

Retreat: For our Past relationships, sons, brothers, Uncles discussion
Finding the Medicine Within Yourself to Help
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Are You a Silent Son?

These Handouts are to help Native Men and Women who love them to begin making Healthier choices in their lives and relationships. They can also be used for same sex relationships. The first step in Change is Awareness, then Admitting, then Acceptance, and finally Action .

Some of the dominant characteristics of a silent son are:

- He keeps things that bother him to himself, “Strong, Silent Type”
- He denies that unpleasant events occur.
- He fears letting people know him.
- He has difficulty interacting with parents, spouse, or children.
- He has a strong fear of criticism.
- He is angry.
- He can't express his feelings.
- He disproportionately fears failure.
- He is obsessively driven to succeed.
- He desperately wants his life to be better but doesn't know how to change.

A Silent Son may be in pain, but has many positive Characteristics:

- He is good under pressure.
- He is Adventurousome.
- He is Independent.
- He is a survivor.
- He is empathic.
- He is a hard worker.
- He is a loyal friend.
- He is willing to help others.
- He is a problem solver.
- He has a good sense of humor.

Indicators of Silence

Silent Sons believe that they're just like everybody else, many either believe that their family was not dysfunctional (when in fact it was) or believe that it was dysfunctional, but they are not affected. Classic behavior patterns:

- Limited Expression (Men are hospitalized for stress-related disorders such as heart attack, stomach problems, or addictions.)
- The Strong Silent Type: Negative silence is the silence of a man in pain. Your silence keeps you locked in and others locked out.
- The Silent Treatment: Do you know when you are giving those around you the silent treatment? I'll bet you do, but you won't admit it. We can give people the silent treatment for many reasons, but usually is because we are upset about something.
- Target Practice: The opposite of silent treatment is taking out our frustrations on others, who become targets of our internal struggles. It means that instead of dealing with what is really bothering us, we project our negative feelings, usually anger, on others.
- The Imposter Syndrome: At the core of the imposter syndrome lies low self-esteem, a feeling of unworthiness and the belief that appearance comes first and substance, second. We don't believe that people will like us for who we are. We don't believe that we are good enough. So being anyone other than ourselves must be an improvement.
- One-dimensional Man: Do you often feel out of place when you are not working? Do you think all nonwork time is nonproductive time? This is not an unusual belief for many Silent sons, and it exemplifies the problem of one-dimensional identity. No matter how good we are at work, we can be painfully aware of not being as good at other things, so we either work more, or view nonwork time as unimportant. We can discount our children, relationships, interests, and ourselves.
- Hidden Feelings: How many times do you think, I'll just keep it to myself? For many silent Sons, keeping our feelings and thoughts to ourselves became a way of protecting ourselves

and our families from exposure to the outside world. It was also a way of trying to minimize the problems within our families, by not communicating with each other. This is especially true in families that talk about everything but the dysfunction.

- Short Fuse: Are you often angry, but don't know why? Do you get upset over "small things" very quickly? When it comes to your temper, do you have a short fuse?.....unresolved anger inside...few alternatives for dealing with stress.

OK, Why should we want change?

Trouble in romantic relationships, be they heterosexual or homosexual, is the primary reason why most silent sons seek help. Even when talking about mothers, and fathers, silent sons turn the discussion to the impact their dysfunctional parents had on their current relationship abilities. The problems they identified were:

- Excessive caretaking behavior directed toward their partner
- Need to dominate or control
- Fear of intimacy
- Infidelity
- Lack of honesty
- Inability to express emotions
- Lack of communication
- Anger
- Fears of abandonment, getting too close, rejection, or self-disclosure
- Leaving when it "gets too tough"
- Low self-esteem
- Fear of commitment
- Inability to keep the relationship going
- Mistrust
- Boredom after a few years
- Lack of respect for women
- Inability to confide
- Lack of knowledge about what a healthy relationship is
- Performance anxiety

So what are we shooting for in a Healthy Relationship?

When we realize that our excess baggage has limited our capacity to love and beloved, we have to begin with understanding the characteristics commonly found in a healthy relationship:

- You feel you are respected as a person.
- Your physical and emotional needs are met.
- You like the other person and you feel liked by them.
- You are appreciated and not taken for granted.
- You are not afraid to be yourself.
- You can communicate effectively with your partner.
- You can affirm and support one another.
- Trust is mutual and continual.
- There is a sense of humor and play.
- Responsibilities are shared.
- Privacy is respected.
- You are not constantly fighting for control.
- You both admit and seek help for your problems.
- You want to spend time together.
- Love is a verb, not a noun.
- You are both growing and the relationship is growing.
- You feel good about yourself.

To start, what is your definition of Male Intimacy?

The key is not our capacity to love but our ability to express it. In his book *Male Intimacy*, Michael McGill points out five common ways men show love and share with others, these five ways can also be used to withhold love in relationships:

- **Sex:** Intimacy, love and emotions are confusing. Men can have sex without intimacy. Men can have intimacy without sex. If you ask men what they want in their relationships, many will say “more sex”. How many ways do you know to be intimate that are not sexual? How well do you communicate in your relationship? Can you communicate with more than your organ?
- **Giving:** Do you mostly give material possessions, or a part of yourself? A man and woman may see another man walking

down the street carrying flowers. While the woman may think, oh isn't that sweet, the man sees the flowers and thinks, Boy, did he screw up! Are gifts given out of guilt, substitutes for affection?

- **Touch:** Men are very conscious of the power of touch, but we are also afraid to use it too much. We hesitate to touch another man beyond a handshake, to hug a boy after a certain age, or to touch a woman in a platonic way. We often use touch not as a means of expression, but also as the testing ground for how close we can get. Touching is one of the most confusing ways of sharing for men.
- **Intellectualizing:** The intellectualizer talks about everything but his feelings. Common to men is focusing on logic and rationality. Intellectualizing keeps you in your head and out of your heart. The next time an issue comes up in your relationship, don't jump to intellectualize. Be spontaneous, and tell your partner what you're FEELING right from your heart.
- **Listening:** Some men have a difficult time listening to anything. Ironically, these same men want, and often demand, to be listened to themselves. When you don't listen you are telling your partner that he or she is not important. When you do listen, you communicate RESPECT.

Taking Control of Your Life

No matter how you go about taking control of your life, you will be faced with at least four major issues along the way:

1. **Making Peace with Pain and Reality.** One Man has said, "I have come to realize that I have used my adult relationships and experiences as a stage to play out my unresolved trauma from childhood. This path of escapism has led me to alcoholism and addiction which nearly killed me, but I have discovered that the only way out is through it"
2. **Making Peace with Yourself and Finding Power.** True peace comes from within and begins by learning to like your self. How can you be at peace with someone you don't like?
3. **Making Peace with Your Family.** Once you have completed the first two stages, you might want to or need to move on to the third stage. Making peace with your family must always be an

addition to your growth, not a substitute for it. Your issues and potential must come first. Diffuse guilt, retrain your emotional habits, understand your parent's childhoods, break free of the approval trap, develop your own support family, your life first, theirs second.

4. Achieving Your Potential. When you make it to this stage, you are ready to fly. Join a support group, establish male relationships, and use SPIRITUALITY.