

The Basis of Addictions

This workbook will focus on three things; the first is the nature of addiction and will give you some insight into why. The second will focus on thinking or cognition and offer some guidelines to changing your pattern of thinking and coping and the third will be a section on life in recovery. It is important that you do the homework and the exercises. These will keep you on track and with them you can review how well you are doing. Remember that this will be hard work. It is hard work to leave behind a long-standing pattern. That pattern of drinking or drug abuse was developed by you to cope. The idea here is to find other ways in which you can cope and deal with life and stress.

It is important also to remember that recovery is not a one-time thing, you will always be in recovery. It is like someone who works out in a gym. Once they attain the body that they want with hard muscles if they do not continue to work at it, to diet and continue weight lifting, they will lose the body shape they worked so hard to get. The same is true of addictions. Recovery is best understood as a work in progress and so it is not uncommon for recovering addicts to refer to themselves as addicts even if they are 30 years drug free.

PART ONE

The Addiction itself, the why, the how the feelings

Things to remember:

It has taken years if you are a drinker to progress from a pleasure drinker, to a problem drinker to the disaster drinker you are now. The terms sometimes bother people, but it is best to understand them like this. A pleasure drinker is someone who has an occasional drink but does not get drunk. A problem drinker is one whose drinking, hangovers, has caused problems but nothing that they cannot handle. Or at least nothing they think they cannot handle. A disaster drinker, is one whose drinking leads to DUI's, job loss, marital loss. In short, when drinking or drugs totally takes over your life, it is best to look at it not as a small problem but as a disaster! The labels don't really

matter is always important to remember that although you have this problem, you are taking the steps to change. Change takes time and change takes work. DONT BE IMPATIENT.

Recovery is not easy nor is it quick. In fact, relapse is common. It may take you years before you are confident and serene and feel you can cope and live without drugs or alcohol.

ACCEPTANCE OF YOUR PROBLEM

The hardest thing to admit is that there is a problem. We live in a world where we are told to be together, to have no problems. When asked how we are, the standard reply is fine, even if we feel terrible. If you grew up in a family of alcoholics the key rule was to hide the drinking, to deny that there is any problem to act as if everything was normal. Deep down, if you are like most alcoholics (or problem or disaster drinkers) you knew for a while you had a problem but resisted seeking help because of the label. An alcoholic you think is a down-and-out bum on the street, or someone like your Uncle Henry. You push away the label and resist getting help because you don't want to be classed in the same boat as these people. This is often a real problem for people who have prided themselves on problem solving or hard working. They just can't admit that there is any problem in the world that they cannot beat by their own efforts without outside help. Yet, if we have a broken leg, none of us would imagine that we could set it ourselves without help. Somehow, drinking and psychological problems are considered to be a sign of weakness.

Don't resist or resent or be ashamed of the label. Many look at addiction as a disease and while some treatment specialists disagree with this, I think it is healthy to look at it as a disease at least for the first part of your treatment as this will help you achieve sobriety. When you have a disease, no one would call you weak. You are not weak for having the disease, anymore than one is weak for getting flu or being diagnosed diabetic. There are six million alcoholics in Canada. Think of it as disease and never be ashamed or too proud to get the help you need.

PRIDE:

Once you become a sober alcoholic or addict, you will take on a new life. Many of recovering or recovered addicts will tell you that despite all that they have lost in recovery they gain far more than they lost. Why? While they may have lost their drinking buddies and the beers after work, or the parties, they have gained self insight and self awareness which enables them to perhaps for

the first time understand who they are and accept others. The sober life is not a boring life; it is instead a life with self-understanding.

MILESTONES AND BLOCKS TO RECOVERY

There will be times when you want a drink or drugs so badly you can taste it. This is why a support system, a sponsor is so important. At times like this it is **CRUCIAL** to speak with someone who has been there. This is one reason why telephones are so useful! It is essential to speak with your sponsor or therapist at these moments because without that support, relapse is around the corner.

There will be days or weeks when despite the progress you make, it will seem to you that nothing has changed. You have worked hard, but you still have problems with your friends or spouse and your moods are the same. It is easy to become discouraged and yet such plateaux are inevitable. It may simply mean that you need a few more challenges to stave off boredom. At this point, you may think that sobriety is simply not worth the effort.

Secondly, you may not have the rewards you expect from sobriety. You somehow expected the sober life to be exciting, full of new friends and pleasures and yet your telephone is silent and the life that you thought would happen is not there. You find yourself thinking back to your drinking or drug days with fond memories. Such thinking is unrealistic. These thinking patterns are very common to addicts and will be discussed in a later section.

The goal of sobriety is serenity, peace and self-forgiveness. To forgive yourself means firstly to know yourself. While you may think you know who you are, chances are the reason you began drinking or drugging was to avoid facing some painful things in the past. You drank to forget. It was easier to drink than to look inside yourself. Thus, it is often the case that addicts do not really understand themselves and why they think and act the way they do. As a result they are consumed by guilt over their actions and lost lives. It is important and imperative to recovery and sobriety to learn how to forgive yourself. This does not mean cutting yourself so much slack that you don't take any responsibility for what you have done. But forgiving yourself is to understand the difference between being wracked with guilt and shame over things that may have happened years ago, and taking responsibility and putting the steps in place so that those actions that caused so much trauma to other people because of your addictions, will never happen again. To forgive

yourself is simply to recognise what you have done, and to put into place steps, treatment and work to ensure that you will not repeat those mistakes. It is paramount that you know right now that self-forgiveness is critical. This is not easy. Addicts suffer from low self-esteem and often abuse drugs simply to reinforce their guilt. The guilt trip machine that addicts have actually pushes them to abuse again and again. After all, if you think about what you have done, you start to convince yourself that you are worthless and cannot change, and thus convince yourself that you may as well continue using drugs and drinking, since life is rotten and you have burned too many bridges anyway.

Avoiding 'losers'

Auld Lang Syne!

Many of your former friends will be addicts or drinkers. It is important to avoid them. This is not being a snob or nasty it is simply refusing to play Russian Roulette. Relapses are almost always the result of testing yourself with friends who urge you to have 'just one drink'. A true friend will respect your decision to remain sober, but a drinking or using buddy will not. With drinking and using buddies, your whole social life was controlled or dominated by the drug and alcohol. Whether the activity was hunting, golf, fishing drinks and drugs were always there. The concept of saying no and avoiding your old associates and friends is perhaps one of the hardest but most valuable of any sobriety program. I would even say that in the initial stages of recovery, it is better to only associate with people who have had long standing sobriety.

Hang out with Winners

Choose new friends who are making a change in their life, the recovering addicts. You will find that you have a lot in common with them. Addicts tend to be down on themselves, so it is important to try and associate with positive people. Associate with people who have goals and direction in their lives and are a pleasure to be with.

Over-Confidence

Sometimes, you will find that everything seems easy, you know it all and you in fact think you don't need to attend AA or NA and you go on your own. This is very common with people who are in the early stages of recovery. They have done well, and they think that they no longer need those boring meetings or that they can call their old friends again. After all, they reason, they know it all now, or they have done it before. When you find yourself bored, thinking you know it

all, when you find yourself impatient at meetings and anxious to hurry up your recovery STOP. Relapse is but a drink away. Over confidence always spells disaster.

Relapses

Addictions are a relapsing illness. That is to say, that no matter how hard you try there will be days when you are tempted. At times, you may even give into the temptation. Unfortunately when a relapse occurs in addictions, we often don't take the necessary steps. Instead of getting back on track with meetings and counselling, we berate ourselves and feel worthless. The "what is the use" attitude will take over and once again we will drink or use drugs. This is not true when we catch other diseases. Think about if you have a cold. You may rest in bed and get better but then a few months down the road catch another cold. When this happens, we do not give up and lie on the road waiting to die! Somehow with addictions, when we relapse we take it as a breach of our self worth and go into crisis. The terrible guilt and feelings of worthlessness that accompany a relapse, can often lead to further more devastating drug abuse. These feelings are the result of faulty thinking and childhood memories in many cases. Our mind is like a tape recorder and when we relapse, we hear the messages played in our head that we are worthless and that life is not worth living. It is time to turn that faulty message off!

When you relapse, don't panic. Be prepared but expect to pick yourself up and start again. In many ways relapse prevention is like having life jackets on board of a boat. You don't expect the boat to sink or get into trouble, but if it does it is comforting and life saving to have life jackets and life rafts on board. Relapse prevention is simply about knowing your danger areas and having safety valves to protect yourself. Sobriety is the first step in the long journey to wholesome living.

