

# Getting out of the doghouse and into a healing intimate relationship

Helping couples get past the initial stage of shock, blame and trauma that accompanies infidelity and sex addiction

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Bliss



*"And the next thing I knew, I was kissing her, and two of her friends, I think one was a dude, then we all did Ecstasy, rented a limo, and went to Vegas—but I swear that's all that happened."*

Is this a familiar  
problem?

Observe ...

# What is Empathy?

- Empathy is the capacity to, through imagination rather than literally, share the sadness or happiness of another sentient being.
- Empathy is what active addicts lack - and is a 'late-stage' developmental treatment task - can it be taught?

# How has he empathically failed her?

- He isn't listening to the subtext of her message only to the surface content
- He is defensive - and argues his point
- He does not exhibit insight into the subtext of her upset.
- He is trying to obtain regain power & control over her feelings for self-stability

# The Problem

- The problem is that addicts are used to living in a world where they have control
- By “giving-in” to going to treatment, meetings, disclosure etc., they in-effect, are giving up this control to their spouse

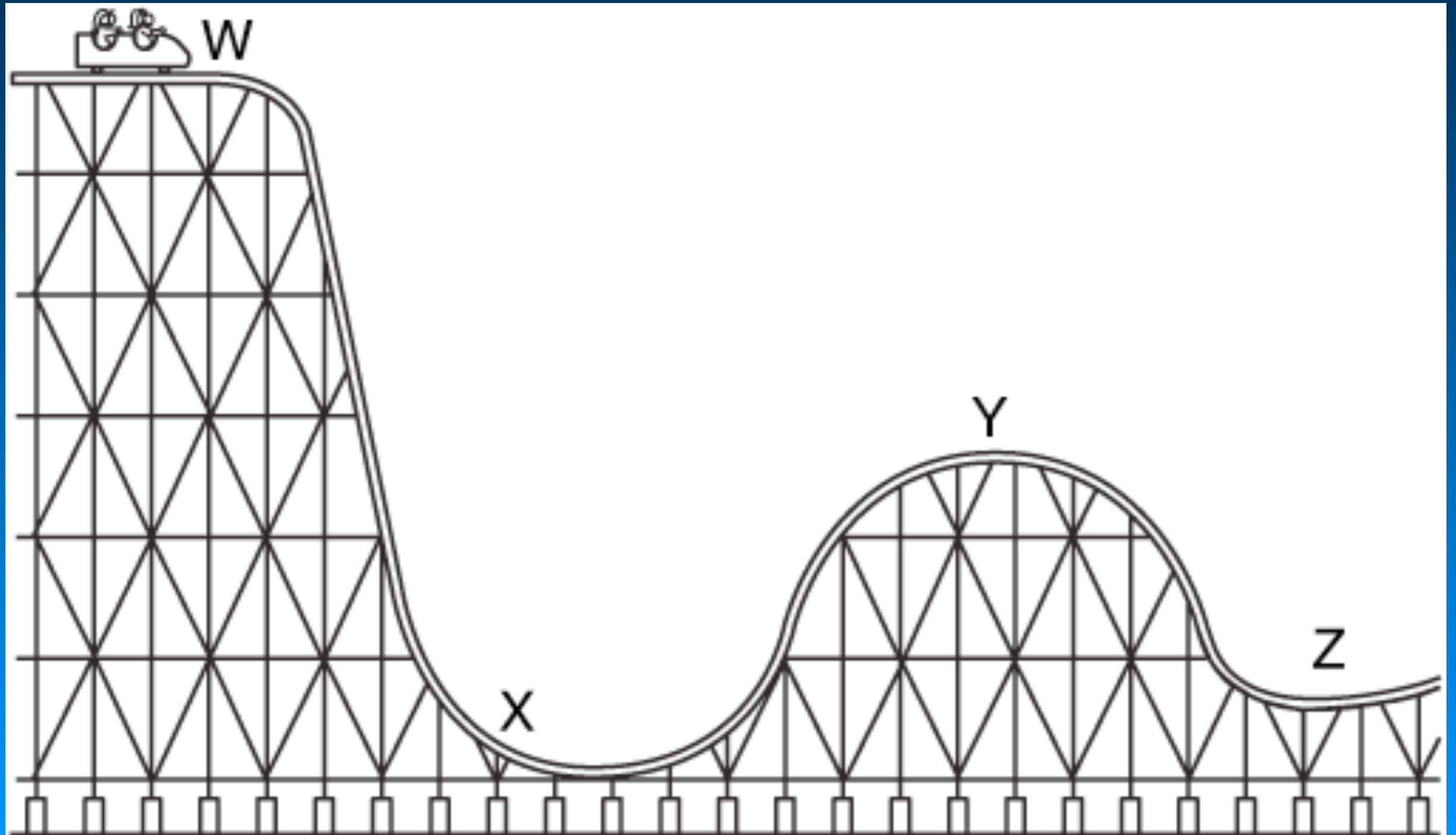
# What does it mean to be “*in the doghouse?*”

