Distraction Actions Assessment

A distraction action, as we like to call it, is a type of coping strategy used to divert attention away from how we're feeling, and direct it toward something unrelated. It is a behavior that minimizes the emotional distress related to how we're feeling.

Are distraction actions helpful or harmful? It depends on how we use them. If we use them for temporary relief, they can be helpful. If we use them to avoid, or even prevent unwanted emotions, they can be harmful to us.

> NOTE: Some distractions are destructive by their very nature because they harm us or others. A few examples are gossip, substance abuse, physical harm to self or others, shoplifting, etc.

Why look at our distractions? The purpose of doing this activity is to consider anything that is harming you.

Below is a list of some common ways that we distract ourselves from feeling. Check each statement that applies to you. If in doubt, then the statement may be true for you.

Gossip

_____ I love to talk about other people.
_____ I criticize other people for behaviors that also apply to me.
_____ I feel uncomfortable stopping those who gossip in my presence.
_____ I sometimes forget the similarities I share with others.
_____ I find myself eager to impart new information about someone to a mutual friend.
_____ I would have trouble stopping all talk about other people.
_____ I watch and analyze other people regularly.
_____ I spend more time thinking about other people's problems than my own.
_____ I have been caught in an embarrassing situation shooting my mouth off about someone.
_____ I am drawn to people who like to gossip.

Food and Eating

_____ Eating makes me feel guilty.
_____ I often focus on food and the next meal.
_____ I eat when I am upset.
_____ I binge on food, even after I am full.
_____ I eat sugar every day.
_____ I use food to make me feel better.
_____ I often eat food in bed at night.
_____ I buy a lot of junk food.
_____ Food is very important to me.

Work (this includes housework)

_____ Work is the most important thing in my life.
_____ I work more than 40 hours a week.
_____ I do not like to take much vacation because I might get behind.
_____ I become irritated with people who are unwilling to sacrifice and work as I do.
_____ I sometimes disappoint my family by working too much.
_____ I feel overpowered the day before a vacation trying to get everything done.
_____ I feel exhausted from working so hard.
_____ I work more than I really want to.
_____ I expect too much of myself at work.
_____ I believe in the work ethic of "Idle hands are the devil's workshop."

Sex

_____ I have sex with the wrong people.
_____ I make promises to myself concerning my sexual behavior and do not keep them.
_____ I have more than one sexual partner.
_____ I have sex to get away from my problems.
_____ I feel as though I have earned sex.
_____ I do not practice safe sex.
_____ I have sex in inappropriate places and at inappropriate times.
_____ I feel I am acting out sexually.
_____ My sexual behavior is frequently out of control.
_____ I think about sex more than once or twice a day.

Romance

_____ I feel incomplete without a 'significant other' in my life.
_____ I feel 'high' at times in a romantic encounter.
_____ I can establish "instant intimacy" with a partner.
_____ I have the ability to quickly recognize a 'cosmic' mate.
_____ I quickly pour out my life history to a lover.
_____ I experience instant sexual attraction.
_____ I feel as though a relationship can have a grip on me.
_____ I feel I can 'save' the partner in my love relationship.
_____ The relationship I am in is central to defining my identity.
_____ I can lose my boundaries in a love relationship.

Caretaking

_____ It feels good to me for people to be dependent on me.
_____ I prefer that my children rely on me rather than on themselves.
_____ Much of my thinking is about how the people I am in relationships with need to change.
_____ I like being responsible for other people, especially people I love.
_____ I have frequent judgmental and critical thoughts of others.
_____ I can think of solutions to other people's problems more than my own.
_____ I am not willing to let loved ones learn their own lessons in life.
_____ I would gladly sacrifice my own needs for others.
_____ Helping others gives me a high.
_____ I like relationships where I can tell others what to do.

