

“A Woman’s Plimsoll Line”

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The “Plimsoll Line” was invented by Samuel Plimsoll. Sometimes sailors will call it the “waterline.” It is a simple marker on the side of naval ships, indicating the limit to which a ship may be loaded. The Plimsoll line is adjusted on each boat depending upon its makeup, and also for specific water types and temperatures. Temperature impacts where the marker is placed because warm water provides less buoyancy, being less dense than cold water. Salt water also impacts where the marker is placed, because fresh water is less dense than salty seawater.

The purpose of a Plimsoll Line is to ensure that a ship will stay afloat. All captains must know the limitations of their ship. Without this knowledge, an inexperienced captain endangers his crew and cargo. All commercial ships are required by law have the Plimsoll Line symbol painted on each side of the ship. This protects the public’s safety. This symbol must also be permanently marked, so that if the paint wears off it remains visible. The load line makes it easy for anyone to determine if a ship has been overloaded.

Below is an example of the “Plimsoll Line” drawn on the side of a commercial ship.



Most women will struggle finding out about their husband's sexual addiction and behaviors. The information about his infidelity can be traumatic. She can feel overwhelmed and "loaded up" with heavy cargo. Her own personal "Plimsoll Line" is uniquely her own. Metaphorically, this would refer to her ability to "stay afloat" amidst the trauma of what is going on. Her ability to emotionally handle the situation will be different than other women. Just like naval ships have different factors determining where the line is drawn, there are many different factors that contribute to a woman's ability to work through trauma. Such factors could include childhood events, history of abuse, age, physical health, ability to self-care, mental health, financial distress and family cohesion.

Because each woman is unique, her Plimsoll line will be unique. What one woman can tolerate will be different than another woman. However, the line is there; when she is overloaded beyond her capacity she will capsize. When she capsizes, it will look like trauma response. Women should be cautious NOT to compare themselves to other women, as every woman is unique in this regard.

What is a woman to do? Work toward self-awareness, which will give her insight toward important self-care items. Consider areas of physical attention: sufficient sleep, healthy eating, exercise, hygiene, etc. Consider areas of spiritual connection: church activity, scripture study, prayer, etc. Consider areas that personally energize: hobbies, friends, activities, music, clubs, counseling, etc. Working toward self-care in these areas will help her prevent capsizing. When a woman feels ready to "capsize," she must slow down, get support, engage self-care, and find balance.

What is an addict to do for his wife? Demonstrate patience and practice safety. When his wife is upset, she may be exhibiting a trauma reaction. Recognize it as such, and work for understanding and validation. Practice the "safe language" outlined in workbook nine of LifeSTAR, and learn to recognize YOUR wife's response by doing the exercises. Remember that her healing may take time, and it can only occur when the relationship is safe. How do you develop a "safe" relationship? Needless to say, your sobriety will go a long way in creating safety. However, even when you slip your honesty and transparency help your wife feel safer with you. Sharing with her the tools you utilize in your recovery will also help.

Don't expect that a woman's trauma response will go away just because a man is sober. It takes time. You must patiently walk with her. This may require your own self-care. Does her trauma response trigger faulty core beliefs? If so, a man must slow down, get support, use his own tools, engage his own self-care, and find balance.

In summary, be aware of the "Plimsoll Line." Don't overload. To stay committed to your recovery doesn't always mean a woman must be *tough-enough*. Sometimes it means she must be *smart-enough* to know her limitations!

Floyd Godfrey is the Director of the LifeSTAR Mesa, Arizona office with Family Strategies & Coaching. The Mesa office has been implementing LifeSTAR programming since 2005, and has served nearly 700 individuals struggling with these issues. For more information about please visit Floyd's website: www.familystrategies.org -or- call us toll free at: 877-271-9389.