

CHANGING THE ADDICTIVE MINDSET

THE DEEPER PROBLEM OF DRUG ADDICTION

Most addicts have traveled a predictable cycle, with an identifiable origin through to an identifiable end. At its start, the addict's compulsive behavior begins with the need to apply a “quick fix” to ease, perhaps, an emotional pain. This behavior repeats itself, and becomes impulsive, irrational and irresponsible. In the end, the addict is generally in full denial of his addiction but lacks the ability to control it.

Interestingly, the addict's compulsive behavior has been likened to certain psychological characteristics that the addict may be displaying at that time. These characteristics are:

- High interest in sensation seeking
- Low self-esteem
- Live in a dysfunctional home
- Ego deficiency
- Emotional wounds
- Regressive tendencies
- Repressed anger or fear
- More rebellious
- Untrustworthy
- Impulsive

A display of one or more of these psychological characteristics leads an addict-prone person to drugs as a way to desensitize.

COMPULSIVE ORIGIN

The addict's preexisting personality difficulties/psychological characteristics make for a “bad root system”. Because the addict's roots are bad, his life produces additional hurts or difficulties. His ability to cope is inadequate. The addict may mistakenly see his life as a straight line. He thinks, “What happened to me in my past could not possibly effect me today.” This is especially true if he has learned to repress his feelings. He may have been told to, “Shake it off! Don't let it bother you!” So he buried the feelings, secrets, experiences, deep within him and thought that they went away.

Like the rings of a tree, however, the addict's repressed experiences and emotions are always discoverable and threaten to destroy him. Unhealed hurts effect him the rest of his life in indirect ways.

Since the addict has repressed pain, he looks for a way to deal with it. Unfortunately, he deals with the surface pain (the symptom) instead of looking inward to the root cause.

The addict's compulsive origin has four components:

1, The addict experiences an unmet need or a painful life situation.

Conflict, family crisis, psychological or physical pain produces tension and pressure. When too much pressure builds up, our body releases the pressure and surrenders to pain. When too much pressure is in a given area, that part of the body surrenders to pain and shuts down to release the pressure. For example, when a person does “chin ups” on a bar, he can only do as many as his strength will let him. When the pain starts in his arms or his strength to hold on diminishes, he is going to let go.

2, The released pressure of an unmet need creates an opposite or corresponding pressure.

This throws the person into an imbalance that can only be relieved by engaging in some form of undesirable behavior. Here we have the genesis of the problem. The undesirable behavior now threatens to become the addiction.

3, The surrender to the behavior brings a sense of relief, and denial.

Relief may be profound. With it is a reduction of pain and denial that the behavior had a casual relationship to the relief. Denial plays a formative role in all addictions. In fact, it seems that for a behavior to become addicting, the relief it provides must be denied. The deeper the behavior sinks into the subconscious, the more powerful the addiction.

4, Once the addictive behavior is completed, the tension and pressure reappears. This person must begin to deal with the real problem or the addiction root system continues to grow.[24]

No one decides one day that he is going to become addicted to some form of substance. As described above, addictive roots start with deep seated psychological characteristics or, perhaps, a serious circumstance in the individual's life. Poor coping skills lead the addict-prone individual to undesirable resolution of root problems through inappropriate behavior. The cycle repeats itself, and becomes damaging. The troubled individual will then create root systems that are damaging and addictive to that personality and life.

We call addiction idolatry because these things can become “gods” for us. Many times we look to our idols to meet our needs. They may provide for us: *security, value, self-worth, a sense of being loved*, and a way of easing our burdens or escaping from them.

CHANGING THE COMPULSIVE NATURE

CHANGE: BY FACING FEAR

By now we've come to understand that anger is a byproduct of fear. Because of uncertainty, people lash out to defend themselves. When an individual allows anger to internalize, he then becomes angry with himself for not taking control of his problem earlier.

At this point it is very easy for one to blame and condemn himself for allowing his life to get so out of control. This always creates a poor self-image. The result of a poor self image is a feeling of powerlessness.

For someone to face his fears, he must build a healthy self-confidence that he can make it, and learn to face his dilemmas.

CHANGE: BY BREAKING OFF ADDICTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Addictive relationships are very harmful for those who are changing their compulsive nature. The influence of “old friends” (users) is very strong. Their own denial pattern was just like their addictive friends.

For the most part they will try to sway the individual into joining them in a drink or form of a drug. "Let's do it for old times sake." If the addictive person has not decided to stay in recovery their influence weakens his will and he gives in.

When the addict decides that enough is enough, he will find that those "friends" were only friends because of his chemical use/abuse.