THE EVIL 6 R's

There are six R's that will put blocks to your journey.

REGRET: Regret for you past behaviour is normal but don't let it hinder you from forgiving yourself. You have heard the old adage, poor me, poor me, pour me a drink! This is because regrets and feelings of guilt can lead you simply to give up. You may have lost friends, families, jobs and years from your life, but the point is that today is a new day. You cannot change the past, but you can make steps to control what you do today!

REMORSE: Remorse is normal as well, unless it takes over your thoughts and you cannot function because of your remorse for your past actions. I often hear from my clients that their life is ruined. They simply cannot go on because of their jail sentence. They have lost too much. It is important to understand that feeling sad for such loss is normal. You would have to be insane not to feel sad because you have lost so much because of your addictions, but there is a dividing line between feeling sad about a loss and being crippled by a loss.

A good example is someone who is a soldier in a war. The soldier may see their friends killed. Some were never able to recover from that. They suffered from nervous breakdowns and shell shocks; others were able to go on. They still felt for their friends and were sad but were able to survive and go on. The first group returned home, crippled with scared minds. The second group came home sadder and wiser but able to incorporate those experiences into their civilian life. Be sad for your loss, but be prepared to put it behind you, learn from it and move on.

RESENTMENTS:

If you cannot forgive yourself because you keep regretting what has happened and are filled with remorse and cannot let go of the past, you will begin to resent yourself and your treatment efforts. What is wrong with you, you will reason. You cannot simply go on, and you start to feel that your efforts in treatment are wasted. You will become cynical and negative you will in fact, start to hate yourself and others who are on the road to recovery.

RESERVATIONS;

At this point, you will have reservations about the need for sobriety. If it is so hard, who needs it? You start to wonder. I like to call this type of thinking, romancing the drug. You will find yourself thinking about drinking and drug use and forgetting all the trouble it caused but remembering, or rather imagining the 'good' times. Sobriety is so much work, and there are so many things to look at, that it may be easier if you simply go back to your old life.

RATIONALIZATIONS

Now not only do you question, you make excuses. This whole process has begun because you cannot forgive yourself and have written yourself off as a failure in life. There is no point in trying and if you do try, you are a phoney. Now you begin to make excuses about why you should use drugs or drink. You imagine that you can control the amount you use. One drink, one

hit will be all you will do. Of course, you know what happens. One drink leads to another and another and this is relapse.

RELAPSE

The sad tragedy of alcoholism and drug abuse is that each relapse is more serious than the previous one. I have had clients tell me that they fall harder each time they go off the wagon. This may explain why some people simply give up, and choose rather to die with a needle in their arm or a bottle in their hand. This is why alcoholism is often referred to as a progressive disease.

MORE HURDLES

In recovery, you will notice that you will be irritable, your moods will swing, your eyes will be dry, and you will be emotional. Believe it or not, this is a delayed symptom of withdrawal. It is your body adjusting to being drug free. This is the case for alcohol, for other drugs the withdrawal symptoms are different involving stomach cramps. Alcohol withdrawal has sometimes the effect of you thinking that you have lost your ability to think. You will have a hard time to remember dates and times and events. You will find it almost impossible to concentrate and these troubles can last for days or weeks. You may be restless or engage in frenzied activity. There will also be a lot of fatigue.

JOBS

It is important to your recovery and self worth that you try to get back into work. Keep your sights lower at first and ease into the job market slowly. Don't push it or expect miracles.

DEBTS

Most addicts are heavily in debt. It is important to clear this up. Get help with a credit bureau and cut up your credit cards. There are many agencies such as the Debtors assistance board that can help you out here.

Lastly there are a few Common sense Guidelines that you must NEVER forget

a) ANY person who is sincere and makes an effort over a long period of time can learn to be drug free. This means YOU.

- b) Once a person has passed that threshold from normal to abnormal drinking they can NEVER learn how to control the drinking. Loss of control is PERMANENT. There are those who believe that controlled drinking or drug use is possible, but the odds are against it. It is better to look at your drinking and drug use as a life-threatening allergy and never go back to it.
- c) You must be convinced FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE, that your reaction to drugs and alcohol is ABNORMAL and that ANY indulgence will lead you back into an impossible, undesirable unhealthy way of life. It is not good enough to read books on the subject or listen to tapes on the matter. Your sobriety is YOUR sobriety. You need to be convinced from your OWN experiences. This is why keeping a journal of your experiences and feelings are so very important.
- d) You must know that in giving up your drugs and drink you are NOT a hero or a martyr to be pitied. You are doing it to SAVE YOUR LIFE. Do not go to parties where they serve drinks and spend the evening feeling sorry for yourself. If you had a life-threatening allergy to peanuts would you order a bowl of peanuts?
- e) The objective you must have is not merely sobriety but wholeness and the ability to function as a responsible happy member of society.
- f) You must look at RECOVERY as the most important thing in your life. Notice how I did use the word sobriety. Sobriety or stopping drug and drink is step one. The goal is really recovery. Your goal is to look into yourself and start to live a life not full of regrets remorse, resentment and rage but full of joy and serenity.
- h) You must learn how to handle successes and failures and NEVER feel you have it made and therefore don't need the support systems that are available.
- I) You must avoid 'losers'. The old addict friends, the pimps, pushers, drinkers and so forth.
- j) You must not expect recovery to be quick or painless. The rewards must be earned.
- k) You must watch against day dreaming, where you think of the 'good times in the bar'

l) You must learn that some emotions lead you to dangerous actions. You must learn never to wallow in resentment, anger or hostility. These emotions escalate and can lead you quickly into a relapse.

m) You must conquer your feelings of shame and worthlessness, and develop your own strengths and inner resources.

o). Lastly, don't look upon your recovery as drudgery or something you are forced to do. Do it with joy and with the knowledge that you will begin a happier and more wholesome life. I believe that your attitude towards recovery is crucial to your success or failure.

The first part of this course will give you tools to measure your feelings and to begin the road to recovery.

ANGER and other TRAPS

It is clear that most addicts have been taught not to feel. This often goes back to the childhood experiences. Many addicts come from a family of addicts and one of the first rules one learns when coming from an addicted family is not to feel. You learn quickly to mistrust your feelings. If your parents are alcoholics, you learn not to believe the promises they make you learn not to trust them when they want to drive you home, your life is one of disappointments.

You start, in short to learn that your feelings are not to be trusted. Even if you did not grow up in an addicted family, chances are somewhere in your past you experienced terrible rejection or pain. In my experience, I believe that there is a link between grief and addictions. Most if not all of my clients grieve for their past. They were unable to bear the loss and substituted drink or drug in its place. It is easier not to look at your feelings and drink or use drugs instead. The result of ignoring our feelings of hurt or shame or of saying everything is okay when in fact we are crying inside is anger. Anger is like a volcano inside of people who bury their feelings, hoping no one will come near. Yet when something or someone does touch a deep issue in them, an issue of shame that calls them to recall their failures and losses, the result is not sadness or acceptance but rage. Normal feelings were never expressed, and rather than acceptance anger comes out. This is

why people who are addicts often have explosive and violent tempers. The feelings of hurt and pain, were not expressed and bottled become explosions.

Many addicts grew up in homes with other addicts. The rules in an alcoholic or addict home are don't trust and don't feel.¹ From a very early age addicts have learned not to trust their feelings. The problem is that feelings are natural to all of us. Emotions are motivating forces. Addicts have been trained to fear their emotions, and have learned over many years how to bottle or ignore their feelings. Growing up in a home with addicts meant that you were exposed to violent excess of emotions. The result is, that you have now learned not only not to trust your feelings but in fact to be afraid of them. This is especially true of anger. Children growing up in such homes try everything they can to maintain stability. They are exposed to such excess and are so overwhelmed by feelings of loneliness, anger, resentment sadness and powerlessness themselves that they begin to learn that one way to cope is to repress their feelings. Besides their feelings were never validated anyway. Many times while growing up if they would express their feelings they were ridiculed, so they grow up learning not to trust or even believe their feelings and emotions. For example, children growing up in alcoholic families are always disappointed in broken promises². Their parents promise they will attend a function, but never show up.