Money, Debt, Spending

_____ I usually wait to pay my bills until the last minute.
_____ I get a 'high' when shopping.
_____ I spend money to escape my feelings.
_____ I live from paycheck to paycheck.
_____ I charge more than I can pay off in one month.
_____ I have little or no savings available for an emergency.
_____ I am repeatedly unsuccessful in my attempt to control my excessive spending.
_____ I am frequently short of cash and borrow from friends.
_____ I experience a great sense of relief when my paycheck arrives.
_____ I spend too much money on others or buy to impress or influence others.
_____ I sometimes lie, minimize, or rationalize to conceal my spending.

Staying Busy

_____ I dread being alone.
_____ I try to fill up every moment with something to do.
_____ I am easily bored.
_____ I like to keep a full social schedule, allowing me little time to be alone.
_____ Finding myself with some unscheduled time makes me uneasy.
_____ I like to brag about how busy I am.
_____ I rarely have a night alone.
_____ I like to keep activities scheduled, even on vacation.
_____ I watch more than ten hours of television/movies per week.
_____ I talk a lot.

Mood-Altering Substances

_____ I have had negative consequences occur in my life due to alcohol/drugs.
_____ I would have trouble giving these substances up for more than one month.
_____ I depend on one of these to mellow me out.
_____ I would feel uncomfortable socially if I turned one down.
_____ I like to have one, two, or more most nights.
_____ I tend to choose places where I know I can get these substances.
_____ Someone I love has asked me to slow down on consumption of one of these.
_____ I tend to be dishonest with myself sometimes and minimize how much I depend on one of these substances.
_____ I sometimes conveniently forget how much I have used a substance.
_____ I have tried to stop but cannot follow through with a plan.

Drama

_____ I love crisis and find myself enjoying talking about other people's tragedies.
_____ I feel a heightened sense of excitement when either myself or someone else is facing a dilemma.
_____ I love talking about others when something exciting or negative is going on in the world.
_____ I have always loved weather extremes or hearing about tornadoes, hurricanes, or other dangerous weather conditions.
_____ I feel a heightened sense of pleasure to think I can help someone in trouble.
_____ I would love to be a fireman, an emergency room helper, or a person helping other victims.
_____ Drama in my life or another person's life has always interested me.
_____ I find myself drawn to negative circumstances that are dangerous or exciting.

Tech, Gaming

_____ I spend hours gaming, and I even lose all track of time.
_____ People have complained about the amount of time I spend on my phone.
_____ I feel intimidated when I think about having a direct conversation with someone.
_____ Most of my relationships are virtual; with people that I have never met face to face.
_____ I avoid face to face conversations. I would rather text or message my friends.
_____ I lose all track of time scrolling through social apps just to see what everyone else is doing.
_____ I have to keep up on the latest games, apps, and happenings so that I don't miss something or fall behind.
_____ There are parts of my life that are way out of whack, yet I still find time to game or scroll.

Add up the total number of checks for each category. If you have checked more than five on any one area, look closely at the power that distraction may have over you.

Gossip ____ Food/Eating ____ Work/Housework ____ Sex ____ Romance ____ Caretaking ____

Money/Debt/Spending ____ Mood/Altering Substances ____ Drama ____ Tech/Gaming ____

List any other distractions not listed above that you know you depend on to avoid your feelings. Sleep? Reading? Shopping? Write them here.

_____

Now, look over your work above. What say you? What are your top three distraction actions? List them below.

My Top Three Distraction Actions

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Reflection Questions

Now, reflect on the following questions for each of your top three distraction actions.

1. Do I enjoy this particular distraction, yet it ultimately hurts me?
2. Is this something that I wish I could stop doing?

If you answered "Yes", continue below.

My Top Three New Helpful Habits

Brainstorm ways to stop a distraction action by swapping them with a behavior that is more helpful.

What is something that I want to start doing, instead of the distraction, to better fulfill my needs?

For Distraction #1: _____

For Distraction #2: _____

For Distraction #3: _____

Action Question

What am I willing to do to start allowing myself to feel my emotions? Write some ideas below.

_____

Congratulations on your new insight!
Suze and Jenni