



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2023

PROVIDED BY SAINT ALPHONSUS EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

BUILDING EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

Emotional intimacy can be one of the most fulfilling experiences we can have as humans.

It is one of our fundamental needs and is one of the key reasons we seek to enter relationships. It's natural to want to experience sharing love and to be loved, to share and connect through our inner worlds, and to know and be known on a deep level.

Unfortunately, despite the level of importance to us, building emotional intimacy at best can feel confusing, frustrating, and overwhelming. The good news is that building emotional intimacy is a skill—one that can be developed with practice over time.

Emotional intimacy is something we seek in romantic partners but is equally rewarding in relationships with family and friends. So, what exactly is emotional intimacy?

Generally speaking, emotional intimacy is defined as a feeling of closeness and connection with someone, a sense of being deeply seen, known, and understood. Emotional intimacy requires vulnerability, empathy, a high level of trust, and finely attuned communication skills. Some signs of emotional intimacy include but are not limited to:

- A feeling of safety and trust in your relationship
- Physical affection and warmth
- Feeling that you know each other on a deep, meaningful level
- A sense of fun, playfulness, and shared humor
- A willingness to communicate and share your inner worlds

This will look unique in every relationship.



You may be wondering, "How does someone work to build the skills of emotional intimacy?" We will offer a few ideas and suggestions to get you started but please keep in mind, as stated before, each relationship is unique and presents its own set of strengths and challenges.

- Genuinely Care
 - When your partner is speaking, be present and show compassion
 - Respect opinions even if they are different
 - Check in about what is going on in your partner's life and how they feel about it.
 - Do little things to demonstrate that your relationship is a priority
- Increase The Amount of Appreciation
 - THIS is one of the simplest effective ways to build emotional intimacy
 - Identify what you are thankful for and share how it impacts you and how it contributes positively to your world.
 - Share the specific qualities or values a person brings into your life
- Dredge Up the Past...In a Positive Context
 - Share favorite memories and relive them together, try by saying, "Remember when...."
- This next one may seem dark, but bear with us... contemplate their death
 - Reflecting on mortality allows us to be more present and grateful and allows to you feel the emotional impact your partner's absence may have on you and your life
- Create Connection Rituals
 - Sharing morning coffee, an after work gym routine, a Sunday brunch date, etc.; this allows you to create more intentionality in your relationship and allows you both to feel cared for and important
- Improve How You Navigate Conflict
 - Conflict is an opportunity to build emotional intimacy if done effectively and with love and respect
 - Consider counseling to assist you in improving these skills

(continued on page 4)

WHAT IS GASLIGHTING?

The term gaslighting has been mentioned frequently in the news and online in recent years. In fact, the term was searched online so often last year that Merriam-Webster dictionary chose it as the 2022 word of the year. The many online searches are likely a reflection of the public's desire to know what gaslighting means. So, what is gaslighting?

Gaslighting is a form of manipulation and emotional abuse in a romantic relationship where a person attempts to manipulate and control their partner by challenging their partner's recollection of a past conversation or event. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines gaslighting as "psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency on the perpetrator."

The term gaslight comes from the 1938 British play *Gas Light* and its 1944 film adaptation *Gaslight*. In both the play and film, a husband attempts to make his wife feel like she is going insane so that she will be institutionalized and he can take over her family's estate. The husband manipulates his wife by secretly dimming the gas lights in the house, moving objects around the house, and making strange noises in the house while denying to her that it's happening. When his wife asks him about the dimming lights and the other strange occurrences, he says it's all in her head. Soon, the wife begins to question her sanity and memory.

Like in the film, when someone is gaslighted, the victim begins to question their memory and sanity and the victim may feel like they're going crazy. The gaslighter will twist the words of what they or the victim said in prior conversations or attempt to change the victim's memory of what happened in the past. Often, the gaslighter changes the victim's recollections of the past so often that the victim feels the need to tape record conversations with the gaslighter to confirm what was said.

Like the term narcissist, the term gaslighting is often overused and misused, which tends to water down the concept and minimize the abuse it causes. While a person may occasionally mislead or lie to others, a true gaslighter frequently lies or misleads and almost always has a personality disorder such as Narcissistic Personality Disorder (commonly known as a narcissist) or Antisocial Personality Disorder (commonly known as a psychopath or sociopath). Narcissists and Psychopaths use gaslighting as one of the ways they manipulate and control their partner. The gaslighting is sometimes so subtle that it's often not noticed by the victim and they may not realize they're being manipulated. Therefore, it's important to be able to identify the red flags of being gaslighted. Here are some red flags to look out for:

A gaslighter will often say the following to a victim:

- "You're crazy. That never happened."
- "Are you sure? You tend to have a bad memory."
- "I'm worried about you. You keep forgetting things."

- "It's all in your head."
- "You're too sensitive."
- "That's not what happened"
- "You're being paranoid."
- "You always blow things out of proportion."
- "We already talked about this—don't you remember?"
- "You never told me that."
- "Do you really think I'd make that up?"