One very sad story I heard from my clients is the story of a young girl who wanted her father to take her to midnight mass for Christmas Eve. She waited, all dressed up for him to show up. She was still dressed up and sleeping near the Christmas tree when he did show up the next morning with apologies to his daughter. A normal child would be angry and frustrated. But this young woman chose not to dwell on it. It was no big deal, she said. Children growing up in homes like this, learn for their own survival to forget about their emotions.

As adults they grow up to be tense and rigid. They are terrified to lose control because of what they have seen, but because they have never learned to trust other people, they have problems with relationships and are lonely. Drinking helps them loosen up. When they drink they share more about themselves and can be vulnerable. As a result, children who have grown up in drinking families are far more likely to develop a psychological dependence on alcohol or drugs.³

¹ There are many books that discuss this topic, but one of the clearest to read is:

"It will never happen to me", children of alcoholics, Claudia Black, Ballentine Books, New York, 1981

² This may account for the alarming fact that many women who grow up in alcoholic families have to struggle all their lives with self-assertion. They are so used to broken promises, lies and excuses that they either marry someone like that, or allow themselves to be similarly abused in work situations.

³ The subject of adult children of alcoholics involves much more. There are roles that they have played as children to survive in the alcoholic home. The roles were useful to help them survive but become binding

When you try to control your feelings because you are afraid of them, or ignore them in this way there are two possible reactions.

- 1) Your emotions become so intense as to feel uncomfortable.
- 2) You don't feel capable of managing your emotions at all.

Drugs are painkillers to our emotions. When you use drugs, you basically numb your emotions. When you get off them every emotion that was previously numbed will be more keenly felt.

Some of the feelings that drugs masked.

Depression

Depression is one of the most painful feelings and one of the most likely feelings that the addict has numbed. This is particularly true for cocaine addicts. Cocaine gives the user a feeling of euphoria or well being that lasts a few minutes. To a depressed person, for whom life is bleak and hopeless, the thought of relief is so enticing and appealing that they will do anything. The newly dry addict is likely to be depressed and it is only after a while of sober reflection, that the true damage of the drug can be seen. This is a dangerous time. It is easy to chase the blues with a bottle of blue, but also deadly.

The pain trap

Most addicts are so used to numbing the pain in their lives, the memories, and the regrets that the thought of going without the drugs is unthinkable. In fact, many newly recovered people find themselves going into acute anxiety and panic because the feelings that they tried for so long to mask and numb are now back with a vengeance. Recovery, is more than abstinence, it is a new way of learning how to deal with your formerly buried or lost emotions and feelings.

Emotions

and crippling if they are continued in adult life. Once more Claudia Black's book is a fine resource on this subject.

It is not easy to learn how to handle your emotions. Many addicts feel like zombies or emotional wrecks and some think it is easier when they were on drugs as they felt more in control

ANGER

Much ink has been spilled on anger and many addiction books speak or give advice on how to control or manage anger.⁴ There are courses on anger management that teaches you how to recognise when you are about to boil over and how to stop that. It is important to understand that an addict is an angry hurting person. While there are books and articles about how to deal with anger, none of these books in my knowledge speak about the why of anger. Why do addicts have such explosive tempers? Why is anger such a problem? Some spiritually based books claim that the basis of such anger is anger with God.⁵

To be angry is natural and healthy. Anger becomes unhealthy when we react out of all proportion to the problem. This can be seen in movies such as *Falling Down*, where Mike Douglas takes out a machine gun because he was not served breakfast.

1) The instinctive phase

This is a gut reaction. Anger is a physiological response. If someone hurts you, you feel angry. There is no right or wrong, it is simply a natural, physiological response. In fact, anger is our first reaction. It is nothing to be ashamed of. To be angry in certain a certain context of being hurt or rejected is as natural as laughing when something amuses us. We cannot control this part. Women are often taught that anger is wrong, but in this phase it is easy to see when we are angry. If you think you cannot get angry or are afraid of anger, watch your body. In this phase, your shoulders will hunch, your jaw will tighten and your body will tell you that you are angry. You may deny it, but the physical signs are present.

2) The reaction

Once we are angry and the physical signs are present, we react to the emotion. We can either lash out, make a remark or take it in. We have control over our reactions. There are healthy and unhealthy reactions. A healthy reaction is one where we express our anger without rage and put

⁴ While anger is not always associated with drinking, it is often associated with drinking. In addition to the link with drinking, many forensic clients suffer from anti social personality disorders which makes them even more prone to angry outbursts and violence towards others.

⁵ In part I agree, but in my experience, most anger seems to be directed towards the self. When anger is directed towards the self, it is often manifested as depression and self-hatred.

positive steps in place to resolve it. For example, someone cuts you off in traffic. You may wisely judge that this person is an unsafe driver and change lane. This would be a healthy reaction, insofar as you note the source of the anger and deal with it. An unhealthy reaction would be to take a shotgun and shoot the offending driver.

3) Grudges and How Long do we suffer

While we have no control over the physiological aspects of anger we can control our reaction to anger. Even if we react or respond in a healthy fashion, the next problem is how long do we hold on to our anger? How long do we hold a grudge? The Bible notes that one must not let the sun go down on ones anger, and there is much truth to this. People become physically ill when they hold on to anger. I have known clients who have held onto a grudge for years even though the offence is long past. The emotional toll that this takes is simply not worth it. I have had clients say to me “But if I forget all about it I am an idiot!” I am not advocating forgetting about an injury, I am advocating a healthy way to deal with the past and how to handle an injury that happened to us.

If we hold onto anger or keep a grudge over a wrong that has happened to us over which we have no control and cannot make amends, our anger and grudge will have no where to go and we will become depressed. A good example of this is my clients who are angry at abuse suffered at the hands of their parents. They cannot forgive their parents and since they were children at the time, they could not control or stop the abuse. The problem lies with the fact that all too often the parents are no longer alive. The longer my clients hold on to the bitter angry feeling towards their dead parents, the more depressed they become.⁶

Making amends is very important. While it is unrealistic to suggest that people can simply forget a wrong that happened, it is important that they move towards making amends. In the case of individuals, when you have been hurt it is critical to speak with them as soon as possible. This will avoid the unpleasant spectre of not being able to face them, or writing them off, or holding on to the injury in your mind. If we keep the injury fresh in our mind, by reliving it every time we

⁶ This has been demonstrated in many laboratory experiments using mice and rats. When a rat is put in a cage and subjected to continual shocks no matter what he does, the rat will quickly become depressed and lose his will to live and die. In our lives, when we are put into a situation where we are powerless, we can easily become depressed and lose hope. This is why I think it is important that clients, who are in jail or in trouble with the law, understand what is going on with their case and what they can do about it. I have seen clients literally destroyed because they were waiting for a long court case and did not know what they could do, or if they could do anything to help themselves.

see the affronting individual or situation, then we will get angry each time we do so. The longer we hold on to reliving the event, the more deep-seated our anger will become. Eventually, we may even forget about the original insult but just feel angry towards the individual without really even remembering why that is the case. I have seen many poisoned work environments because of this very thing.

Addicts find normal, i.e. drug free life boring and sometimes choose to hold on the grudges and hatred because of the emotional ride it gives them. To feel angry, is to feel alive they reason and so often they will nurse a grudge long after the event has past just so that they can feel. Usually their feelings are out of all proportion to the event itself.

The problem with addicts is that they have a problem reacting to anger even when not under drugs. When under drugs, without the self-control the anger is often rage. But even without drugs, self-control is a learned thing and many addicts, having grown up in addicted homes have never learned how to do it. Thus for an addict, anger is very dangerous as it can build into blind rage. Self-control was never learned by most addicts. One the drugs are gone, the feelings come out in an explosive fashion.

ADDICTS AND ANGER

Many addicts, by virtue of their childhood or other experiences feel that life is unfair and they have been cheated. They are the victims. When they enter the penal system, these feelings are made worse. As a former prison chaplain I remember hearing all kinds of victim stories, from inmates who were addicts. The stories would have been amusing if they were not so firmly believed and tragic.

Addicts are offended by anyone and anything! Their friends let them down, the sales clerk was rude, and their spouses do not appreciate them and so on. It is as if they are overly sensitive and imagine that every slight is directed at them. The clerk in the store deliberately tried to cheat them, their bosses ignore them and make every effort to put them down, and even the rain seems to come just to annoy them when they are outside.

