to talk about a difficult subject and everyone in the room went silent for a moment and then changed the subject. Or maybe you brought up a subject that was off-limits and were greeted with a loud sigh. It wasn't stated that you couldn't talk about the issue at hand, but nonetheless, the message was communicated loud and clear.

In this section, you will identify your family rules<sup>6</sup>. There are some rules that are common to sex addicts and their spouses. This is not an exhaustive list and you may identify many in your family of origin that aren't listed.

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<sup>5</sup> Nichols, Michael P. & Richard C. Schwartz. *Family Therapy: Concepts and Method (6<sup>th</sup> edition)s*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> The concept of family rules and roles is based upon the work of Virginia Satir.

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### **Don't Talk . . .**

About sex, religion, politics, death or any other subject that is uncomfortable. You may have been taught to avoid bringing up any subject that makes the family look bad. It's the belief that, "If I keep the secret it won't hurt as badly and maybe it will go away." Have you ever been in one of those conversations where the room goes strangely silent? Someone has just broken the rule. The things that the "don't talk" rule often apply to, are issues we don't know how to fix.

### **Don't Feel**

Feelings may have been ridiculed, minimized, or ignored. Somehow the message gets sent that you shouldn't feel certain feelings. A variation on this rule may be that you "should" only experience positive feelings that the family knows how to manage. Things may have been uncomfortable for you when you discovered something painful. Feelings may be ignored if you have not had your feelings validated.

God created people with feelings for a reason. It involves protection and survival. You experience feelings of pain and hurt which warn you of potential harm. If you touch a hot stove, you feel pain. This is a warning to move quickly away from the source of the heat or risk long term damage. In the same way, emotional pain can warn of threats to your spiritual and emotional safety. These feelings need to be felt, validated, and considered carefully.

Men may have been taught that, "Big boys don't cry." To feel pain and express it with tears may bring an extra dose of shame and criticism. Statements like, "Quit crying or I'll give you something to cry about," or "Go to your room and don't come out until you stop crying," may have reinforced the "don't feel" rule.

### **Denial**

"It never happened." "Ignore it and it will go away." "Nobody else noticed anything." Denial is crazy making. It's the pink and purple elephant in the living room that the whole family ignores. They will go over, under, and around the elephant to avoid dealing

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with it directly. Maybe there was an addict in your family of origin, but nobody would ever admit it. Growing up with denial will make you tolerate things that are unhealthy while denying their existence. It will eventually cause you to question your own reality. It amounts to lying to yourself so much that the lie becomes your truth.

### **Minimize**

What is minimizing? Minimizing is one of the most insidious family rules in existence. It creates confusion and a lack of self-trust. It normalizes the bizarre and creates a high tolerance of unhealthy pain. Minimizing pain and emotions leaves one vulnerable to extreme hurt. It includes statements like, “It’s not that bad.” “Nobody else was bothered by it,” Or, “It’s no big deal – everyone else is ok with it.”

Minimizing feelings can take place through the comparison trap. By saying that my pain isn’t as bad as someone else’s, I invalidate my own experience and minimize the hurt. The comparison trap leads to minimizing difficult emotions and experiences. Comparing yourself to another person has only two possible conclusions and both of them are bad. You either wind up looking down at someone in arrogance or you develop a feeling of inferiority and minimize your own experience. This leads to identity confusion, the inability to make decisions and a lack of self-trust.

### **Appearances and reputation are everything**

This is the family that always looks good when dressed up in their Sunday clothes. Everyone behaves just right when they are in public and never tells the family secrets. This family may have people who overcompensate for their addictions, conflicts, and other struggles by becoming overly involved in religious activities. To the outsider, everything looks wonderful. The family may even be praised in church or the community as being role models. The outside of the cup is clean, sparkling and shiny. The inside is full of hurt, pain, and a deep longing to be heard and validated.

### **Blame**

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Blamers don't take responsibility for themselves. It's always someone else's fault that things go wrong. Finger pointing becomes common. The bad grades were always the fault of an incompetent teacher. Dad drank too much because Mom was mean and the kids wouldn't be quiet. Blame keeps you in a victim role and will paralyze the journey of recovery. Accepting personal responsibility for your role in the relationship will be a critical part of your journey.

### Your Family Rules

What are the most common rules that you can identify from your family of origin? Use additional space if needed.

Husband:

Wife:

1.

1.

2.

2.

3.

3.

4.

4.

5.

5.

***Remember, you are doing this to understand the issues that went into creating your current situation. Ultimately, you are doing this to make an honest self-assessment and to help break the cycle for the next generation.***

### Family Roles

As people struggle to adapt and cope with the family rules, they will begin to play different roles. As you work through this section you will be looking for extremes. Some of the roles and rules can have healthy aspects. Ecclesiastes 7:18 remind us, "It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes." Consider some of these roles that might have existed in your family of

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origin. Be aware that it is common to play more than one role in your family and roles may change over time.

### **Addict**

It may have been a parent, grandparent or another relative. The addiction may have been sex, drugs, alcohol, food, work, religion, relationships or another substance or behavior. Violent behavior can also have addictive elements. Regardless, there was something present that you were aware of, even if you didn't have all of the details as a child.

The addict may be loud and boisterous while acting out, but on the inside they feel angry, hurt, lonely, frustrated and guilty. If they have picked a socially acceptable addiction, like food, work or religion, they may be getting encouragement for acting out. It may be validated with promotions and praise. The drug addict, alcoholic and sex addict might receive more direct and severe consequences over time. The entire family may be living a lie, but the addict will do his/her part to keep the system going.

