

Have You Ever Felt Helpless Observing a Loved One in an Abusive Relationship? The Stockholm Syndrome and It's Strategies May Offer Assistance

Are you powerless to help a loved one trapped in an abusive relationship? Perhaps understanding the Stockholm Syndrome will shed some light. Treatment strategies can include an accountability buddy. This article explains the Stockholm Syndrome and may help you might provide.

Stockholm Syndrome Background Information

The Stockholm Syndrome, a form of Post Traumatic Stress, explains why some individuals remain in an abusive relationship despite overwhelming opportunities to escape. Often, the victim defends the abuser or is grief stricken when the possibility of leaving becomes real. Roots of the Stockholm Syndrome date back to a 1973 bank robbery event in Stockholm Sweden. This event began with machine gun blasting from criminals who took four bank employees as hostages, subjected them to life threatening treatment, including being tied up with dynamite and being kept in a vault. Six days later the employees were rescued. To the surprise of the legal authorities, as well as many others, the hostages displayed extreme sympathetic behaviors and statements regarding the robbers and bonded with them enough to raise money for their legal defense.

Nils Bejerot, psychiatric consultant and negotiator placed at the bank for the entire event, referred to the term as The Stockholm Syndrome for the victims' state of mind post trauma. Typically, after trauma, a victim expresses great shock and almost disbelief of surviving the horrific event. Post trauma of this failed bank robbery left victims feeling sympathy towards their captors and minimization of the aftereffects. As it evolved, some basic elements were identified as necessary for The Stockholm Syndrome to take hold through a form of emotional brain washing.

Elements of the Stockholm Syndrome

In this syndrome there is a Controller (abuser) and Controlee (the abused victim, follower of the Controller). The victim or Controlee obeys and follows orders from the Controller. The resultant Controller-Controlee relationship is a nightmare for those observing because the victim receives unreasonable abusiveness. An unconscious dance seems to keep the relationship going between the two individuals. The key is mind control leveraged by the controller, to manage nearly every decision of the controlee regardless of the victim's income, profession and social support. The following conditions are created and present in The Stockholm Syndrome.

1. a relationship is established between the Controller and Controlee. It is not a one shot connection. Closeness in which the Controller towards the victim makes alluring emotional appeal. The abuser conveys a sense of a powerful protector role towards the controlled and is very convincing that the two of them must join together or bond to be safe. The victim gets ensnared, perhaps interprets this as love and begins to identify with the

abuser's need for sympathy or empathy – the abuser is just like everyone else, tapping into the allure of being needed.

2nd there is a threat somehow, that the outside world is against us. In the bank robbery it was the threat of harm from the police. In other relationships it may be a person who wants us to break up or doesn't recognize our relationship or how much we need each other. The outside world doesn't understand the special bond that we share. Compliance on the part of the victim may be a survival tactic as well.

3rd there are rare, random acts of kindness, which serve to remind the victim of how positive and caring the abuser is. This reinforces the manipulation and you must obey me demands from the Controller.

Unconscious Dance

The Controller or the Controlee may not be consciously aware of the steps taken to create and keep this relationship going. Annihilation of the controlled person's emotional and even physical integrity is the outcome. Individuals such as Patty Hearst, Elizabeth Smart and Tom Cruise's ex-wife Katie Holmes, among many others, have been associated with this syndrome.

There are no clear-cut reasons one person develops Stockholm and another doesn't.

Perhaps the Controller plays upon the victim's good will and vulnerable self-esteem. The victim's good will tendency might allow greater care and kindness be extended to the Controller/Abuser than would be given to the victim's own self. Additionally, self-esteem could be seen as on a continuum, with under deservingness included in the low end.

Therefore the Controller could take advantage of the victim's good willed nature and vulnerability to underserved treatment.

Assuming the Controller is convincing and the victim easy prey for unreasonable and illogical compassionate endurance, this may set the opportunistic climate for entering into this trauma bonding. It's closely aligned to brain washing.

This syndrome is different than recognizing the universality of a person in need or a once in a lifetime slip up that allows one to let someone off the hook and even feel compassionate empathy. There are those who are more forgiving towards others than practiced on self. What happens when the Controller finds all of these tendencies in one person? Bingo, no further 'grooming' is needed. The Controller has met a match made in heaven or is it hell?

There exists controversy whether the victim was really brain washed or has an inherent desire to participate. Questions about the veracity of this term may be eliminated via personal experience. Knowing someone who is in a relationship like this – makes one a believer. If you wish to help a person overcome identification with this syndrome, read further.

Strategies to Help The Victim

Naturally, encouraging the Stockholm person to meet with a trauma specialist therapist makes sense since Stockholm Syndrome is considered a form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Due to the shame, secrecy and brainwashing experienced, the controlled individual may need direct assistance. Specific help may be offered in the realm of deprogramming.

Deprogramming is a way of re-patterning the weakest mind link or thoughts that trigger the victim to fall into the manipulative hands of the Controller, even and especially when the controller is not present physically. If the Controlled person allows you to help, begin with a discussion aimed at identifying mental 'triggers' that set the victim backwards into obedience mode. With abused children it may be a room, time of day or presence of something or someone in particular. Older victims may also have electronics to deal with. Programming which uses the triggers has already been put into the mind of the Controlled. Often the abuser uses texts, phone calls, or positive gestures to regress the controlled back into position of being controlled. The basic idea is to help the victim identify triggers that set the Controlee into obeying and following the Controllers wishes which eventually conflict with healthy sense of self.

Accountability Buddy to Empower Positive Change

Next, you may help as you collaborate with the Controlee to name an accountability buddy and a strategy, both of which help the victim handle a trigger when it arises. The accountability buddy serves as a safe, trusted other(s) to remind and review if the victim has executed and handled the trigger in a way that takes care of self, instead of returning to a costly pattern of putting self behind protecting the Controller from any reasonable standard. This standard is defined as what 51% or greater of a group of people would judge as too costly for the Controlled to undergo. To start with an example, the trigger could be a text, comment or phone message from the Controller or designee, such as a child of theirs. It could also be the abuser's voice inside the victim's head that makes the victim wonder what might the abuser be thinking or doing now. The strategy calls for coming up with steps the victim will take at the exact moment in time a trigger sets the Controlled person off into backwards motion.

It is helpful for the victim to rate on a scale from 1-10 (one is low and 10 is highest possible) how pressing or scary the trigger is rated, when it comes up. Typically, the victim has to practice holding off responding immediately. This allows a delay and handling in anon-automatic, rational, deliberate manner. The accountability buddy is to review with the victim their plan and before the victim takes any action. Each time a trigger is met, the victim is to wait to respond, rate the trigger's power, review internally what strategy is to be taken, then execute with action. Rating the trigger's power afterwards is also recommended in order to assess how the approach is working. The accountability buddy may be involved at any point. The intention for the accountability is so that the victim may be helped to do what is not possible by one's self; to receive encouragement as well feedback to review how well the Controlled did with each trigger's occurrence. The same

repetition is followed until there's a change to suit the victim and the buddy. As each trigger is handled, new positive behaviors can be praised or simply acknowledged.

Recovery is a slow process and the victim benefits greatly by having the support and caring of loved ones. Be prepared that the victim may refuse rescue help from you or anyone else.

Abusive bonding is stronger than a non-abusive bond. If an accountability buddy is present they can begin a new when backward movement is evidenced. The buddy helps the victim review and problem solve. Possibly a new trigger has shown up to be handled. Then the hovering and ever-present fear of the Controller's voice has new possibility of meeting with calming and detachment by the former abused.

References:

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