These reactions are distortions. The addicts must learn, if he or she is to understand their anger, how to distinguish reality from fiction. Since most of them grew up where distortion was necessary to survive, such old habits persist. In a home that was addicted or seriously

dysfunctional, fictions were always invented. Daddy was sick with the flu when you knew it was a hangover. Mommy went away to visit her sister for a few days, when you knew she was out on a drug binge. Lies are so common and fictions so easy that growing up in that environment makes it sometimes difficult to tell reality from fiction. Distorted truth is the order of the day.

For example, an addict goes to his boss with a new idea and the boss did not jump up and down with praise. The addict then grumbles and feels unappreciated and may actually hate his boss. The addict knows that the boss is out to get him. Where did such distortions come from? It may be that the boss simply has a headache. The addict's anger stemmed from the fact that the addict expected a certain performance from his boss, and when that performance was not there, the addict became angry and disillusioned.

Recovery

The key to recovery in terms of anger and the importance of the 12 steps for example, is that it refocuses the addict from one who was totally selfish to one whom begins to think of the welfare of others. As I note in chapter two, this is often achieved with reference to the Higher Power. As you begin to recover, your self-esteem will improve and you will begin to be able to understand your sensitivity and distortions in thinking that has crippled you so far. You will learn to stop the blame game and take responsibility for your own actions.

For Guys Only

Men have been socialised not to cry. Thus when men are hurt, they cannot cry. In the prison system this is even worse. When I worked in the prison, I had many inmates tell me that the only time they could cry and feel safe would be in the shower. Crying is simply not acceptable but rage and anger are. In the prison, many of the more violent inmates who would shout, and beat up others were actually in a great deal of pain from a rejection or feelings of being abandoned. For a man to be deprived of the chance to cry when hurt is wrong and this wrong often translates into a conversion of the pain to rage. When men recover, some cry for the first time in years. It is okay to feel it is okay to cry.

For Women Only

Whereas with men it is okay to be angry, many women have been socialised to believe that it is not all right to be angry. It is unladylike to raise one's voice, or to yell. Many women thus suffer

tremendous pain without ever telling anyone. They suffer in silence. It has well been noted that anger turned inwards like this leads to depression⁷ Most of the women addicts that I have come into contact with often will drink alone in silence. They drown the pain of their lives, unable to express the rage and the anger that is inside of them. The drug users, particularly the cocaine users have nearly all been victims of sexual and emotional abuse. The rage is stuffed inside of them, and drugs are used to calm the volcano that is within.

Common Thought Distortions of Addicts

Having looked at anger and some blocks we will now look at some common thought distortions of addicts. This is how an addict thinks

“I don’t have a problem”

The addict has a distorted self-perception; the addict sees themselves as victims, a helpless victim. They are convinced that they are a victim and that drinking or drugs are not a problem. They system is the problem, other people make them drink or use drugs and so on and so forth. This is called denial. For addicts it is very easy to deny that they have any problems with drugs or alcohol at all. Yet denial is for a reason. It is easier and safer to believe that there is no problem and to blame others than to admit that YOU have a problem.

Addicts deny being addicts. To admit they are an addict would mean in their mind that they would be labelled or seen as weak. To be labelled an addict would mean that they would be classed as a pathetic person who cannot manage life without drugs. Often, people do not want to admit that they are addicts because such an admission would mean that they are not in control.

The Excuse Factories

Addicts are masters at finding reasons why they fail or why they do something. Often, they will offer multiple reasons, as if they are trying to convince themselves. They cannot go to meetings because they are busy at work and gas is expensive. They cannot read books on treatment because they are so busy they have no time, or they have to take their children to hockey practice. They missed their meetings because they had to cook dinner and on and on and on. The amount of

⁷ I sometimes think that many women who are on anti depressants today would perhaps be better served if they were to learn how to express their feelings especially anger in an appropriate fashion.

energy that the addict puts into excuses and running away from actually facing their problem is amazing. Another good example of excuses is when my clients start to make excuses about AA. They no longer need it or feel comfortable with the group. When I suggest changing the group, a new series of excuses are created. The new group is too far, too old, too young, too rich, and too poor or they work long hours. Of course the real reason behind all the excuses to avoid help and treatment is that the person wants to drink and use drugs again.

To rationalise or make excuses protects the addict from making the changes that are needed in their life. I can stop doing drugs anytime when I am ready but I am under stress this week.

HE or SHE is worse than I am! Or the Projection game

Projection means when a person accuses another person of having their problems. This is seen a lot with addicts. Often they will say that they don't have a drinking problem, not like their Uncle Bob. He was a drinker. I reply that we are not here to discuss Uncle Bob and they will go on to discuss Aunt Jennie, or Cousin Bess or their boss. They will bring up anyone and point out that they have serious problems. They will bring up anyone and anything rather than focus on what is their problem.

Another form of projection is when they blame others for actually making them drink. If their husband did not watch so much TV they would not drink! This is the same kind of mechanism as before. The shift is away from the individual on to another person.

I don't need to make changes, it is my boss and others, and once they change I won't need a drink to cope

The addict is an expert in the blame game. Anyone can play the part. A boss, a spouse, a parent a child, a teacher. It is THEIR fault why you are an addict. They MAKE you use drugs or drink.⁸

It is a safe bet that the 'others' won't change. The key here is that you must come to know that you must make the changes yourself.

⁸ Of course such games are not restricted to addicts. While working as a prison chaplain I had an inmate explain to me that it was the policeman's fault that he shot and killed someone. When I asked how that could be he explained it this way; "The police know I get angry and they waited and they waited. They knew I had a gun. If they were there sooner I would not have shot him". The inmate believed this explanation.

HOMEWORK

While this is a long section, it is mainly an introduction. It is important that you start to come to grips with your feelings.

HOMEWORK

1) Write a daily journal. In it write out what happened and how you felt about it and what you did about it. See if you can find any patterns to your behaviour after a week.

2) Reactions. Entertain the idea that you are overly sensitive. Think of an event that happened, write down what the event was what you thought, what your reaction was and how there could be another explanation.

For example

Event: The prison guard called me down for being slow to get up

Feelings: I felt angry and humiliated

Thoughts: That guard is out to get me, things will never change. That guard is simply a jerk and should show me respect.

Reaction based on the thoughts: I was angry so I shouted back with the guard

Result" I was put in the 'hole'

Other possible thoughts: The guard could have been having a bad day and it was nothing personal.

Notice in this example that it was your thought that the guard was out to get you, that caused the reaction which was to shout back. The key to this section, in preparation for chapter three is simply to start to think about the linkage between your thoughts around events and your reactions. I believe that your reactions or behaviours are a RESULT of your thinking patterns, which as an addict are distorted. For homework simply start to think about the connection between THOUGHT and ACTION. Write down several examples from your week to substantiate.

3) Write down why you want to live life clean and sober. What will the benefits be? Why do you want help at this time?

4) If you were to write your life story with drugs or alcohol as a character in your story, how much of a part would they play? Try to imagine your life without these characters. How would your life be different?

CHAPTER TWO

On Religion and the Higher Power

Very often God is referred to as the higher power and many therapists and books suggest that you pray or appeal to your higher power for help with your addictions. In this chapter, matters of the higher power will be considered.

Firstly

Why bother with a higher power? Some common questions.

IF God so loves, why is our life such a mess?

This is a very common way of thinking. At first it seems that everything we do is well within our power and our grasp. We grow up, we work, we have a family and then something goes wrong and we are left with the painful question of why and the myriad of regrets that accompany the addict. We berate ourselves and cannot accept that our lives have gone so terribly wrong. Indeed, we may even be angry with God. If God so loves, why did He let this happen to us?

Much ink has been spilled on this question, but I think the heart of the matter is that our relationship with God is based on faith and trust. It would make no sense to believe in God if we did not trust God implicitly. As such, we must trust that God loves us. Some theologians refer to this as experiential proof. We simply need to open our eyes to see that God loves us. Most of our life has not been a disaster; there have been far more occasions of joy than of pain. We live in a world where beauty and grace surround us, if we only could see it.

Once we come to learn that our relationship with God is one based on trust then we can come to learn, albeit slowly that in fact, that while God loves us, God does not control us. God does not suspend the laws of physics for our benefit. God allows us to make mistakes. In our mistakes we have two choices. We can either learn from our mistakes or in terms of God, grow in our trust and faith of God, or we can become embittered by our mistakes and angry with everyone including God. The latter path, is the way most addicts think. They blame everyone and everything to avoid the painful truth that in fact; the fault lies within them!