If you have been gaslighted, you may also notice the following about yourself:

- You are constantly second-guessing yourself.
- You often ask yourself, "Am I too sensitive?"
- You often feel confused.
- You're always apologizing.
- You frequently make excuses for your partner's behavior to friends and family.
- You have trouble making simple decisions.
- You feel as though you can't do anything right.

What can you do if you're being gaslighted? The first step is to learn more about gaslighting and other forms of emotional abuse. Researching and reading more about gaslighting, emotional abuse, and personality disorders like Narcissistic Personality Disorder online and in books can help you become more knowledgeable with manipulative behaviors and how to deal with them. It's also advisable that you seek counseling from a mental health professional to help you navigate the relationship or help you to leave the relationship. If you need help dealing with a gaslighter, our Saint Alphonsus EAP counselors are here to help you.



BARBACOA-STYLE SHREDDED BEEF TACOS

This barbacoa recipe cooks the beef in a flavorful barbacoa sauce in the slow cooker until it's fall-apart tender and easy to shred. It's similar to what you'd get at Chipotle's and perfect for nachos, tacos, and burritos.

Recipe by Jack Grigsby III

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (3 pound) beef chuck roast, cut into 6 to 8 chunks, salt and ground black pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup beef broth
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1/4 cup fresh lime juice
- 4 chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 3 large bay leaves

PREPARATION

1. Season beef chunks with salt and pepper on all sides.
2. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, cook and stir beef until browned, 4 to 5 minutes per batch. Transfer browned beef to a slow cooker.
3. Mix broth, vinegar, lime juice, chipotle peppers, garlic, cumin, oregano, and cloves together in a bowl until well combined. Season mixture with salt and pepper and pour over beef in the slow cooker. Stir in bay leaves.
4. Cook on Low until beef is fork-tender, 8 to 10 hours. Discard bay leaves. Remove beef from the cooker and shred using two forks.
5. Return beef to the slow cooker and stir to coat with sauce. Let marinate for at least 10 minutes before serving.

PREP 35 m	COOK 8 h 10 m	MARINATE 10 m
---------------------	-------------------------	-------------------------

HOW TO LISTEN NON-DEFENSIVELY

We have all been there. Our partner brings up a concern, need, or feeling and instantly our hackles go up.



We may feel that the statement is unfair, untrue, and certainly not reflective of the 'whole story.' Often, we then get defensive, taking the information personally and respond in kind. Sometimes we can feel emotionally and physiologically flooded making it very difficult to hear what our significant other is trying to share with us. Usually we end up defending ourselves, and that marks the end of a potentially productive conversation. Many times, we realize what has happened after the fact, and wish we knew how to stay calmer, more open, and receptive to what the other person has to share with us. This is certainly a work in progress for most of us; often a little movement forward can go a long way in helping us to have closer and emotionally safer intimate relationships. Here are just a few ideas that may help us with this effort.

SELF-SOOTHING.

Learning how to soothe oneself is key in remaining open and physiologically calm enough to receive what our partner has to tell us. Writing down what the other person shares with us can help to keep us out of the part of our brain that is reactive (in charge of flight, fight, or freeze) and remain in our thinking brain which is what we use when we write. This also helps to know if we have accurately heard what our partner has to share with us. Remembering the

bigger picture can also help to keep us receptive to what is being said. In the middle of receiving information that may be hard to hear, keeping in mind that this discussion is only a part of our experience with our partner. Fond memories, as well as keeping the larger goal in mind, such as having a connected, close, and peaceful relationship, can also help us on the path of listening. It's simple, but not easy, and remember to slow your breathing down. Breathing always becomes more shallow and quicker when we are ready to fight, flight or shut down.

Hold on to yourself. You will have an emotional reaction to what is being said to you. Attempt to understand what you are feeling, how you interpret what the statements mean about you and/or the relationship and simply be aware of both. It is often so difficult to keep our feelings separate from the other person, but they are. Being able to recognize our own emotions, triggers, and how we make meaning of what is being said to us is important and just as valid as our partner's. However, being able to allow your partner to share their needs, feelings, and concerns and not make it about ourselves can create the emotional safety needed for them to share with us more intimately and honestly. Listening without defending ourselves doesn't mean we have to agree with what is being shared, it just means we are listening for understanding.

STAY CURIOUS.

If the person sharing something with you was someone you had recently met, or a friend, or colleague would you respond differently than if that person is your partner or spouse? Often, we allow others to share what they want to with us without judgement, not assuming it means something bad about us. We often try and remain curious about what is being shared so that we can learn more about that person. Although this can be much harder to do with the person closest to us, it is even more important if we want them to continue to be close to us.

TAKE TIME OUTS (AND TIME IN'S) AS NEEDED.

Some days its easier to hear hard things than others. Notice if you begin feeling anxious, angry, sad, or defensive. If it gets too hard to listen, take a time out for an allotted and agreed upon time and come back to the conversation when you've had time to slow down your physiology and try the conversation again.

Again, this is HARD work. Any movement toward really hearing our most treasured person is a noble and good effort. We are here at the EAP to help in any ways we can to assist you with this goal.

