



ELKANAH COUNSELLING

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Festive Season 2010

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Reception Hours:
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Monday – Friday

Consultation Hours:
8.00 am – 8.00 pm
Monday – Friday

8.00 am – 12.00 pm
Saturday

Consultations by
appointment only.

After hours: Elkanah
does not operate a
locum service. If you
need crisis assistance
Lifeline can be
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Well here we are again almost at Christmas. It doesn't seem long since I was writing for the 2009 edition of our Christmas newsletter.

Christmas is a time of gift giving. John has written an excellent article in this edition re making it a time of *genuine* gift giving.

My article is regarding sexual giving and receiving. Again if genuine intimacy is to be possible for couples each must be considerate of the other's needs as well as their own. Then genuine caring for each other can occur as a real gift of love in the relationship.

Gifts come in many forms – the giving of time is an important one, making food gifts, being really aware of others interests before purchasing a gift. Recently friends from Sydney came to stay. They remembered that I love figs, so they arrived with a pot of home-made fig jam which I really appreciated.

Family time is important at Christmas as well. However, it can have the unfortunate effect of bringing up old unfinished business. If this occurs, it is important to seek counselling, whether the wounds are real or perceived – either way they damage relationships. Paying for counselling could be seen as a genuine gift too.

Lyn Shand
– Psychologist & Family Therapist

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GIFTS & GIFT GIVING

John Andersen

Looking forward to Christmas, I have been reflecting on gifts and the nature of gift-giving.

What is it that makes a gift a gift?

The first thing that occurs to me is that gifts frequently are actually purchases. It is often unclear what a person is purchasing. The question to ask is what is the giver expecting in return? What is the implied request that the gift is conveying? For example, lingerie is a popular gift in Valentine's day. Yet the 'gift' of lingerie is generally a purchase, a purchase of sensuality and good sex. The recipient is expected to dress up for the enjoyment of the giver.

Another example was my birthday. The element of our electric kettle had recently failed. And guess what I was given for my birthday? You're right. A brand new electric kettle. Was this really a free gift for me, personally? Or was it a purchase for the family so we all could enjoy our hot cup of tea, coffee or hot chocolate? It did not feel like a birthday present. I teased them by thanking them, and declaring my intention to take it to use in my counselling rooms, much to the dismay of a number of my family members...

When is a gift a gift? It is when it is freely given. It has no strings attached. There are no implicit demands, no expected "quid pro quo". It is genuinely freely given. And it leaves the recipient free.

Yet gifts are also an important currency in relationships. The exchange of gifts convey important messages about how the person is valued. The value of the gift sends important messages about the status and wealth of the giver as well as the value the giver attaches to the recipient. So an expensive gift conveys a statement about the nature and importance of the relationship. An expensive gift conveys how the person it is given to is valued.

And so gifts unavoidably convey messages about how the recipient and the relationship are regarded. So what is the relationship message that your gift is conveying?

What the message is depends on what way the gift relates to social expectations. It is regarded as too expensive or too cheap. How personal is it? Sometimes the conspicuous absence of a gift, as on a birthday, itself may convey a powerful message about how the recipient is valued.

The giving of gifts, rather than the exchange of purchases, is important in marriages. Gifts that are given freely convey love in a way that gifts that are implicit purchases simply do not. How often is a gift to my partner really an implicit demand or request from my partner? What are the expectations attached? Is this a gift or a purchase?

Likewise, too often our statements of "I love you" really mean "I want you to love me." How often do we really say "I simply love you..." that leaves our partner free in how he or she can receive it. Are we still giving love as a gift, or has it become a purchase? If my partner does not feel loved, it suggests that I have ceased in my gift giving.

I suggest that this Christmas, we make it a time of genuine gift giving.

SEXUAL DIFFERENCES IN COUPLES COUNSELLING

Lyn Shand

According to Laumann et al, 1999, approximately 45% of couples at a given time suffer a male, female or couple sex problem. Sexual satisfaction with one's sexual life is grounded on realistic physical, psychological and relationship expectations. Unrealistic expectations cause frustration, a sense of failure and distress. Effective treatment needs to include pharmacological, psychological and relationship aspects with an individualised approach.