When I pray to a higher Power nothing happens

As a prison chaplain, this was the most common complaint I got. “When I pray nothing happens” To me it is a sad commentary on how prayer is understood if we think of it only as a request line and God as a jack-in-the-box.

When you read the Psalms, which contain some of the greatest prayers in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, you will note that prayer is very honest talk with God. Read psalm 109 for example! There is no holy talk; prayer is simply talk, to bare ones soul before God. To simply pour out your anguish, your pain before God. God, unlike some therapists, listens and I believe answers in many ways our prayers.

To pour out your soul, to cry out in pain or joy before God in prayer is therapeutic because it enables catharsis but there is more.

God responds to our prayers. When we pray, there is God himself with us. This does not mean that God will respond with a YES to all of our requests. Sometimes the answer is no. It is within the waiting for the answer that we grow. In terms of answered prayers, once more it is a matter of being patient for the answer.

In my own experience, God always speaks to me through the Scriptures, that is when I read them, a previously dull passage suddenly contains an answer to my question, or God speaks through other people. I have heard the voice of God calling to me in the guise of other people. Faith and maturity and prayer are all about discernment.

Life in General

In the end, God and faith is all about reality. What is reality? What is the meaning of life? How do I live a good life? You see it is not enough to be clean and sober. The reason you became an addict was to create a new life for yourself, to escape from the reality of pain that was your life. You sought that new reality by means of drugs or alcohol. Matters of God are matters of ultimate reality.

There are several levels of reality and many people do not see what is truly there. Augustine of Hippo, one of Christianity’s greatest thinkers believed that much of our unhappiness centres on what he called disordered love. We think that reality and happiness can be found by fixing our attention, on loving

1) Physical objects, 2) other people 3) us. 4) God.

It is clear that 1) and 2) and 3) will not lead to satisfaction, we are disillusioned in even ourselves at some point. For Augustine as for many mystics and thinkers, ultimate satisfaction is found only in God, In other words what we seek, what we focus our attention on must have a referent that is outside of ourselves, It must be bigger than ourselves.

The addict's life is one that is shaped by pain, disappointment and many false turns. The addict has looked to drugs for a quick fix to life's problems. Respite from despair! Yet reality comes back the morning after.

Life needs an outside referent like God but not just any God. For life to truly have meaning, the outside referent, or God or the higher power must be a God who loves us and who loves creation. It is only love, unconditional love that gives meaning to things and to people. It is the reverse or Augustine's reality ladder.

Love, God imparts meaning to people and things.

It is best expressed in the children's classic, the Little Prince. The little prince despaired because he had come to a planet where there were many roses and his small asteroid had only one rose that he cherished.

"You are not at all like my rose", he said, "As yet you are nothing. No one has tamed you, and you have tamed no one. You are like my fox when I first knew him. He was only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But I made him my friend, and now he is unique in all the world"...."You are beautiful, but you are empty," he went on. "One could not die for you. To be sure, an ordinary passer-by would think that my rose looked just like you-the rose that belongs to me. But in herself alone she is more important than all the hundreds of other roses; because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen; because it is for her that I have killed the caterpillars (except the two or three that we saved to become butterflies); because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even sometimes when she said nothing. Because she is *my* rose."

The rose had meaning only because the prince loved the rose. The same is true of us and of creation itself. It is only because the creation is loved and we are loved by God that the creation is more than a collection of flora and fauna. It is only because God loves us and loves others that other people around us are more than simply people, they are cherished of God. This is the basis for the brotherhood of man. With such an understanding there is no them, and us there is only us.

With such an insight, other people are no longer objects to be used or put in our way. They are like us, beloved creatures of God, and as God who loves us loves them, we love them. Other people therefore the elderly, the crippled, the handicapped and the addict become not people whom we despise and point to but sacred partners. Necessary partners, as they are loved, unconditionally by God.

With such a worldview that includes God in the picture, our horizons expand from a selfish world of one, or a few to embracing the whole of creation. We learn a new respect for others and for that which is around us. Creation itself is to be loved, not exploited and people are to be cherished for what they are not from what we can gain from them.

As we grow in sobriety and in faith, we will gradually come to see that life is meaningful only when seen through the eyes of the love of God.

HOMEWORK

Think about God and the Higher power and ask yourself if a loving God were part of your life how would your life be different?

Read some of the Psalms

Think about how your life would be different if you truly believed and acted on the premise that others, like you, are loved unconditionally by God.

Pray to God daily for help with your addictions and to help you see life as it truly is. Life is not a burden but a joy but that is a hidden truth for many people.

Write a journal on your reflections for a week and mail it back to me. There are no right or wrong answers. I encourage you to read the New Testament if you are Christian, the Koran if Islamic and the Torah if Jewish or your Holy Scriptures this week. Again write a journal on new and special insights

Addictions Course, Chapter Three

In this chapter, some of the basis of cognitive therapy will be discussed as it relates to addictive thinking. This chapter will look in more depth at some of the errors of thinking that is part and parcel of addictions.

As an addict you have developed a very complicated system of thought that revolves around justifying why you need a drink or why you need to use drugs. Your thought process starts with I need a drink/drug and then you go on to find reasons why. Often there are multiple reasons and most of them are very clever and in fact reasonable. For example, I need to drink because of all the stress on my job, I need to relax. No one would argue that in fact you may have stress in your job, the problem with this line of thinking is that while there may be stress on the job, the premise is flawed, you do not NEED to drink. This is always how an addict starts to think.

Addicted individuals begin their thinking with a flawed premise. It is not enough to look at addictions merely as a system of excuses or projections, one must go deeper into the coping mechanisms and in fact the distorted thinking that is part of the addicts life.

DISTORTED THOUGHTS

The addict will often say, “I can’t help the way I feel, I feel rotten and therefore I NEED to drink”. This small section will try to show that while we cannot change what happens to us, we can control the link from feeling to thinking to action. We can stop ourselves from behaving irrationally and abusing drugs. To understand this idea further, we must first ask ourselves why do we distort?

I believe that our mind is somewhat like a tape recorder. When we are young, recordings are made on this tape. Often it is negative. Our tapes are filled with messages of doubt. We are told that we are unlovable, unworthy, not clever, not attractive, nor successful. While we may know intellectually that these are not true, triggers in our life often reinforce the negative tapes. For instance someone, who was often told that they could not do this or that, grows up with a sense of inadequacy. Years later, if they fail in a job, or in a relationship, the pain they experience is out of all proportion to the actual event. What is happening, I think is that the tape, the recordings, the

ingrained or core values have been reinforced, and the person now will come to actually believe that they cannot succeed at anything, and in despair, give up.

Some of the most common distorted thoughts that addicts have are as follows:

Negative self image: This idea is that you are no good and that no matter what you do, the fact remains that you believe that you are in fact a loser.

No matter what you do you feel inadequate and less than capable. Thus, when thinking of solutions to your problems, you are inclined to make excuses as to why you cannot go to AA or NA, because deep down you believe that you simply cannot succeed.

These negative self-images have been reinforced throughout your life. Every time you have a relapse or hear a relative say they told you so, the old tapes of how unworthy you are play again. The image is reinforced and you actually start to believe that you are in fact, no good. The more ingrained this thought is the harder it will be to overcome it.

Rigid Thinking

This kind of thinking is either or. Addicts generally are not able to see grey areas. Thus, if you make a mistake you believe that you are going to jail that your life is over. The grey areas do not figure in your thinking. For example, a person is going through a difficult period in their marriage and may only see two options, staying with the person or leaving them. The grey possibility of seeking counselling or therapy does not occur to them. Rigid thinking makes it very difficult to adapt to changes. This is why, when changes do occur in your life, it is so hard to adapt. Addicts in general, resist change, any kind of change. That is why the thought of sobriety is such a hard one to make. Why addicts have rigid thinking is perhaps easy to understand. An addict lives in a world of black and white. You are either high or you are not, and the object of life is to be high. There is no such thing as half high. Rigid thinking leads to all sorts of problems in the relationships of addicts. They find it impossible to forgive themselves because of the way in which they resent the actions they have done and therefore relationships are all or nothing. There is no forgiveness. Clients often will say “My relationship is over, she betrayed me, or he is not serious” and that is the end of it. The addict is rigid and very judgmental in their thinking. I believe that such rigidity makes it very difficult for the addict to heal as well. They will see a relapse as catastrophic. They have a hard time putting it into perspective.

