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It's a Wonderful Life at Santé

by Cindy A.

I have been a member of the Santé community since early September. I originally came here with the idea that my mere presence here would be enough to pacify my 'overly' concerned family; several spiritual awakenings later I became fully engaged in my recovery process. Our insurance company, on the other hand, thought my need to be here was premature and refused to pay. We were able to pay for the first 30 days, but took our financial options to the limit with that. On my 27th day of treatment I reluctantly filled out an AMA request form and was prepared to leave on a Sunday, 30 days after I had first arrived at Santé. Ron and Sam each spoke to me individually; they both voiced concern over my decision to leave. I explained to them that I was not willing to put more debt on my family, which would create yet another piece of the chaos my addiction had already let in its wake. They reassured me that if God wanted me here he would make a way. With much internal uncertainty and fear I rescinded my AMA request form, and had a conversation with my husband about my need and desire to finish my stay at Santé the right way. Within 72 hours, I received a check for $10,000.00 from my high school alumni along with a letter expressing their desire to be a part of my recovery. My husband and I were overcome with emotion! I was amazed; not to mention extremely grateful!

My sister-in-law still lives in the town where my husband and I grew up and attended high school. She had recently asked my husband's permission to pray for me with her congregation at church. Little did she know that within her congregation was a member of my high school graduating class, and that soon our prayers were to be answered. Needless to say, I am glad I stayed at Santé.

It has been a long standing tradition in our family to watch, 'It's a Wonderful Life,' every Christmas Eve. Little did I know that I would experience the complete joy of truly knowing how much I am loved. I think an angel just got his wings.

- Cindy A.

Witnessing True Transformation at the 14th Annual Alumni Retreat

by Erica Sheley, Aftercare and Alumni Coordinator

This past October 21st, 22nd and 23rd marked the 14th Annual Alumni Retreat here at Santé Center for Healing; my third as Alumni Coordinator. It was another weekend for the books. Over 50 Santé alumni came back to reunite with us and each other to celebrate their recovery together on the hill in Argyle, TX; quite literally from all four corners of the U.S. and Canada! It was so awesome to host a fellowship of people who all had an experience on the hill, some from years ago and some who left us just a few weeks ago.

Every year, my goal for the weekend is to connect and re-connect Santé alumni while offering them a place and time to come back, and renew their commitment to Recovery. Despite the construction with the current expansion going on, I think we accomplished our goal! This year the retreat kicked off across the street from the Santé campus at the Denton Country Club where we had a beautiful dinner complete with entertainment from a very talented staff member and all of our Transitional Living residents!

One of my favorite moments from the weekend was when Ron Arrington, MS, LCDC, Clinical Director at Santé, administered a 'Sobriety Countdown' at the Welcome Recetipon Friday night. He asked everyone to stand up for a moment when he announced their specific time of sobriety. Starting at 26 years, he counted down to one week. After all was said and done we were all sitting in a room with 2,822 months, or 235.17 years of sobriety! That is truly something to think about. Thank you again to all of the alumni who came out; it was so great to see you all! As always, I encourage you all to send me your feedback or any ideas you may have for future alumni events. I hope to see you all next October at Santé's 15th Annual Alumni Retreat! ***To your health!***

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Addiction And Spirituality: The Search For Transcendence

by Jim Savage, LCDC

Andrew Weil says in his book *The Natural Mind* that man has an innate desire to alter consciousness. He describes a progression of learned behaviors from spinning around in circles when we are young to make ourselves dizzy, to learning about sex, alcohol, drugs, and other mood altering activities which become available to us as we grow older. Meditation and other spiritual practices are identified as perhaps the purest and most effective means of achieving this desired effect. His point is that this follows a progression in *which the results are directly related to knowledge of, and the amount of effort and discipline put into the means by which we choose to satisfy this desire*.

Denial, or ignorance of this desire for "altered consciousness" results in the mystery or taboo that is often associated with the term. The fact is we all want to experience the feeling of "transcendence." We all want to feel spiritual. We all want to see "magic" in an attempt to validate our own spiritual experience. Denial of this fact affects the choices we make regarding our "search for transcendence," and results in less informed decisions as to how we go about achieving our spirituality- thus an entire generation turns to LSD in hopes of "finding God."

