

Kort's Korner



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Joe's practice specializes in sexual addiction, childhood sexual, physical and emotional abuse, depression and anxiety.

He offers workshops for couples and singles. He runs a gay men's group therapy and a men's sexuality group therapy for straight, bi and gay men who are struggling with specific sexual issues.

His therapy services are for gays and lesbians as well as heterosexuals.

Book Review By John R. Ballew, MS, LPC

10 Smart Things Gay Men Can do to Improve Their Lives

Sometimes it's tough being a psychotherapist. We often listen and watch while clients do things we don't think reflect very good choices, but it doesn't usually work to tell clients what to do as if we were their parents. Instead we try to help them find their own ways to make their lives better. Joe Kort, a psychotherapist in Detroit, no doubt wrote *Ten Smart Things Gay Men Can Do To Improve Their Lives* to do exactly that. *Ten Smart Things* reflects the distilled wisdom of years of working with people who are hurting. So what are the "ten smart things," anyway? Heres the list:

- Take responsibility for your own life.
- Affirm yourself by coming out.
- Resolve issues with your family.
- Graduate from eternal adolescence.
- Avoid (or overcome) sexual addiction.
- Learn from successful mentors who've been there, done that.
- Take advantage of therapy "workouts."
- Maintain rewarding relationships.
- Understand the stages of love.
- Commit to a partner.

A commendable list, and doing these things will indeed make your life better. As someone who grew up and came out in another large midwestern city (St. Louis), I found myself wondering how much Kort's geographic location affected his list. The Midwest is a conservative region where being different isn't easy. Much of his book points toward the challenge gay men face around coming out and forming healthy identities in a homophobic culture. For that

reason, I think *Ten Smart Things* is most useful for men who are early in the process of coming out or who are struggling with owning their gay identity.

Kort is an accomplished relationship therapist, and the sections of his book that deal with love, intimacy and relationships reflect his warmth and wisdom. Our early relationships with family and friends have an enormous impact on how

we approach intimacy later in life. Readers will find this a useful introduction in understanding how issues show up in adult relationships. The realistic, heart-centered information about dating and coupling found in this book is quite constructive.

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Joe Kort MA, MSW, ACSW
25600 Woodward Ave,
Ste 218
Royal Oak, MI 48067
Tel: (248) 399-7317
Email joekort@joekort.com
Website: www.joekort.com

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I do not share the author's comfort with the term "sexual addiction." His exploration of the ways compulsive behavior can impact our lives is of use, but his examples don't reflect the dilemmas contemporary gay men face every day. For most of our community, compulsive cruising is less of an issue than making responsible decisions about bareback sex, partying and the whole circuit scene. For every gay man risking arrest in a park or rest stop, I suspect there are a thousand men struggling with why they can't count on themselves to use condoms when having sex. Too many gay men have problems that stem from having sex under the influence of crystal, ecstasy and other party drugs. I wish the book included more words addressing those issues.

I like Kort's idea of a relatively short list with a relatively big impact; like the book itself, it's clear and concise. What would I have on my own list of things that would improve the lives of gay men?

- Rein in your use of drugs and alcohol.
- Nurture a healthy spirituality that supports you.
- Let your sexuality reflect genuine self-love.
- Develop a social network that isn't too dependent on bars and clubs.
- Understand peer pressure and learn to make your own decisions.
- Cultivate a realistic relationship with your body and with aging.
- Give something back to the LGBT community.

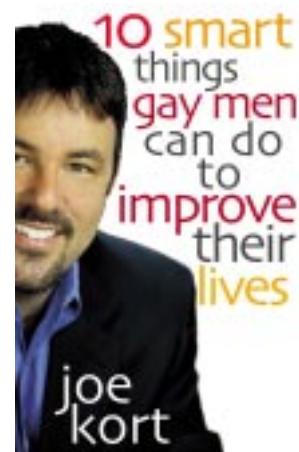
Ten Smart Things does what it sets out to do make a useful contribution to our community's emotional and mental health. I recommend it to men who are working through issues of self-acceptance, coming out and intimacy.

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Joe Kort MA, MSW, ACSW
25600 Woodward Ave,
Ste 218
Royal Oak, MI 48067
Tel: (248) 399-7317
Email joekort@joekort.com
Website: www.joekort.com



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