Hypersensitive

Remember that chemically dependant people are hyper sensitive to emotions. You will feel things more intensely than non-addicts will. Some people take drugs to dull the pain of life, but others take drugs simply to feel alive. The main key here is often rejection. Most addicts that I have worked with have suffered series of rejections in their life, often stemming from early childhood. The addict will often see rejection when it is not there and over react. In relationships this means that they become either very clingy or possessive or they explode into a rage, out of all proportion to the actual situation. Addicts are often loners because they fear rejection. The addict feels somehow that they don't belong. They feel different from their friends and family and society in general. No one understands me, is the common lament.

Doom thinking

Many of the addicts that I know suffer from what I call doom thinking. While a few things have gone wrong in their lives, the addict believes that everything is going wrong. They are pessimists in the extreme. The addict believes that good luck cannot last, and when they meet an obstacle, partly because of their rigid thinking, and fear or rejection they OVER react. A small set back sets them to think that it is not worth while, that nothing they do is right and they might as well drink or use drugs again, or give up. Doom thinking is linked to rigid thinking.

This of course, nurses any feelings of poor self worth and the whole cycle starts over again.

Con artists

Addicts are great cons. They have lied to others and to themselves for so long, that it may be difficult if not impossible for them to face up to the truth. Thus addicts are experts at manipulating and controlling others around them, be this their family, their 'friends' and occasionally their counsellors. Manipulation and lying becomes, for the addict a way of life. The old joke is 'how do you know when an addict is lying?' 'when their lips are moving!'

This translates into the addict lying to himself or herself and the most common form is that they don't 'need' help anymore. Thus, they stop going to AA or NA, having coned themselves that they are cured and that such things are needless crutches for the weak. This of course spells disaster. The addict suffers from a disease. Manipulative behaviour also means that the addict does not really have a surplus of friends, in fact the addict often uses friends and family. This is it

is crucial to eventual sobriety and recovery that the addict makes a fearless moral inventory and faces up to all the people that he or she has hurt because of their addiction.

No Big Deal

Addicts will minimise their problems. They will often lie about how much they drank and claim that it is not a problem, which in fact they are in control. If they are charged with driving under the influence, they will claim that the police made a mistake, or that the sample was tainted. The operative word here is minimisation. Rather than face the terrible consequences of their behaviours, the addict chooses instead to pretend that the problem is far smaller than it actually is. In short they minimise it. Often they say 'it is no big deal'.

The Uses of Lying

The addict lies to himself and to others because he cannot face the consequences. Lying or creating a fantasy world is far easier to live in than the reality of broken lives, broken promises and lost opportunities. Lying is used to hide deep-seated feelings of inferiority.

Shame

Contrary to what many people think, most addicts suffer not from guilt but from shame. Shame leads to despair. The guilty person wants to correct their behaviour, the person who feels shame merely notes that they cannot fix the problem and they themselves are broken and unable to make any amends whatsoever.

What would make the non-addict feel guilt makes the addict feel intense shame. Addicts believe that there is no point in having themselves treated or fixed. They in fact, often give up before they start. The remorse that an addict will express when they lament their actions, do not represent guilt but are closer to shame. The difference is very important. For the addict to begin to get treatment and to address the issues of their addiction, it is imperative that they consider their own self-esteem and start to build themselves up. They are not bad apples or black sheep, but simply persons who need to realise that they are worthy of being loved and appreciated. This is one reason why it is so important for addicts to do the dreaded group work, as it is in a group that the addict comes to learn that others are going through the program and finally gain acceptance and love within the group. Thus, gradually the addict will change their thinking from someone who believes that they cannot be fixed to someone who understands that they have a valuable place within society.

Acceptance and Love

The addict has to come to truly believe that they are loved and accepted. This is why many religious groups have developed Christian twelve step programs that focus on the addict being loved and cherished by God.

While it is not crucial to be Christian to recover, the notion of a higher power is important insofar as the higher power serves as a focal point to guide the addict to recovery. The higher power enables the addict to realise that he or she is not a broken person, useless for society and family, but rather a person who is loved by God and therefore worthy of being loved.

Control vs. lack of Control or when you are out of control

An addict has a million excuses as to why they find AA or NA useless. A common excuse is that they have no use for a higher power. Basically the addict thinks that they are God and can control everything. The truth is, in life there are many things over which we have no control. We cannot control the ageing process, or the weather or our parentage. No one in their right mind would call it a character weakness to suggest that because we cannot control the ageing of our bodies that we are somehow weak or deficient.

Addiction is not a moral flaw or a weakness it is a disease and must be accepted as such. While it is true that there are many moral or character flaws that support the addiction, such as lying or cheating, the fact remains that the addiction is a disease.

Wrong Thinking

Two things are critical for recovery. The first is that the addict must accept the fact that their thinking is distorted and their reasoning power flawed. You have build up a sophisticated system of reasoning but its main basis is to support the addiction. It is flawed and you distort information that comes to you

The second point is that there is another version of reality. Your reasoning system is so flawed that you have in fact constructed a new version of reality. This means that you must accept someone whom you trust versions of reality. Often this is your sponsor. It pays to have occasional reality checks because for most, if not all of your life, you have lied to yourself and to others.

You are so good at lying that you have convinced yourself. This is one reason why I find group work so useful for recovering addicts. Another recovering addict will be quick to point out that

you are running, or lying or making up excuses because they have been at the same point you are and thus understand. To hear another point of view is very important in recovery because you have convinced yourself that your version of reality, with you as the victim is the only one that exists.

Before going on to distorted thinking and to offer some ideas as to how to cope with them, some ink must be spilled on the topic of moods and depression.

Moods and Painting the Town Red

Addicts use their drugs to dull their senses or in some cases to make them feel alive. They are so used to living with altered states of emotion that in fact, they make themselves believe that it is only with a bit of drugs that they can feel alive.

Addicts feel they are missing out on life. They feel unhappy and always ask themselves if there is more to life? Often the addict has it all, a job, a family, and a home but feels deep down that there needs to be more. An addict thinks differently than a non-addict, they distort messages and believe that they are only truly alive with drugs. With drugs they feel normal and they believe they are experiencing the good life that others have. Remember the addict always feels different or an outsider to others.

Because they believe they need drugs to be alive, when they are sober they may experience what looks like depression. They seem to lack interest in life, feel futile and hopeless. They often feel that life itself is not worth living. While suicidal thoughts are cause for alarm, these feelings are what are sometimes called the Addictive Depression. It is not clinical depression, but instead the result of living a life without the drugs. It seems for a while, that the colour is gone. In fact, I have had clients tell me that the reason they refuse to give up their drugs is that life is so much more fun when drug soaked.

In clinical depression or episodic depression, the depressed person can usually point to an event or a series of events that lead to the depression. In the case of the addict there is no start or end point, only a general malaise and a feeling that all is not well or all is not right. The addict will lack motivation. Addicts feel that the world never gave them a fair deal, and that somehow they

were cheated and that the world owes them an apology. They are unhappy and always looking for something else in life. Often they will seek that something else in a relationship, which often does not work out because the addict is seeking fulfilment through another person rather than searching within him or herself. The fact is that the world is not dull or grey but it is also not always in vibrant Technicolor. The addict, by means of group work will come gradually to understand that the world is enough and that there are many pleasures to be enjoyed and experienced. Once the formidable defence system and rationalisations of the addict start to crumble and a healthy self-esteem built up, the notion that the world is in fact enough becomes more acceptable. Also, the addict will take pleasure in the simpler, non-drug-induced things in life. I am not saying that it is impossible that an addict also suffers from a depression which requires psychiatric help and drug therapy, but my point is that the addict, simply because he is coming down and had been used to seeing the world as altered, has lost interest in many things including family, work and sex. That lack of interest does not always translate into a depression and thus, to treat the addicts 'depression' with anti depressants can be dangerous and counter productive. The problem is not the depression; it is the drugs and the distorted way of thinking that follows addiction. That is why it is very important not to be too hasty to diagnose depression. The therapist must understand the ins and outs of addictive depression and not be too hasty to dispense pills.

A short note on Distorted Thinking

Recommended reading: Feeling Good by Dr. David Burns

(This is by far the best book I have seen that discusses that cognitive distortions are and how they can destroy us unless we recognise them for what they are). Many of the ideas here are from David Burns's book. Burns has written a readable useful book.

Rigid thinking

This is one form that was discussed previously.

