

The UK has been in lockdown since 23rd March and I am now taking time to reflect on what this has meant for people, my clients in particular. My private work is mainly Sex & Relationship work and my speciality is working with compulsive/addictive behaviours.

Firstly, I am surprised at the number of people who have barely met each other – who have e.g. travelled the length of the country to create lockdown with the object of their affections that they have only recently met online. Even with the most harmonious of couples, personal space and an independent part of life is welcome and vital to what you can contribute to a relationship, so without these retreats it is fair to say that conditions can be fractious. I can't help but imagine these new relationships will be a flash in the pan and they will never want to see each other again when lockdown is broken.

Out-with a pandemic situation – I often see couples that are at make or break point, who start therapy & then announce after a few sessions that they have booked a holiday for 2 weeks in the sun without the children, in an effort to get back on track. My heart sinks at this announcement. If people are struggling in their relationship when they have the security & routines of employment, housing, family & friendship support – how on earth do they think being in each other's company 24 hours a day, with little structure or support– is going to affect them? As an idea for fixing a difficult relationship, it stinks! For a couple that have a good or even an ok relationship and that have had little time to see each other over the months, it is a very different situation. They look forward to their holiday with excitement and happiness at the thought of spending long leisurely days together. Relaxing and making love, dreaming about the future. Being in physical proximity whether on holiday or in the captivity of lockdown is a major challenge.

Annoying habits that you can usually remove yourself from, become unbearable and a major point of conflict. Whether it be a repetitive argument about who should put the bins out, (unbelievable the number of people in assessment that cite not putting the bins out as a major point of conflict) or why your razor shouldn't be used by your partner, these annoyances become of epic importance. If you have not got a garden/garage/shed/office to escape to – it's even worse and with bored and unexercised children to deal with, is it any wonder that we find ourselves reaching for the chocolates or Prosecco?

But comfort food & wine apart, what about people with addictions? I'm hoping a documentary is going to be made about how the supply and demand of illegal substance abuse/ has been affected by lockdown. More importantly the human side of this lockdown substance shortage would be interesting, (although I suspect hugely sad) particularly regarding children. Children are the ultimate victims of a drug drought. A parent will often replace illicit drugs with alcohol when the drug of their choice is no longer supplied and this triggers inability to cope, the social services are alerted and if unavoidable the children may be taken into care. So families are facing significant impact. My heart goes out to Social services who I'm sure are massively overworked at this time.

How is cv19 and the subsequent lockdown affecting people with sexual problems? It is structure routine and leisure that allows people that don't want to have sex to escape feeling pressurised to have sex. The same routes are available for people with compulsive sexual behaviours that they are trying to keep secret. The toxic impasse of 'I want sex V I don't want sex' becomes like a pressure cooker if one partner decides that it is a grand time to sort this sex problem out once and for all. The overwhelming urges to act out sexually e.g. with masturbating to porn and sex 'chat' sites will not be lessened by lockdown but probably increased. If available time is reduced or nullified in which this acting out can be carried out, then a Tsunami of problems is heading towards couples in these situations. Alone time & privacy is required to sexually act out at home. Despite thousands of partners that sit glued to their TV or mobile phone each evening, whilst their partner spends hours upstairs hunting for pictures/videos/chat sites and masturbating, there are a lot of couples that have a different dynamic i.e. spend many of their evenings together and sexual acting out happens when the none addicted partner is working on shifts or visiting family, or going out with friends to socialise or perhaps to the gym. Hold them all captive in a pressure cooker for weeks on end and implosion can be triggered.

A partner's discovery of this sexual compulsion, causes a visceral misery of pain. The partner acting out, is also in a misery of guilt, shame and perhaps denial & hostility. It is a 'Bleak house' indeed. The betrayal and hurt that the partner feels, the confusion & anger, perhaps self-blame, is devastating. The addict finds that discovery and all of the negative emotions that have been maximised, pull him deeper and deeper into acting out sexually...looking for novice & unusual sexual content, (this can cause straying into barely legal or illegal websites which can lead to immeasurable damage). As with any addiction the input has to be increased. With sex, e.g. internet sexual activity that causes anxiety, it is received as 'upping the ante' which makes the activity even more pleasurable and the more time the partner spends in pursuit and removed from the family room – the more the none addicted partner becomes the detective – deliberately policing their partner, who in desperation has promised, 'it will never happen again'.

Of-course it happens again and a war begins. What about the children now? How does either parent build space and time without the sexually addicted partner/father in order to be able to ground herself just enough to be able to put it aside for a while, in order to give herself to her children? It may sound crazy, but for now, I am suggesting that where possible, clients that have not yet been discovered, use their car as a private area in which to act out. It is a way to avoid inflicting trauma on his family in the current lockdown. Not everybody has a car, so this option is not always available, however your 1 hour of exercise slot may occur at midnight in a secluded field. There are options, not great options but options that will delay that emotional Tsunami from drowning your family in emotional pain, for now when your usual network of support is at a distance.

I'm guessing that there will be readers who think this is an exaggeration – it isn't. Like babies being born, addictions have no respect for time or location & therefore minimal harm is proposed. It is not a time to moralise, but to help reduce the amount of pain that can be washed upon all involved.

If you are struggling with an unwanted sexual behaviour (including sexual fetish) and you are looking for help – drop me an email & I shall reply ASAP
enquiries@castawaytherapy.com

