TOKYO families

MAR 12, 2010

Home   Sections ▸   About   Contact

Man in crisis

By Dr. Douglas Berger, M.D., Ph D. | ASK THE EXPERT

QUESTION

I am a foreign dad in his early 50s, a science teacher by profession, twice divorced and am in the middle of an emotional, financial, and psychological crisis. I have enormous debts to pay, no job security, and most importantly, I am suffering from loneliness and low esteem.

I frequently feel lonely even in a crowd and I feel empty and lost with not knowing what direction to take in my life. To assuage this loneliness, I resort to compulsive shopping, have a girlfriend for physical intimacy and loneliness, and also look online to find a life partner. I feel obsessed with finding an ideal partner, I idealize women, and feel frustrated when they fall short of my standards.

I admit to a long-standing nature of being a domineering man and want neither to be bossed around nor treated coldly by a woman. I have zero tolerance when it comes to being the subject of blame and I suspect that my defensive nature has caused relationships to fail and has alienated people. What's wrong with me? *Marc*

Your story needs to be simplified into what are the underlying causes and what are the secondary results. The "Crises" are clearly the secondary results of the underlying problems and only focusing on them will not solve these problems (i.e., getting a job will only help so much unless the problems in your self-esteem and alienating others are also fixed).

Sorting out the underlying problems is a little complex with only the information you have provided so far. Let's list them up as: 1. uncomfortable feeling states (symptoms) like loneliness, emptiness, and low self-esteem; 2. behaviors aimed at calming the feeling states like desperation for physical intimacy, obsession with the perfect women, and compulsive shopping, and 3. long-standing personality traits to protect yourself from control or belittlement that backfire on you.

While more information about your history, symptoms, and the chronology of these issues is needed, it could be construed that you have either: 1. a disorder in personality style (the control and belittlement issues) that leads to social and occupational trouble that then leads to severe unhappiness and maybe an illness of depression (the uncomfortable feeling states) that then make both the personality style and social consequences worse; or 2. an underlying illness of depression causing you to feel lonelier, emptier, and have lower self esteem than is normal to have, and that inflames your feelings of being belittled or controlled (similar to a cold causing

someone to be irritable easily), causing the secondary crises and thus a vicious cycle making the depression worse, etc.

You would need a professional psychiatric evaluation that looks at other associated symptoms (sleep, appetite, risk for suicide, etc.), history of mood problems, drinking and substance use, family history, medical history, your interpersonal style, and then to make a treatment plan on how to attack these complex issues that cause your social problems and subjective distress.

Dr. Douglas Berger, M.D., Ph.D.
Dr. Berger and his staff at the Meguro Counseling Center in the Shibuya-Ebisu area of Tokyo provide mental health care for individuals, couples, and families, in both English and Japanese. www.megurocounseling.com

The discussions herein are meant as general information and advice only. Each person needs to make their own personal life decisions and to contact a mental health professional for consultation if deemed appropriate.

Send your comments to: editor@tokyofamilies.com

Digg submit