CHANGE: BY ADMITTING THAT THE ADDICTION IS A PROBLEM

In most addictions, there is a high degree of denial. The addict refuses to perceive of his habit as abnormal or wrong. He considers himself justified or even "normal".[32] To change, he must become honest with himself and surrender his will, heart, and intellect to God. If the addict justifies himself, he will continue in his addiction.

CHANGE: BY NOT BELITTLING, RATIONALIZING, OR EXCUSING THE ADDICTION

When attempting to emerge from denial, the addict understands that he has a problem, but often rationalizes his addiction into respectability. "Why did you do it?" you may ask. "I have a perfectly good excuse for doing it. It helps me cope with my problems. It helps me deal with my friends and family." In reality it does neither. He must stop lying to himself and others. He must refuse to make excuses. He needs to ask God to deliver him from rationalizing.

CHANGE: BY IDENTIFYING THE HARMFUL ASPECTS OF THE ADDICTION

Accountability to others is essential when dealing with the harmful aspect of addiction.

I believe we should have three close relationships; our Pastor, spouse and a close friend of the same gender. It is easier for a person to change if they can identify and understand harmful consequences. The individual's recovery depends upon his ability to recognize the problem and the life he is missing because of the addictions.

We can identify two important aspects of recovery:

1. Personally. Does the addict know why he has the problem? It is not the world, his friends, nor even the substance he is abusing. It is something within him.
2. Relational. Is the addict willing to cut off all ties to addictive lifestyles? The addictive relationship will go against his recovery plan and will hinder his spiritual growth.

CHANGE: BY HAVING THE COURAGE TO BE VULNERABLE

Confidence and trust must be building blocks in the foundation of recovery. The addict must be willing to talk about the reasons behind his addictions. Open confession will not only help the individual to become stronger, it will help someone else who is struggling with the same thing.

Remember, failure is not the end, but a beginning! As we will discuss in a later chapter, change is never smooth and problem-free. There will be setbacks and relapses. Relapse does not necessarily mean that a person has failed, and that there is no use to go on. Relapse may tell him what areas he is weak in and needs help. He needs to learn and go on.

CHANGE: BY BUILDING COPING SKILLS

We live in an imperfect world. People will do and say things that upset us. We cannot change them, and yet we cannot live without them. The addict's only course of action is to learn to live with them.[33]

1. He must learn to handle negative information.
2. He needs to be assertive, not hostile.
3. He must not allow other people to control him.
4. He must resist revenge.
5. He must enforce logical consequences.

CHANGE: BY GETTING INVOLVED IN HELPING OTHERS

Hans Sclye, the father of modern stress psychology, concluded that people are the most fulfilled and at ease when they are involved in what he coined "benevolent philanthropy", which is giving to others with love as the motive.

The addictive individual is very selfish. He is a narcissist. He looks out only for himself, and disregards the needs of others. Progressive behavior is highly unlikely as long as they remain in this state.

The addict must break away from glorifying self-exaltation to helping and caring for others.

CHANGE: BY BEING WISE IN SELECTING THE PROPER SUPPORT GROUP

Selecting the right after care program or group is very important. The individual works toward remaining clean by choosing whom he will “hang out” with. The wrong one will influence him back toward his addictive lifestyle. Many judges agree that religious after-care groups are among the best. A spiritual based program will help him to be honest with himself and others. A non-moralistic group will fill his head with ideas and theories that are untrue and will not work.

The ingraining of thoughts and sentiments, over time, forms established behavioral patterns. Often, these learned behaviors have very little truth. **This is the reason many continue going to programs (meetings) without changing.** They have swapped one addiction for another and have become addicted to meetings.

Between the ages of twelve and eighteen, I drank alcohol and took many drugs. I was eighteen when God delivered me and now, more than twenty years later, I have not relapsed or had the desire to use them. Why is that? The answer: When Jesus sets you free, you are free indeed!

Christ replaces a person's addiction with his presence. He gives him the power to overcome. That is why we never say at our meetings “Hi, I'm so-and-so, the addict”. I am not an addict. I am not recovering. I recovered, past tense, over twenty years ago.

Why is it that others cannot obtain recovery and have to attend meetings? Some say, “I'll have to for the rest of my life.” It is simple. They do not want to be totally honest in their lives and take a moral investigation of their soul. Addiction is a choice. So is complete recovery.

Continue to grow spiritually.

The addict must resist the tendency to hold onto Jesus as a sort of life preserver. He delivers people, but he wants to be much more than a life preserver. He wants believers to grow in his grace and with the fruit of the spirit. His power grows in us as we obey the word of God. The complete “cure” is to be **FULL** of the Holy Ghost.

Addiction is not just something the addict does. Addiction is a part of the character and nature of the person. A bond forms between the individual and his addiction that makes them inseparable. The bonding is strong because it has become a form of survival to the addict. The addiction becomes the person, and the person becomes the addiction.