

## Behavioral Addictions in Foster Care -

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Coping with Loss and Neglect in Unhealthy Ways

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## What is a Behavioral Addiction?

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- Behavioral Addictions are a relatively new field of study.
  
- Behavioral Addictions are sometimes referred to as "impulse control disorders"

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## Types of Behavioral Addictions

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- You can become addicted to many things:
  - Eating – Hoarding, Overeating
  - Sex – Multiple Partners, Pornography, Masturbation
  - Computer – Internet, Games, On-line relationships

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### Other Behavioral Addictions

- Strenuous Exercise
- Gambling
- Shopping
- Overworking
- Violence
- Taking risks, including dangerous behavior

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### Understanding Behavioral Addictions

- Patterns of behavior which follow a cycle similar to substance abuse.
- They begin when an individual experiences pleasure in an activity.
- Initially the behavior enhances their life.
- The behavior can become a way of coping with stress

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### Understanding Behavioral Addictions

- Later, the behavior becomes more frequent and even a ritual.
- It increases to become a significant part of the person's daily life.
- Urges and cravings develop and intensify.
- The behavior creates relief and even elation.

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### Signs and Symptoms

- Engaging in the behavior longer than intended.
- Constant need to engage in the behavior.
- Majority of time is spent in the behavior, arranging the behavior or recovering from the effects.

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### More Signs and Symptoms

- Become preoccupied with engaging in or preparing for the behavior.
- Neglect other obligations such as work, school, family.
- Isolate yourself so others don't know about the behavior.
- Engage in behavior despite negative consequences.

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### Final Signs and Symptoms

- Must increase the intensity or frequency of the behavior to obtain the same effect.
- Become restless, irritable, hostile and/or anxious if unable to engage in the behavior.

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### Abuse and Neglect = Vulnerability

- o Addictive behaviors blot out the pain of the abuse.
- o Temporarily reduce tension.
- o Help you feel better.
- o Can help control flashbacks.
- o Something to do when you can't sleep.

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### Eating Addictions

- o Foods with lots of sugar, fat and salt trigger "feel good" brain chemicals.
- o Feel the need to eat again.
- o Overeating may be less about "loss of willpower" and more about food's effect on our brain's "pleasure centers"

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### The Brain and Food

- o Foods with high salt, sugar and fat trigger the same "pleasure centers" as cocaine and heroin.
- o Dopamine production increases making the eater feel good.

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### Signs of Eating Addiction

- Develop a tolerance to food. Eat more and more, but feel less and less satisfaction.
- Continue to eat despite negative consequences:
  - Weight Gain
  - Damaged relationships
  - Physical harm - Diabetes

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### Questions to Ask:

- End up meeting more than planned especially with certain foods?
- Keep eating certain foods when no longer hungry?
- Worry about not eating or cutting down on certain types of foods?
- Go out of the way to obtain certain foods?

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### More Questions

- Feel anxious and agitated without the food.
- Eat certain foods instead of working, spending time with family or doing hobbies or recreational activities.
- Avoid social or professional situations for fear of overeating in front of others.

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### Additional Questions

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- Instead of helping depression or negative feelings, eating causes increased depression, anxiety, self-loathing or guilt.
- Need more and more food to reduce negative emotions.

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### Treatment

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- Individual, group, or family counseling
- Assistance from a dietician or nutritionist
- Food Recovery Groups

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"Today I learned what may seem small and insignificant to an adult...can be absolutely enormous to a small child."

-Jodee Battistuzzi

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**Hoarding Defined...**

Hoarding is defined as the acquisition of, and failure to discard, a large number of possessions that appear to be of useless or of limited value.

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**Items Often Hoarded Include...**

- Food
- Items from the past with significant meaning
- Items collected over time that have no current use

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**Hoarding May Have Been Adaptive Behavior in the Past**

- Saving items such as food or clothing for a time of need
- Used in the past as a survival technique
- A way of remembering important people or happy times

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### Other Causes for Hoarding...

- The items are perceived as valuable
- The items provide a source of security
- Fear of forgetting or losing items
- Constant need to collect and keep things
- Obtaining love not found from people
- Fear others will obtain their personal information
- Inability to organize
- Self neglect
- Stressful life events

• Lisa Dickson, Former Foster Youth

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### Risk Factors

- Often starts in early adolescence
- Hoarders may have a family member who hoards – may be genetic &/or learned behavior
- Can result from stressful life events such as neglect, loss, grief
- Is sometime associated with obsessive compulsive disorder or reactive attachment disorder

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### Hoarding Symptoms

- Cluttered living spaces
- Inability to discard items
- Stacks of newspapers, magazines and junk mail
- Move items from one pile to another without discarding
- Difficulty organizing items

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### More Hoarding Symptoms

- Difficulty managing daily activities including procrastination and trouble making decisions
- Perfectionism
- Exceedingly attached to possessions-won't let others touch them
- Limited or no social interactions
  - Sue Scheff

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### Hoarding is Part of a Continuum

- Is the person merely a "pack rat" or is hoarding interfering with life?
- Is it a messy teen room or hoarding?
- Is it an adaptation to early loss, neglect and abandonment that will improve as trust builds?
- Does hoarding create health risks or interfere with daily living?