### **Martyr**

This is often, but not limited to, the spouse of an addict. The martyr will take extreme levels of emotional, spiritual and sometimes physical abuse believing that they will one day rescue their partner from his/her addiction. A martyr will tolerate lies, being blamed for the addicts problems and will enable the addictive behavior to continue. Addicts often marry martyrs who refuse to get into recovery. It keeps the addictive family system functioning and makes maintaining an addiction easy for the addict. As long as martyrs do their job, addicts don't have to look at their own issues and can continue to "medicate" their own pain. The martyr eventually ends up feeling a lot like the addict. Anger (usually turned inward), hurt, loneliness, frustration, guilt and low self-esteem describe the inner experiences of a martyr.

The martyr believes that if he/she can please the addict and take care of his/her needs, then the addict will eventually change. There is an element of narcissism in being a

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martyr. Deep down, the martyr believes that he/she will come out a hero for saving or rescuing the addict from the disease.

When the martyr begins to change, there will be resistance.. Don't be discouraged - this is a good sign. It may be that you are setting boundaries for the first time in your relationship and enforcing them. And you may be experiencing growing pains. But understand that resistance isn't always a bad thing. After years of sobriety, many addicts have said that it was their spouse's willingness to state boundaries and enforce them which blessed their recovery immensely.

### **Hero**

The hero (sometimes called Golden Child, the little prince, little princess or saint) is typically a first born child. This is typically the overachiever. It may be the "good kid" on the block. This is the child that may become a pastor or enter a helping profession. The hero may have been successful publicly and the family may have used this child to make the family look good. Or maybe he/she is the athlete that wins awards for their achievements. Like the martyr, the hero believes that if he/she can perform well enough, then the situation will change and their needs will be met. Emotionally they feel guilt, hurt, and inadequacy and may become very resentful. Hero's are often perfectionists. This is based on the perception that if everything is done "just right" that everything will be ok. Hero's can turn into scapegoats if they get frustrated enough.

### **Scapegoat**

The scapegoat is sometimes called the problem child. This is typically the member of the family who is rebellious and defiant. They may struggle with drug abuse, have legal problems and become violent. In reality, the scapegoat may be the healthiest member of the family. They see the problems in the family and shine a light on the dysfunction through their behavior. Family members don't want to see these problems so they focus on the scapegoat. Rebellion isn't always about doing things that break the law. It could be that the family has three generations of doctors and the unwritten rule is that the

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children must enter the medical profession. The scapegoat could choose to rebel against the system by choosing to be an auto mechanic. The family system may have a hard time absorbing this type of a change.

Scapegoats experience feelings of insecurity and fear. They are lonely, unsure and have a strong fear of rejection. Scapegoats may try to control their environment by force in order to feel connected to people. All behavior communicates something. The behavior of the scapegoat may be a dramatic cry for help. Due to the level of rejection they have experienced, it takes a long time to earn their respect and develop trust.

### **Mascot**

The mascot may be known as the family clown. This is a role that may bring praise and other forms of positive attention for a period of time. But eventually it becomes annoying. The mascot is attention seeking through humor and showing off. The mascot functions as the emotional thermostat of the family. A thermostat keeps the temperature within a comfortable range. When the atmosphere in the home gets tense, the mascot may crack jokes to lower the intensity. They may behave like a cheerleader. When things get down, the mascot may raise the mood with a lively performance.

If you find yourself using humor as a way of minimizing pain, you might have learned to do this in your family of origin role as a mascot. It becomes a socially acceptable way to cope with uncomfortable situations. Sadly, it is a way of internalizing pain and becoming depressed. Mascots need to be challenged to be honest with their feelings. They also need a strong support system as they face these feelings, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

### **Lost child**

The lost child is lonely, isolated, and often forgotten. Maybe you were the child that was left out of activities. Or perhaps your name was forgotten. Or you got left at the restaurant and nobody noticed for a period of time. A lost child is typically sad and quiet.

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They experience strong feelings of rejection, loneliness and abandonment. Lost children rarely express their feelings and may suffer in silence.

It's easy to understand how a lost child might survive in a marriage to a sex addict for a long period of time. Their role as lost child creates the belief that they have no significance. Lost children may retreat into isolation and deny feelings of betrayal and pain. Their level of tolerance is high and they may suffer in silence for long periods of time. Lost children are taken advantage of and often exploited.

### Your Family Roles

This is not an exhaustive list of roles. Think carefully about different roles you have experienced in your family of origin. Did they change over time? Which ones have you played? What roles did other family members play and how did they interact with you? Perhaps in your family of origin, your mother was a sex addict and alcoholic. Mom may have been an enabler. What would you have learned about marriage and intimacy from observing these roles. In some families there might be a scapegoat who develops a drug and alcohol problem. The scapegoat may have drained so much of the families energy and resources that there wasn't much left for you. You coped by becoming a lost child. How has this role affected you in your marriage?

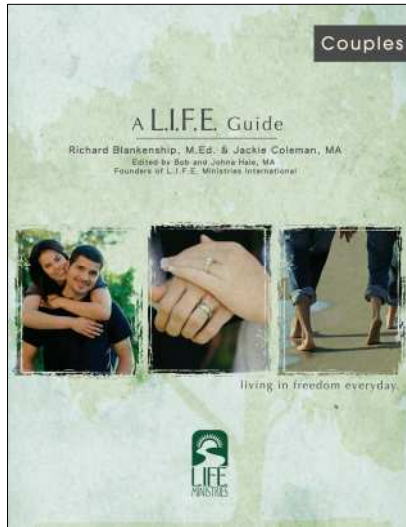
Husband's Role(s)	Wife's Role(s)

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