The majority of people who develop drug or alcohol problems will admit that they were searching for something. The problem is we don't know what we're searching for! We want to feel whole and happy; we want relief from pain, we want to be somebody. It is only natural that we will try what is available and easy, and what we see other people doing. However, it's much easier to experience the effects of a few beers than it is to master the art of transcendental meditation. This is an example of the less effort we put into our "search," the poorer the results. And, as the nature of addiction dictates, it is easy to see how before long, the tail is wagging the dog, so to speak

I believe there is a direct relationship between addiction and spirituality. In our attempt to satisfy the need for spiritual fulfillment - our "search for transcendence," chemical use (or other mood altering, compulsive behaviors) provides a seemingly effective means of achieving this. But this is only an illusion. A powerful and dangerous illusion at that. To the contrary, addiction cuts us off from spirit. Any time we look outside ourselves to satisfy that which must come from within, we lose our connection with our spiritual source.

"Recovery"

When people who have had an addiction problem quit using, they are said to be in "recovery." To "recover" means to get something back, as in "the stolen property was recovered." Why do addicts use this term in reference to quitting drinking? What are they getting back?

Addiction cuts us off from our spiritual source.

Any time we look outside ourselves for that which must come from within, we are cut off from our spiritual source. Is this perhaps what the addict is attempting to "get back" through "recovery?" The 12 Step program suggests that successful recovery is contingent on a "spiritual awakening," representing an entirely new attitude and outlook on life. To the extent that an important part of the human experience in general is the reclaiming of our spiritual connection, it could be said that we are all in need of "recovery." We are all Heroes on a Journey to recover that which has been lost. Just as the addict's sobriety may be contingent on spiritual renewal, our sense of wholeness and fulfillment comes with the reclaiming of our spiritual connection.

In 2011, after Jim Savage made the decision to sell his outpatient treatment business he created New Vision Recovery, a program that represents a synthesis of much of the work he has been doing for over twenty years. He included some new elements he has developed as a result of his own continued spiritual and clinical training. Jim lives in Dallas, Texas with his wife Laura and their numerous cats. He enjoys recording musical Christmas and birthday gifts for his 3 grandchildren, and heads to California to surf whenever he can. Jim Savage, LCDC provides drug and alcohol counseling for adults and adolescents that range from initial assessment and referral to treatment support and aftercare management. Call (214) 789-8456 to schedule an appointment.

"I have found myself. I do not want to let go of this person that I am now. Santé has helped me find my true authentic-self and for this I am truly hopeful and grateful for my future."
~ Santé Alumni

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Living with Addiction

by Eric Denner, MFT

It can be very difficult to tell if someone has a problem with drugs or alcohol. In the past, addiction was defined primarily by physiological measures: tolerance and withdrawal. In the past few decades the definition has expanded to include:

- Taking the substance in larger amounts or over a longer period than intended
- Desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control use
- A great deal of time spent in activities necessary to obtain, use, or recover from the effects of a substance
- Failure to meet important social, family, or occupational obligations or giving up or reducing recreational activities
- Continued use despite adverse consequences
- Tolerance
- Withdrawal

A shorthand way to identify a substance abuse problem is known as the 3 C's:

- **Compulsion** or **Craving** (an inordinate focus on obtaining or using the substance)
- Loss of **Control** (using more or for longer than intended)
- **Continued** use despite adverse consequences (loss of job, relationships, money)

One of the hallmarks of addiction is **denial**, a defense mechanism that prevents people from seeing or acknowledging the negative effects their use of substances is having on their life. Part of the reason for denial is the shame that people feel when they lose control of their use. Legal and illegal substance use is actively and aggressively promoted in our culture through advertising, promotion, and informal, often subconscious, messages. Strength and independence are important cultural values. Acknowledging a substance problem to oneself or to others can make someone feel that he or she is weak and cannot withstand the pressures of living. Yet the nature of alcohol and illicit drugs is to foster dependence. No matter how strong or independent a person is, if one uses enough or for long enough, physiological, psychological, or emotional dependence can develop.

Addiction is rampant in our culture, and it is not limited to drugs and alcohol. In addition to substances, people can be addicted to behaviors such as eating, gambling, relationships, sex, shopping, or working. The reason people turn to any compulsive behavior is the same: to escape or distract from pain. No one likes to hurt or suffer. Yet pain is a part of life, just like happiness, sadness, and fear. Escaping it may work temporarily, but it prevents us from growing, learning, and developing in the long run. And it doesn't solve the problems that are causing the pain. Usually it makes problems worse and creates new ones.