Overgeneralization

If something happened once, it will always happen. If you got fired from one job, it will always happen. Over generalisation occurs when a painful event happens to us and we imagine that the pattern will always follow us. For instance, a person starting on a date may be rejected on the

second date. From then on, he assumes that his date will dump him on the second date and actually starts to engineer it so that his date actually does dump him on the second date.

Filter Thinking

Here is where you pick out the one negative remark or comment and forget all the positive remarks. You may have got all A's in your courses but one B plus. Rather than be happy you focus on your lower mark.

Or as an addict in recovery, you may find yourself tempted to think and act in your old patterns. When people compliment your progress, you dismiss the praise and focus on something negative. Depressed people are experts at this. The classical example is Eeyore in the Pooh books. Eeyore, the donkey focuses on the black and the gloomy even when all is well.

You think that because one thing is negative it is all negative. This distortion causes needless pain.

Dismissing the Positive

Yet another common distortion is when we dismiss the positive. This is linked to filter thinking but differs insofar as we dismiss all positive input that comes our way. It is one of the most dangerous and deadly of all the distortions. It reaffirms our notion that we are no good and worthless.

Mind Reading

This is when we think we know what the other person is thinking or why they act the way in which they do. It is called mind reading because we never check out whether or not we are correct. An example of this is if we meet a friend on the street and say hello but they ignore us. We assume that they are a snob and that they don't care for our friendship and sometimes we spiral and conclude that the reason they are a snob is because we are not worthy of being their friend.

Fortune Tellers

You phone a friend who does not return your call. You feel depressed and conclude your friend is no longer your friend or is somehow angry with you. You imagine he got the message but does not care. (Mind reading). You then go on to feel bitter and angry and then you don't want to call him back because you will make a fool of yourself. In fact you convince yourself you will make a fool of yourself (fortune telling, you predict the consequences without any facts)

Magnify and minimise

Addicts catastrophise events. This means that when an event occurs, the addict will often blow it out of all proportion. You imagine that your relapse is a ticket to jail and that life is downhill. Conversely, you often minimise problems like arrests for DUI by focusing instead on the 'other guys' problems.

Emotional Reasoning

IF I feel it, it must be true. You assume that because you feel badly, and feelings don't lie, it must be a reflection of the way things actually are. I feel hurt; therefore it must be true.

Should Statements

You use should and ought a lot. I should do this; I ought to do this. I should be clean and sober; I ought to act more maturely. We beat ourselves up with shoulds and oughts. Where do they come from? No doubt from our childhood where we were told we should behave, or we ought to do the following and so forth. Shoulds and oughts are really like red flags. When we hear ourselves saying we this or we ought to do this, step back and think about it. Who makes these claims on us? I am not saying all shoulds or oughts are bad, but we tend to over use them and actually punish ourselves, throwing us into the vat of guilt and shame once more.

Before we go into some steps, very easy ones at that to check your thinking, there are a few more remarks I will make regarding some feelings especially anger. It seems that anger is the one feeling that gets most addicts into trouble. The sidenote on anger will also lead as an example of the power of cognitive therapy and start us thinking.

Sidenote on Anger

Sometimes we are living on a volcano of anger and we don't know why. Moreover, we won't even admit how angry we are. The first step is to measure or be aware of how angry you are.

I wrote this test,, but there are many similar tests. All of the tests focus on the same things and taking it will help you see that you are reacting explosively to certain situations.

SCALE

0 you would feel very little or no annoyance

1. you would feel a little irritated

2 you would be moderately upset

3 you would feel quite angry. You would like to hit a wall or at the very least, shout at someone.

4 you would feel very angry. If you could you would shoot someone.

THE ANGER TEST

1) You buy a toy for your child for Christmas and when you unpack it you find that there is a piece missing and you cannot put it together. You would feel:(put in a number from 0 to 4 based on the scale)

2) Your car broke down on the highway and because there is only one garage that will tow your car. They are overcharging you. You would feel.....

3) You just finished shovelling the snow in your driveway and you hear the snowplough going past. You look out and see a pile of snow at the end of your driveway.....

4) Getting your car stuck in mud or snow.....

5) While you are talking to someone, they don't answer you.....

6) You are at work and your boss singles you out for correction while the faults of everyone else are ignored.....

7) You are at a party and someone speaks to you pretending to be an expert on a topic they know nothing about.....

- 8) While speaking with a friend, they interrupt you and don't let you finish your train of thought.....
- 9) You see a friend who is pretending to be someone or something they are not.....
- 10) You visit a friend's home and their dog jumps up on you putting muddy footprints on your suit.
- 11) You go to the bathroom and notice there is no toilet paper
- 12) You are followed and bugged by a salesperson as soon as you enter a store.....
- 13) You made arrangements to go out with a person and he (she) cancels out on the last minute.....
- 14) Being joked about or teased.....
- 15) Your car is stalled at a traffic light but the guy behind you keeps blowing his horn.....
- 16) You are in checkout line in a grocery store. The line clearly indicates for 8 items or less and the woman ahead of you has a grocery cart full of items and insists on price checks when she is at the cash.....
- 17) Someone else makes a mistake but blames it on you.....
- 18) You are trying to concentrate but the person beside you is humming.....
- 19) You loan someone a book or a tool and they don't return it.....
- 20) You have had a busy day and the person you live with starts to complain about you not doing something you agreed to do.....

- 21) You are trying to discuss something important with your partner who is not giving you a chance to express your feelings.....
- 22) You need to be somewhere quickly but the car ahead of you is going 40 in a 60km zone and you cant pass.....
- 23) You make plans to go with your friends to the theatre. You buy them tickets but they don't show up, nor do they call you to give an explanation.....
- 24) You arrange and pay for a baby-sitter so that you can go out with your friends. Your friends cancel at the last minute and you are stuck with a baby-sitter.
- 25) You get a personal phone call from your spouse at work and your fellow worker comments on the contents of your phone call when you hang up.

RESULTS

0-45 Only a few percent in the population score like this. You are more peaceful than most people are and people will often comment on your serenity.

46-55 you are more peaceful than the average person is

56-75 you respond with an average amount of anger

76-85 you react in an angry way to life. You are irritable

86-100 you keep anger and hold negative feelings long after the event has past. You are a hothead and experience a lot of headaches and problems as a result of your anger. At this level your anger is clearly a problem. Very few score this high.

SOLUTIONS

The traditional way of dealing with anger is to say that either we turn anger towards ourselves or we vent it. Venting anger is often encouraged but the problem with that is, is that it can get us into trouble and alienate other people. Who wants to hang around someone who is constantly expressing his or her feelings of anger?

Cognitive therapy, in my mind, offers a more balanced approach to the problem or the issue of anger.

The solution is very easy; STOP CREATING YOUR ANGER. Angry people will always insist that someone else has actually caused or made them get angry, but the truth is that we create our own anger, because we chose how we respond to situations. For example, in the anger test, none of those situations were life threatening or serious. Yet some people will score very high on the test. The reason is, they choose to make themselves that upset over something that many of us would simply shrug off. While some therapists will try to find the reasons for this, I think it is more useful to acknowledge that this is how we are and to choose more appropriate and helpful ways of behaving.

It is very natural to think that OTHER people or other events make us angry. The neighbours are annoying with their loud music, the dogs bark, my partner is thoughtless, and the boss is an idiot and so on and so forth.

In fact none of these people MAKE you angry or cause your anger. While anger is a physiological response, how we act is a function of our thoughts. A situation may make us physically tense, but it will only lead to anger and frustration if we allow it to do so. It is all in how we interpret the event.

Suppose for instance that you lived in a culture where it was expected and considered an act of kindness to blow the horn. In fact, if you did not blow the horn you would be thought of to be rude. Now take a person from this culture and put them in a traffic jam where everyone is blowing their horn. Our person would be very pleased and probably comment on how thoughtful people are. Another person, who hates horns and considers them rude, would be in a fit of rage in the same situation. This illustration shows that in fact it is NOT the event that causes the anger, rather it is our perception or cognition of the event that leads us to the emotion, which in this case is anger.

Most addicts believe that life has treated them unfairly and much if not all of their anger stems from long standing feelings of being cheated or hard done by. Thus they react. There are a variety of unpleasant events that each of us goes through every day but the fact remains that when we control our reaction to these events and become less angry and thus happier.

Anger at least uncontrolled anger is generally the result of distorted thinking. Many of these have already been discussed and there are many of them. A few more examples will not hurt. Another common distorted pattern is labelling. We tend to label people into rigid categories. For example: The Boss is A Jerk.

