

Journaling as Therapy in My Practice

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I am a pastoral counselor that specializes in working with men who are struggling with sex infidelity and addiction. This can involve fantasy, pornography, masturbation, affairs (emotional and physical) and a large variety of other sexual behaviors. It has been well researched in our field that many of these men experienced a great deal of wounds in their growing up years. That can be due to problems in their families and their cultural environments (schools, churches, neighborhoods, and social groups).

Quite often I find that these men were abandoned of the love, support, and nurture that we all need from caring adults in our lives. This is particularly so when it comes to their mothers and fathers. One of the difficult awareness issues that this abandonment creates is knowledge of what exactly they missed if they never had it in the first place. They are often words of affirmation and blessing that are never said, a sense of safety that is never created, healthy that is never felt, and helpful instruction that is never offered. When this kind of neglect is the issue, we often say the person has a mother or father "wound."

To help these men understand what they missed, I often have them journal about words that they had wished had been said to them. Recently, one of my men sobbed when he recalled that his father never had talked to him about sexuality. He said, "I was all alone in trying to figure it out. In reality I turned to pornography just to find out what all the other boys were talking about." This man's father had also had an affair and left the family when the boy was 18. He was not to be seen again for 20 years.

I had the man think of the words or instructions that he had always wished his father had said to him. So, he took pen and paper and pretended that he was his dad and started the journal entry with these words, "Dear son, these are things I always wanted to say to you." Tears and hundreds of words followed as my client poured out the things in his heart that his soul had always wanted to hear.

Not long after he heard that his father had contracted cancer and that it was terminal. On his own, that is without my instruction; he took his letter to the hospital and asked his father if he would read it. The father cried and the father realized that he had been totally remiss in not saying these things. The father then asked if he could read the letter out loud to his son. They wound up in each other's embrace. It was not long before the father died, but he did so totally at peace with his son. Interestingly enough, my client has not struggled since with his addiction.