- 1 - To listen and reflect rather than react
- 2 - To listen with context in mind
- 3 - To be non-defensive
- 4 - To be grateful and express humility
- 5 - To not assume the partner will see your point or understand
- 6 - To not expect a ‘gold star’ for meeting minimum relationship requirements
- 7 - To find recovering people to meet healthy needs and not *demand* them of the spouse

How to remain in the doghouse? “Poor me”...



# We call this the *Emotional Roller-coaster*



# What is the Roller-coaster?

- Hypervigilant about whether or not their needs are being met.
- Hypersensitive about any perceived or actual lateness, incomplete promises or 'not feeling' considered
- Feeling at times overly entitled to what they perceive as just and fair (developmentally ages 8-11)
- Alternately intimate and then withdrawing or punishing
- Accusatory: making mountains out of molehills
- Controlling (finances, time, sex etc.)
- Talking to family members or others about the addict's behavior: as punishment
- Loss of perspective regarding their own part in the relationship challenges

# And what is emotional *engine* drives this 'coaster'?

Her internal state:

- Afraid of further loss and abandonment
- Ashamed, self hating, self doubting
- Anxious - potential triggering of previous trauma
- Worried about the future -parenting, finances, separation

Having intrusive thoughts and images

# How long can it take to get off this ride?

9-18 months, post-discovery/disclosure.  
Provided there is an active recovery process  
in place in place for both.

# How can I trust again?

Trust is restored over time through ...

- Reliable and consistent actions (not words)
- Honesty - even when facing disapproval
- Commitment to recovery steps
- Acting as a full adult contributing family member
- Patience & understanding of the spouses anger and hurt

# Boundary problem examples: addicts

- Expecting understanding, forgiveness and sometimes sex- right away (90 days or less)
- Expecting the spouse to be more understanding, less angry and hurt
- Expecting the spouse to 'get over it'
- Expecting validation from the spouse for doing recovery-work.
- Demanding forgiveness/sex *in exchange* for disclosure, information and/or 'good behavior'
- Continuing to lie, keep secrets, act out etc.
- Think mountain vs. pea example

# Boundary problem examples: spouses

- **Expecting the Addict to be 100 % emotionally available now**
- **Expecting all of the addicts' emotional issues (distancing, crabbiness, narcissism ) to go away right away**
- **Not allowing the addict to have a learning curve for better communication, emotional availability, empathy etc.**
- **Questioning erections, inner thoughts, looks and fantasy**
- **Dismissing addict's needs for solitude, reflection, healthy self care (meetings, therapy groups etc)**
- **Demanding the addict to meet all of the spouses needs and as soon as they occur**
- **Physical or Verbal abuse example**
- **Over interpreting negative mood states or unavailability as a return of addiction/acting out**
- **Being unwilling to accept their own part in the emotional distancing and non-intimacy in the overall relationship (not responsible for the addict acting out)**
- **Abdicating responsibility for relationship healing/growth, thereby holding the addict solely responsible for the relationship**

# How to get out of the doghouse (subtext)

The ideal response to this type of ongoing conflict has three elements:

1. You fall on your sword - this starts with full disclosure and continues ...
2. You validate your spouse - past and present
3. You realistically reassure where possible

# Sounds like this ...

1 - I'm so sorry I was late, that was wrong of me no matter what the reason. - **Fall on Sword**

2 - You have every right to be upset with me, not only because I am late today but because of what it must bring up for you when I do that. - **Validate**

3 - I want you to know that while imperfect, I will continue to do the best I can to keep my commitments to you and keep trying to get it right.  
- **Reassure**

# What helps to get off the Roller-coaster (spouses)

- Support & Validation- Consistent, nonjudgmental feedback and availability from non-sexual friends -
- Education - About the problem, the path to healing, encouragement for her boundaries
- Clear boundaries and structure for what is and is not acceptable to her going forward
- The Truth

# What is the goal here?

- To teach addicts about empathic responses - dictated or written if needed
- To offer addicts a new skill-set - currently absent
- To give addicts the opportunity to receive positive reinforcement from their spouses, even in bad times
- To de-escalate reactivity for both parties so that growth can occur - get them out of cycle of shame/blame
- To educate the couple individually and together regarding this process and expected challenges

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