An often overlooked addiction is known as **codependence**, where someone is overly focused on another person and puts someone else's needs above their own. Codependence is frequently seen in relationships where one person is addicted to a substance or behavior and the other person is addicted to them. It manifests in the partner's excusing or overlooking addictive, abusive, or irresponsible behavior, and placating or pacifying the other person at the expense of one's own happiness. And while this type of **enabling** behavior is usually carried out from a sincere desire to help, it prevents the other person from taking responsibility for and facing the consequences of his or her actions, thus perpetuating the unhealthy behavior.

Living with someone who relies on substances or compulsive behaviors as their means of coping with life's problems can be extremely difficult. For positive change to occur, ultimately the person with the unhealthy coping tools needs to get help for him or herself. But for this to happen, the person's partner must stop enabling and begin his or her own process of **recovery**. The partner must begin to put his or her own needs first and set limits around what behavior they will and will not tolerate from their partner. They must begin to seek and find satisfaction for themselves and not depend on their partner to fulfill all their needs. When the addicted person understands that their partner is not going to allow and enable their addiction to continue, he or she will have to choose between addressing their problem or losing the relationship.

Change is possible, though difficult. Help is available. Many people have recovered and are recovering from substance abuse and codependence. It is a choice that we make, whether consciously or unconsciously, to stay in unhealthy, unhappy relationships and lives, or do the hard work necessary to change, grow, and become the satisfied, fulfilled, productive, creative, caring, and loving people we are meant to be.

Eric Denner, MA, MBA, is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist and a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor in private practice in Austin, TX. He is the current president of the Austin chapter of the Texas Association of Addiction Professionals (AustinTAAP.org) and treasurer of the Austin chapter of the American Association of Marriage & Family Therapists (AustinAMFT.org). He can be reached at 512-323-5623 or through his website, austincounseling.info.

Surviving the Holidays: Tips for the Sex and Love Addict

by Samantha Smithstein, Psy.D.

The holidays are generally thought of as a time for potential relapse of any addiction, and sex addiction is no exception. In working to stay "sober" during this time, people suffering from sexual addiction need to be aware of triggers and to create a guide for themselves to make it through this time without reverting to the destructive patterns of behavior that served as an escape but ultimately an ineffective means for coping.

Why is the holiday season an especially tricky time? We are told relentlessly on television, at the movies, at our workplace and at school that this time of year is the most fun, spiritual, exciting, intimate, etc. In reality, for many people it can trigger an intense need to escape and/or act out because:

1. Our actual family experience does not match the ideal family that we are expected to have. Perhaps we don't spend this time with our family or don't want to, or when we do it is painful or brings up old, unhappy memories.
2. We feel tremendous pressure to create the perfect experience, purchase the perfect gifts, be the perfect host, etc.
3. We don't have the money this year to buy what we would like to be able to give.
4. We are invited to parties at work and through family and friends that we are expected to attend even if we don't want to.
5. There is a tremendous level of increase in unhealthy behaviors – increase in alcohol consumption, sugar consumption, overeating, partying, drug use, lack of rest and exercise, etc. – and all of this contributes to an environment of excess and acting-out. Additionally, alcohol or drug use can serve as a disinhibitor and make acting-out sexually easier.
6. For some people, they don't feel a spiritual connection to the holiday or they are of a different religion or spiritual practice. This creates an experience of being an "outsider" and alienation.
7. There is tremendous pressure to have a "date" or to be part of a "couple," and to have the holidays be highly romantic. Whether someone is part of a couple or not this pressure can be tremendous and can lead to sex addictive or love addictive behavior.
8. In spite of all of the pressure and expectations we are expected to be relaxed, happy, and "on vacation."
9. Because the pressure to feel happy and connected to others is so intense, the urge to act-out sexually can be intense as it may serve as a seductive "substitute" for genuine intimacy.

