

Case Study: Reggie and Todd

Two men are seeking services for couples coaching after being released from prison. Reggie is a 26-year-old African American man with a stocky, athletic build, and Todd is a 30-year-old Caucasian man with a slight frame.

Reggie is wearing a very revealing muscle shirt and shorts and is sweaty from the heat outside. Todd is dressed in a pink cotton polo shirt with shorts and appears to have a “preppie” style. The men are invited into the office to be interviewed; each one selects his own couch to sit. Todd takes the lead in speaking and during the interview, and he frequently talks over and interrupts Reggie.

Todd reports that he was released from prison 3 months ago, 1 month prior to Reggie, and has been under a lot of pressure to find resources for himself and his partner so they could reintegrate into society. This stress, along with other issues, has taken a toll on their relationship.

Todd reports that he is estranged from his family and only speaks to his mother from time to time because she is very emotionally abusive towards him and “drives him to drink.” Reggie reports that his relationships with members of his family are “very complicated.” He discloses that his mother died while he was serving his prison sentence and he has not really come to terms with it. Reggie has two sisters from whom he is estranged — they refuse to speak to him and will not give him information about his mother’s last days. The two agree that they are left supporting each other on the “outside” and feel they are learning how to function again in the “real” world.

Todd states that he has served his time, whereas Reggie has a parole officer to whom he must report regularly. Todd states that he is resentful of the ankle bracelet Reggie has to wear that monitors his every move and does not allow him to live freely.

When Reggie was released, he moved in with Todd in the apartment Todd had rented. Two weeks ago, Reggie moved out of the apartment and into a room in a local halfway house. Todd explains that after 6 weeks of constant arguing that frequently escalated into physical violence, Todd threatened Reggie with a knife because he was so scared. That day, Reggie left the apartment before it got physical, and the police were not called. Reggie did inform his parole officer, and the officer found Reggie the room in the boarding house so Reggie would not violate his parole. Todd later helped Reggie set up the room and bought him some basics so he could live comfortably.

Todd states that he wants Reggie to be able to come back home but cannot tolerate the physical abuse. Reggie states that he is extremely stressed by his own expectations and his feelings that he is not making it outside of prison. He states that he feels like he has to depend on his partner for everything, and at this point, has no other choice. He further explains that he was raised to take care of himself and not have to rely on others.

The men agreed to continue to work on the relationship if referred to counseling. Todd states that he is very anxious about the situation and wants Reggie to move back home as soon as his parole officer will give approval. Reggie states that his main goal is to get things established for himself such as finding a job, meeting the expectations of his parole, and being independent.

Todd is very charming and confident during the interview process, while Reggie is quiet and keeps

his hands clasped tightly together in his lap. Reggie states that one of his concerns is Todd's behavior in public and how it draws attention to them as a couple. The attention makes Reggie extremely uncomfortable.

Todd interjects that he sees a psychiatrist for his mental health and substance abuse issues. Todd also reports that his drug issue plays a significant role in the problems in their relationship. He reports that his current drug use was triggered by the stress of being released from prison first (and alone) and then later from having to endure the physical abuse by his partner. He states that his drug of choice is cocaine, which has been a problem for him for many years, sending him to prison. Todd further reports that his psychiatrist has placed him on lithium and trazodone for his bipolar disorder.

Reggie reports that he smokes marijuana occasionally and has been drinking alcohol regularly since he was a teenager. He states that he does not think either of these is a problem for him and does not see where it is a problem for him to use in front of Todd. Todd states he is resentful that Reggie is not supportive of him in his daily battle to remain clean and sober and that Reggie's recreational drug use in front of him is extremely difficult to deal with.

Todd states that he is on Social Security disability for his mental health disorder because it cost him his job as a realtor several years back and he has been unable to work since. Todd says he also receives compensation and insurance from his previous employer. Reggie states that he has enrolled in the "STARS" program set up for people who have been recently released from prison to help him find employment and re-enter the job market; however, he says he is still struggling to find employment in this program. He reports that this is a source of tension for him because he needs to be out there working and supporting himself. He again mentions that he does not like not being able to support himself and having to rely on someone else.

The two agree that they both have a lot to work on and are under a lot of stress being on the "outside."