EAP COUNSELORS

SAINT ALPHONSUS EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



**Jared Belsher – Supervisor
MA, LCPC, NCC**

Jared is a licensed clinical professional counselor (LCPC) and national certified counselor (NCC) who has worked in outpatient mental health clinics and in private

practice since 2007. He received a bachelor's Degree in Political Science and a master's Degree in Community Counseling from Northern Arizona University. His approach to counseling is strength-based, which means that rather than dwelling on

things that are wrong, he focuses on the strength individuals have, and how they can use those strengths to overcome their obstacles. He uses a person-centered approach and additional counseling techniques such as cognitive-behavioral

therapy (CBT) to help clients discover healthier ways to cope and think about a problem.

(continued on page 4)



(continued from page 1)

- Address Being on Autopilot
 - Start paying attention to where you can become more connected and fulfilled in your life in general, not simply in your relationship
 - It's important you have a life of your own, are working to meet your own needs, and following your own dreams
- Get Out of Your Comfort Zones
 - This allows you to "feed the fire" of your relationship by trying new things together
 - Take turns creating new opportunities to connect in new and exciting ways
- Allow Yourself to Be Seen
 - Yes, this requires vulnerability. It means sharing your dreams, opinions, fears, and passions
 - Yes, this means sharing the parts of you that are difficult, the parts you think are unworthy or unlovable
 - This is BOTH an attitude and action and takes courage and is a form of self-love
 - No hiding, no self-editing, no people pleasing...just the unadulterated, unfiltered truth
- Get Curious
 - Find ways to learn new things about the person you love and care for by asking intentional connection questions like "what was the last thing that blew your mind" or "when were your heart strings last pulled"
 - There are lots of resources on phrases that allow for deeper connection via apps or cards or games
- This One Can Be a Little Tricky but Don't Initiate Physical Intimacy with Affectionate Touch
 - If things get muddled in this area, confusion, misunderstanding, and frustration can follow; so try engaging in affectionate touch, without the expectation of physical intimacy as the result
- Listen to Understand Rather Than Fix
 - It can be helpful to clarify, "Would you like me to listen or do you want my help"
 - Sometimes, listening is the actual "fix"; we all long to feel heard and supported and sometimes there isn't an actionable item to "fix"
- Work On Feeling More Comfortable with Uncomfortable Feelings
 - Let yourself be seen, listen to understand, and embrace empathy and vulnerability
 - It's not easy to feel "yucky" and culturally we have been programmed to rush to toxic positivity, but avoiding these uncomfortable emotions not only has a negative impact on your mental health but can be a lost opportunity to build emotional intimacy
 - If you're uncertain on how to engage in emotional regulation and/or co-regulation, consider seeking some treatment for specific skills and tools
- A Fresh Perspective
 - Turning to friends and family can be helpful but also has its limitations due inability to remain impartial
 - Consider entering therapy to learn about your own blind spots, unhelpful thinking, and behavioral patterns, and to get some tools to get you moving in the direction of emotional intimacy

EAP COUNSELORS

SAINT ALPHONSUS EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



Jenny Lee Doty, MSW, LCSW

Jenny Lee has been practicing as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker for nearly a decade. She has worked in the mental health field for more than 20 years in a variety of treatment settings including but not limited to schools, day treatment centers, hospitals, and local community agencies. Jenny Lee has provided treatment to children, pre-teens and teens, and adults in individual, group, and family settings.

Jenny Lee is skilled in working with complex family units, emotional and behavioral issues, trauma, depression, mood disorders, anxiety, co-occurring diagnosis, psychotic disorders, self-harm, suicidal ideation, gangs, and those involved with foster care and Child Protective Services. Jenny Lee practices from a strength-based approach to treatment, while using a combination of interventions tailored to meet each individual's needs.



Melissa Young, MSW, LCSW

Melissa has been a Mental Health Professional for 30+ years having the opportunity to serve in a variety of mental health settings, with diverse client populations, working in various roles. As a Clinical Social Worker she has had the opportunity to work with survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence; as an Outpatient Psychotherapist within a Community Mental Health Center; a Peace Corps Volunteer in Asuncion Paraguay; Hospice Social Worker; and currently working as a Counselor at the Saint Alphonus Employee Assistance Program and Clinical Supervisor with Tidwell Social Work Services and Consulting Inc. She employs an eclectic approach to her work with clients, believing that a trusting and supportive relationship is key to any therapeutic success. In addition to her professional life, she is a mother of three teenage boys, wife of 18 years, and a proud dog and horse owner.

Saint Alphonus Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Regular Appointment Hours:

9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., Monday-Friday
(special appointment hours by request)

Phone: (208) 367-3300

Locations:

6140 W. Emerald St., Boise, ID 83704
3025 W. Cherry Ln, Ste 205
Meridian, ID 83642

Counselors:

Jared Belsher, MA, LCPC, NCC
Jenny Lee Doty, MSW, LCSW
Melissa Young, MSW, LCSW



Saint Alphonus

A Member of Trinity Health