So what's the solution? How does the sex addict avoid relapse during the holidays? The following are a few tips for keeping yourself safe and sober:

1. **Don't isolate.** Plan your days and let people know where you are and plan to spend time with the people who support you and a healthy lifestyle. Create structure for yourself so you don't end up with lots of empty time.
2. **Have realistic expectations.** Imagine what the trip or party will be like ahead of time based on your past experience, not on a fantasy about it and know that is what you will be headed towards if you go. Keep your thinking grounded in reality.
3. **Take extra care of yourself.** Keep up your exercise, good eating habits, and get lots of rest. Try to remain conscious about your eating and drinking.
4. **Be creative.** Think of simple gifts you can make or afford, or donate time volunteering in someone's name. Volunteer to go with someone who needs you as a gift.
5. **Have a Plan B.** When you find yourself somewhere that is triggering or you are in a situation where the opportunity to relapse is in front of you, have an escape plan, like going out to a movie or going for a walk when suddenly finding yourself alone on Christmas eve in front of your computer.
6. **Find new ways to celebrate.** Who says the old (triggering) ones were really so great anyway? Feel free to say "no" to things that you know will not be healthy for you or will be triggering.
7. **Get support.** Most importantly, get the support you need during this time, either from loved-ones, group meetings, therapy, or friends who know your struggles and can really be there for you. Share your feelings with them and your needs.
8. **Remember, urges will pass.** Sometimes it can be helpful to just remind yourself if you are feeling the pull to revert to those old, reliable escapes that those behaviors really never made you happy during and only made you feel terrible afterwards. The urge is like a wave that peaks in intensity but will pass. And afterwards, you will feel one step freer of the destructive patterns that have dragged you down in the past. And one step closer to a richer and truly happier life.

Pathways Institute for Impulse Control provides help for people suffering from the devastating effects of impulse disorders, "process addictions," and out-of-control behaviors; such as compulsive shoplifting, stealing, sex addiction and love addiction, and their partners and families. They provide a thorough assessment, as well as an investigation into the origins of and contributors to the behaviors, such as unmet needs, trauma, learning and attention differences, co-addictions, substance abuse, eating disorders, codependency, and/or mood disorders. They also provide psychotherapy, treatment groups, training and consultation, community education, interface with the legal system, and licensing and sale of our products. Through these means, Pathways offers practical tools and new pathways for people, and their partners and families, to gain control of their lives and become free to create a life of choice, and ultimately of deeper meaning.

Contact information:
www.pathwaysinstitute.net
415.267.6916
help@pathwaysinstitute.net

'Just for Today' Alumni Facebook Group

Don't forget to check out the Santé Alumni Facebook group, 'Just for Today'. Look for the Picture of Anthony the Cat!

Contact Erica Sheley at 940.464.7222 ext 267 or ericas@santecenter.com for more information or help finding the group.

Penn. State Sex Scandal Not Unusual

by Mic Hunter, Psy.D., LMFT

For weeks now the print and broadcast media has been focused on the history of sexual abuse of boys allegedly at the hands of a beloved coach. Although you may not know any of the alleged victims at Penn. State, you most certainly know some males who were sexually abused. Research has found that 1 in 6 males in the general population report they were sexually abused before the age of 18, and that child sexual abuse is the most under-reported crime in America. The prevalence of sexual abuse is much higher in males who are in psychiatric and substance abuse treatment programs. MaleSurvior.org is a free site for victims, their loved ones, and supporters. There is accurate information on prevalence, impact, and treatment options, as well as chat rooms where people can anonymously interact with others. This is particularly useful for those in places where face-to-face resources are not available. To give you an idea of how many people are seeking help:

Between January 1, 2010 & August 31, 2011 there were 2 million unique user hits to the web site (that is visitors who accessed the home page) which is more than 100,000 hits each month from all over the world.

Between January 1, 2010 & August 31, 2011, there have been 35 million page hits to areas of the web site beyond the home page (each time a visitor checks another section of our website, it is recorded as a separate page hit).

Whatever setting you are practicing, please post information on MaleSurvivor.org so that your clients know it is safe for them to disclose to you their histories of sexual abuse, and have a place to break out of their isolation.

Mic Hunter, Psy.D. Licensed Psychologist, Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist is based out of Saint Paul, MN and is the author of Abused Boys: The Neglected Victims of Sexual Abuse.

"Santé gave me the ultimate git. Not only did they save my life, they showed me how to live."
~ Santé Alumni