

Sandra's Journey to Therapy

Sandra recently separated from her second husband. She lives in a rental unit, on her own, for the first time in her life. Although separated, they still own and run a very successful business. This is causing her the most problems emotionally as she is unsure how to separate the business from the marriage. The separation was not her choice. She has no children. She has a very supportive family and network of friends. She has suffered bouts of depressions through most of her adult life. She suffered a complete breakdown when her first husband left in similar circumstances. She has taken enormous steps this time to manage her emotions and anxiety. She sees a counsellor once per week.

History:

Sandra was born in Perth, WA, to second generation Italian immigrant parents. She has one younger sister. Their family was typical of the time and Sandra was cared for by a stay-at-home mother.

Sandra says she has little recollection of this stage of her life; however, she says that her father's temper was quick to flare and unpredictable. She remembers her mother always keeping the peace, so they weren't allowed to touch things or make a mess. They needed to keep quiet when dad was around. When he wasn't they were free to play.

Sandra explains that at this point in her life her mother and father were busy trying to establish a business. This was run from home and both her parents worked long hours at its inception. Primary care was given to her paternal grandmother, who in turn, was more restrictive than her mother as her paternal grandfather was ill. Hence, her opportunity to become more independent was discouraged.

Sandra explains that her early to mid-school years were very unhappy for her. She felt she never fit in with her surroundings and would find herself changing her behaviour to fit in. Her home life was more stable in terms of her mother being more available as the business grew more successful, yet her father was more absent. She says her mother and father fought a lot during this period with her dad leaving on several occasions. She says it "felt like her mum and them against dad". In order to not be dismissed by her father she followed him around and became the "son he never had". By doing this she formed a bond

with her dad that neither her mother nor her sister had - or still have. However, the relationship is defined by certain things eg. fishing, boating, camping. When not in that environment, the relationship struggles. Her mother made "everything ok" by trying to not get her father angry by doing "the right things".

Sandra says that as a teenager she felt more of the same in terms of fitting in. She says that she isolated herself as she thought her friends would not want to be around her. She did not know what to do when she left school and worked in the family business for a few months. At around this time (18) she met her first boyfriend. This relationship last around 2 years. He mentioned she should join the Army and she applied. She told no-one about this in case she failed. She says she was surprised when she was accepted. She was very successful in this profession however feels that it was all accidental and attributes this success to "good luck" or "being in the right place at the right time". She had a good social life at this point in time however it was defined by her role as an Army Officer. She felt respected and in control until her relationship ended.

Sandra has had two unsuccessful marriages, both involving confident and protective men which became aggressive and controlling. She says they always start with her as a "princess" and end with her "at the kitchen sink". She is aware that "something happens" and she shuts down, almost creating the beginning of the end.

Sandra is extremely giving and concerned about others but to the detriment of herself. Everyone elses' needs are always put before her own, which makes her feel that she is unappreciated.

Sandra has decided to seek therapy for the following reasons:

- * She is aware that she has functioned largely by taking care of the needs of the people around her and she wants more than this. She reports that she doesn't know what "more than this is".
- * She is not sure if she can handle remaining in the business with her ex-husband. She worries about her right to make choices on the basis of her own needs and desires. She fears she will not be successful at taking a more central role to the business.

* Sandra would like to develop a sense of self apart from the expectations of her family. She wonders what she “should” want and what she “should” be feeling.

* Sandra’s relationship with her ex-husband was not satisfactory. She is unsure how to enter and maintain a functional relationship.

All of these factors combined have provided the motivations for her to take the necessary steps to initiate individual therapy.

Whether you are reacting to an event, or your life is just not working out the way you planned and you want more, therapy does not have to be a last resort. There is always a style and therapist that is right for you.

Please reach out to us at **Lifeskills Australia** on **1800 870 080** or **info@lifeskillsaustralia.com.au** to book a session under your workplace EAP.