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### Health Risks

- Unsanitary conditions
- Risk of falls
- Can't perform daily tasks
- Leads to family conflicts
- Fire hazard
- Loneliness and social isolation leading to missed school and minimal peer interaction

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### Dealing with Hoarding

- **Don't Overreact by:**
  - **Pathologizing – What doesn't make sense to outsiders, may make perfect sense to the person hoarding the items**
  - **Rushing to make a diagnosis**
  - **Taking items that may be treasured mementos**
- Lisa Dickson, Former Foster Youth

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### Dealing with Hoarding

- Show empathy – Attempt to see the behavior from the other's point of view
- Be compassionate about past neglect, loss and abandonment and recognize the connections
- Provide reassurance
- Allow trust to build

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### Dealing with Hoarding

- Organize the items
- Allow the child to take a cherished item to school or activities
- Show interest in the objects – ask questions, play together with items
- Foster conversation about collections
- Use collections as rewards

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### Stealing and Hoarding

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- o Try to determine the purpose of the stealing-
  - Having an object from a loved one
  - Having something from a loved home
  - Annoying or hurting others
  - Adding to a collection

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### Stealing Solutions

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- o Give the youth an item from the loved one or from the home
- o Lock up valuables
- o Allow the youth to have a "lock box" for their valuables
- o Allow the victim of stealing to "rent" an item from the perpetrator
- o Stealing from outside the home needs to involve the usual consequences

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### Hoarding Food

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- o Often caused by neglect leading to:
  - Feelings of insecurity
  - Past need to be self reliant
  - Survival mentality

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### Need to Ask...

- o Could there be psychiatric or biological issues contributing to the hoarding?
- o Does the child's history reveal reasons for fixation on eating?
- o Does the child substitute a food fixation for a loving relationship with parents?
- o Are there things that trigger eating problems in the child?
- o Is the child displaying an emotional neediness in the way they eat?

o Charley Joyce, LICSW & Rick Delaney, Ph.D

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### Interventions for Food Hoarding

- o Don't create food battles!
- o Create food baskets, food drawers and/or a food shelf in the refrigerator
- o Make food backpacks or portable plastic bins
- o Combine nurturing and food
- o Teach food regulation

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### Resources

- o Dickson, Lisa, "Foster Children and Hoarding", Sunshine Girl on a Rainy Day Blog, 6/16/06.
- o Joyce, LICSW, Charley and Delaney, Ph.D, Rick, "Behavior with a Purpose", 2005
- o Mauro, Terri "Is Hoarding a Problem for my Child?", specialchildrenabout.com

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### More Resources

- o Rodriguez, MFT, Rocio, "Working with Hoarding Behavior of Youth in the Foster Care System", CCSF Guides.
- o Scheff, Sue, "Hoarding" Parenting Teens Examiner, Broward County, 3/9/10.

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### Sex Addictions

- o Sex addictions can involve:
  - Pornography – Generally internet
  - Multiple sexual partners

Pornography can have similar effects on the brain as food and substance abuse addictions.

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### Statistics of Sex Addictions

- o Very few people are truly "sex addicts".
- o 9 out of 10 college age men report use of internet porn. One third of college age women report use of internet porn.

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### Signs of Sex Addiction

- Persons with histories of sexual abuse are particularly vulnerable.
- Sex does not involve true intimacy. It is characterized by:
  - Multiple partners
  - "Novel" partners
  - Voyeurism
  - Risky sex

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### Signs of Pornography Addiction

- Involves internet use and NOT people
- May not date
- May have difficulties getting sexual pleasure in intimate relationships
- Often have sexual performance issues

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### Root Causes

- Feel unworthy of real acceptance
- Distorted concepts of others
- Fear of abandonment
- Become unreachable personally
- Confuse nurturing and sex
- Males feel powerless around women
- By product of loneliness, pain and the need to be accepted.

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### Computer Addictions

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- o Let's take the quiz!!
- o Can be addiction to the internet or computer games.
- o Can cause physical symptoms like dry eyes, carpal tunnel syndrome and back problems.

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