



Moving Forward: Individual & Couple Counselling

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Florence & Otto Driedger
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Dear Florence and Otto:

Thank you for the tremendous support you provide to incredibly wounded and desperate people. Your presence in their lives is vital. Every week, I hear stories of the ways you and your companions at CoSA offer concrete hope for a transformed future.

As I told you, the point at which these men are first charged is a critical moment in their recovery. I encourage your organization to consider expanding its mandate to include providing services to men beginning at the moment they are charged. It would be even better, if CoSA could accept men who know they are offending but have not been detected and charged. Every man I have worked with who has been charged has told me he wanted help but did not know where to go and was terrified that he would be judged, condemned, and reported. Of course, some offences need to be reported (i.e., when the person is actively participating in an offence against a vulnerable person). However, in Canada, we are fortunate that we are not required by law to report those who access but do not produce child pornography. We can come along side these men and provide the help they desperately need.

Sex addicts and sex offenders are intersecting populations. As these men are caught up in the acting-out cycle, both the structure and processes of their brains are fundamentally altered. The most significant impact is the way the prefrontal cortex increasingly disengages. Reflecting back on their acting out cycles, these men often use words like trance, numb, out-of-body, and swept-away. What they are describing is actually a neurologically dissociative state. In their double life, they become so deeply divided that when they are not acting-out, they experience themselves to be an entirely different person from the person who offends. Conversely, when they are in an acting-out cycle, nothing but the sexual pursuit registers on their radar. They are oblivious to everything and everyone else.

Reality is mapped by its consequences. Up to the point of being charged, these men honestly believed that they are acting anonymously. While they are ashamed of their activity, they thought they had no victims. Oddly, most men report tremendous relief when they are charged. The consequence of being charged brings them face-to-face with the reality of their behaviours. Their double lives collide with each other and, in recovery terms, they hit bottom. W. Paul Young, the author of *The Shack*, talking about his own sexual infidelity and addiction, made the observation that when he hit his bottom, he no longer blamed anyone else, and he no longer attempt to control outcomes. The point at which reality floods in is the absolute most powerful moment for intervening and providing recovery support.

Recovery for sex addicts is most effective when there is a three-pronged approach: therapy, 12-Step Recovery Programs, and a Social Support Network. When roadblocks are placed in the way of these men accessing services at this critical moment, they experience that denial as a rejection of themselves as people. They interpret the message, "We cannot provide services until you are sentenced," as "You are so deeply defective and hopeless as a human being that you are unworthy of our help." This is toxic shame; it is no longer about what they did; it is about who they are. They give up. When these men make their first contact with me, they often phrase the request for therapy in the language of "Do you work with *people like me*?" The phrase "people like me" reflects the horrible truth that they see themselves as less than human and they anticipate rejection and abandonment.

The opposite of addiction is connection. CoSA provides a unique and vital role in the restoration of these men to wholeness. The acceptance provided by professionals like myself is often dismissed because we are paid to see them. Involvement in a 12-Step Recovery Group is often dismissed as, "Sure, they accept me because they are like me, but normal people would never want me." CoSA counters that narrative in the most powerful way. When, at their lowest and most vulnerable moment, a Circle of "normal people" welcomes these men in, that experience disputes the message of toxic shame in a way that a therapist and a 12-Step Group cannot. Your welcoming them into a Circle says, "We see you, we have compassion for you, we believe in you, you have value, and we will walk with you as your spiritual companions through this valley. You are not alone."

Please, consider expanding your mandate to include those who have just been charged and not yet sentenced, and even better, those who have not been charged but are sitting alone in their pain with nowhere to turn. Thank you again for your incredible work with some of society's most hurting and vulnerable people. If I can support your work in any way, it would be my privilege.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fred A. Reekie".

Fred A. Reekie, PhD CSAT