Using an *equal but different framework* can validate both partners' points of view. We need to know what each one's wants, needs and expectations are.

We often realise that sex is an issue when we see couples for counselling about other issues. As psychologists or family therapists, we need to ask about the couple's sex life. Human beings have strong needs to be connected to one another. Lack of connection within the relationship interferes with sexual interest, contact and excitement, so can be seen as a lack of intimacy between the couple. There are also often incompatible needs, wants as well as different libido levels and styles in regard to sex.

If you are the pursuer –

While it is reasonable that you are upset by your partner's apparent avoidance of the sexual problem, trying to corner your partner into long talks hasn't worked so far, so it isn't likely to work now.

If you are the withdrawer –

When you feel overwhelmed and need to stop "the talk", say so clearly and confidently. Keep in mind that the issues won't be resolved by avoiding them. Many pursuers say that they keep at their partner because they can never get the partner to discuss the problem. The withdrawer on the other hand, dismisses any attempts to discuss the problem by saying there is nothing wrong.

If one partner is unhappy, you need to discuss problems, as if one partner is unhappy, in the end both people will be unhappy. Learn to listen to each other with compassion. Both feel rejected, inadequate, lonely, insecure and powerless.

"The Talk"

For one person to be right, the other person doesn't have to be wrong. It is just that you are "different", with different needs (e.g. one can get upset about things that the other thinks are minor).

Key Concepts to Explore and What These Mean to Each of the Partners:-

Meaning

- emotional connection
- expression of love
- physical release
- stress regulation

Beliefs

- importance of sex in relationship
- good sex is a compromise
- entitlement to sex

Senses

enhancing ones

- hormone levels
- appreciation of touch
- erotic pictures

suppressing ones

- fatigue
- irritated by touch
- poor environment

Emotions

enhancing ones

- love for partner
- need for comfort
- feeling of well being

suppressing ones

- resentment
- preoccupied
- anger

Thoughts

enhancing ones

- “Hey we’re on our own!”
- “Great we always have sex on Friday nights”
- “I’m not keen but I’m happy to go along with it”

suppressing ones

- “Now!!!” – as a demand
- “I can’t be bothered”
- “I don’t think I can turn on”

Wants from both partners

- be emotionally present
- be enthusiastic about experimentation
- be compliant
- no pressure
- co-operation with acceptance of specific sexual needs
- remember “equal but different” needs to be your aim for a good enough fit.

Five Purposes for Sex

Reproduction

Tension and Anxiety Reduction

Sensual Enjoyment

Self Esteem and Confidence

Relationship Closeness and Satisfaction

In my work with couples, if there is one person with a consistent low libido (male or female), I always suggest they get their hormone levels tested. If testosterone is low *in either sex*, it can be treated with bio-identical testosterone – available from a compounding pharmacist but on prescription from a doctor. (There is a list of Australian Compounding Pharmacists on the web and they know which doctors will prescribe the bio-identical hormones.)

Obviously there are other reasons for low libidos, such as past traumatic sexual experiences or other resentments in the relationship, as well as the effects of certain medications and age-related problems or expectations.

Of course if erectile dysfunction is a problem, there is also Cialis or Viagra available on prescription, when applicable.

Sexual dysfunction, regardless of the various causes, affects the emotional life of the couple and needs to be addressed in counselling. Effective treatment must integrate medical, pharmacological, psychological and relationship aspects of each individual couple.

References:

Sandra Pertot PhD – Working with Sexual Intimacy Issues, Sept. 2010, Melbourne Pages 27-28 and pages 58-59

Michael E. Metz and Barry W. McCarthy in Sexual & Relationship Therapy, Vol. 22, No. 3, Aug. 2007

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We would like to take this opportunity to wish
you peace, joy and good health for
this festive season and
throughout
next year.



ELKANAH NEWSLETTER

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Comments:

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