The boss now is no longer a human being, but simply a jerk and deserves to be treated as such. You write this person off and fail to see any good qualities. Labelling means that you blame the other person.

It enables you to feel morally superior by putting the other person down.

In truth, the battle when you label someone as a jerk, or a piece of crap etc., is not with the other person but is really about yourself. In fact, you are battling with your self-esteem. Someone has wounded your sense of pride or your self-esteem. Your sense of self has been wounded and so you decry the other person.

What you are doing is fighting a losing battle. The only person who can lower your self-esteem is yourself! Your boss, partner, mate cannot do so, that power is only yours.

MAGNIFICATION.

You exaggerate the importance of an event. You were cut off in traffic and you imagine that the world is out to get you. Isn't that silly?

Or you are in line waiting for soup and they run out of soup. You blow up at the cook! Do you want to live like this? Making mountains out of molehills?

Should, Oughts and Stuff

In an earlier section, I spoke of the dangerous Shoulds and Oughts and how we use them to beat up on ourselves. Should and Ought are also used to label other people. People SHOULD be more thoughtful and wait for me. My friend OUGHT to call me. It is my birthday my friends SHOULD take me out. Who says they should? Who says they ought? You? Most if not all of my clients are

trapped in the land of shoulds and oughts. They have created a world where they expect everyone to play by their rules. Their boyfriend SHOULD call them, they SHOULD get a Christmas card and so on and so forth. They make themselves miserable by never realising that shoulds and oughts are constructions. What I think you SHOULD do, may not be what you think. I would argue that should and ought, should simply be eliminated from your thinking.

By placing expectations like this on other people you are being doubly unfair. In the first place, you are assuming that you are entitled to special treatment and that everyone should know about it. Here is a good example, suppose you go off on a holiday and after a long flight you come to the Hotel and they can't find your reservation. There are no rooms left.

You explode in anger saying it SHOULD not happen, and that the clerks are all idiots. It is natural to feel upset and disappointed but by fuming and insisting that everything is perfect you are only hurting yourself and no one else. Your anger will not make a room appear in fact when you insist on shoulds or oughts, all you are doing is making yourself miserable. The world and other people are not perfect and neither are you so get used to it! Another example is the Christmas season. For most of my clients Christmas is a painful, lonely time and yet they will argue that they should have a family dinner, and everyone OUGHT to behave. The fact that the family has never behaved and those family dinners are always a miserable experience to them, does not seem to stop them. They are caught up in the delusion world of should and ought.

When you don't get what you want, rage and a tantrum are not the solution.

Another example of this is in relationships "I have done so much for my partner! HE (she) SHOULD be appreciative of all that I have done"

Your anger won't manipulate this person into being appreciative. In fact all your anger will do is make you miserable!

Shoulds and oughts are all about what we think is fair, but fair is a relative term. For example suppose you have too many drinks and you start to drive. You get caught and you lose your driver's license. To you, this is unfair but to the person who lost a family member due to a drunk driver it is very fair indeed. Fair is in the eye of the beholder, it does not exist outside of what we think. So if someone is behaving unfairly remember it is only unfair in the way you think it is.

Here is another statement: All marriages SHOULD be 50-50. Again, popular wisdom but in any marriage, it is not wise to go into a marriage with hard and fast rules about the way things should be. There may be a case when your partner is simply not able to pull his or her share as you have defined it. Does that mean the marriage is over?

Such rules are self-defeating.

I am not saying that we should never feel angry. That would be ridiculous, I am saying that we have to be very careful so that the shoulds and oughts don't compel us into anger and in turn that anger and our feelings control us.

Because our thinking is a minefield of problems, especially when an addict we have to ask ourselves two questions when we are angry

- 1) Is my anger directed at someone who has KNOWINGLY and Intentionally hurt us. Note that this is very different than thinking that they did. A hit man that was hired to gun us down, would be an example of someone who has knowingly tried to hurt us. There are also people who are bullies and who enjoy being cruel. The point is, is that we must always be careful to differentiate between the two. The matter of knowing and intention are very crucial. If the action was not intentional, then chances are our anger came from a distorted thinking pattern. One or more of the patterns I suggested.
- 2) Does my anger serve any useful function? There are times when anger does. For example, Foster Parents Plan was I think started as a result of one mans anger at a war in Spain that left many children orphaned and without help or hope. The Bible calls such anger righteous anger and sometimes, we have to be angry at a system or at a problem to actually do something to solve it. In most cases, our anger does not serve any useful function at all, other than to cause us to fume and smoke and make others around us miserable. If our anger does not serve any useful purpose other than to poison us, why keep it?
- 3) There are some tips and tools that can help you manage your anger, the first is to realise that you are angry. Women have a problem with this because in general women are told that it is not ladylike or good to be angry. Women have to realise that at times they are angry.

When you are angry it is VERY easy and natural to think about retaliation. You want to get back at the person and hurt them. For instance, a woman may feel angry with her husband for not spending enough time with her and working long hours in the office. She may wish to lash out.

Take a sheet of paper and write out the advantages of retaliation versus the disadvantages.

ADVANTAGES of Anger

It feels good to be angry with my husband

He will understand just what I think

I have the right to get angry and blow up

I will show him I won't be a doormat!

Even if I don't get what I want, I want revenge!

DISADVANTAGES OF ANGER

It may sour our relationship

He may want to reject me

After I blow up in anger I feel worse and feel down on myself

He will retaliate and get angry right back at me!

My anger gets in the way of the real problem that caused the anger in the first place.

One minute I am up and the next I am down. I am moody and irritable lately and take it out on my husband

He may leave me because of my nagging and bitchy attitude!

The unpleasant feelings I create will rob me of joy and love

Now do this for events where anger is raising its head and causing trouble in your life. When it is over, read over the benefits of not reacting in anger and see if you can understand that it is better not to over react. It is important that you convince yourself from YOUR own experience. While I

can write about many examples, they will mean very little to you unless you come up with your own situations.

Another technique to help you control your anger and be in better control of your moods is to consider what is sometimes termed hot thoughts versus rational thoughts. Hot thoughts are the first things that rush into your head in a stressful situation. Rational thoughts or cool thoughts are the ones that require a little bit of reflection.

For example suppose you are in a relationship and you have had a fight because you think he is spending too much on his car and neglecting to leave enough money for household expenses.

You fight and you shout saying he is selfish and thoughtless. After the fight you both feel miserable. Here is an example of what may have gone through your head

Remember a hot thought is a thought that goes through your head. There is little reflection, they just come.

HOT THOUGHT

He is so selfish! How can he NOT care!

How dare he not listen to me when I speak!

He is thoughtless and loves his car more than me

I feel like towing that stupid car to the wreckers!

I will make him feel miserable for loving that dumb car!

MORE RATIONAL OR COOL Thoughts (These are the thoughts that you can imagine when you STOP and think about the situation)

He does care and the car is what he needs for his work

Why should he listen to me? I nag him so much about this he has probably stopped listening to me. He is listening, he is being defensive and I am being pushy!

He enjoys his car, but he loves me. He spends time with his car because it is important to him.

That would make him furious and I would have to pay the wreckers to get the car back!

If I made him feel miserable by not talking or acting out, he would push away from me because of my moods and character.

At the end of this, write down what you now feel. Chances are if you are honest with your feelings, you will feel a lot better at the end of the exercise mainly because you have come to learn that there are OTHER ways than exploding in anger to deal with the situation. The trick is to realise that it is your thinking, your way of perception that really causes a good deal of the problem. Many of my clients have problems writing down events in this way. They find it childish, yet somehow, when we write our thoughts down on paper we are more able to analyse them and produce more rational thinking. It is as if we can no longer come up with excuses when it is written down.

We feed our anger by fantasy. I spoke on this when we discussed grudges but it bears repeating. LONG after an event has occurred we think about it and imagine various scenes of revenge. If only I had said this, or if only I had done that. We revisit the scene in our mind and each time we do it we feel the pain and the anger afresh. We feed our hatred and our anger.

The only person doing it is us. The only person it is hurting is of course us. The only person who can stop these images is us. There are some techniques to stop the images, the first is humour. Now I am speaking here of ordinary grudges and resentments. There are some people who have experienced horrific things in their lives and whose minds are literally scarred by the terrible things they have seen or that have happened to them. They are depressed and anxious and revisited by these images. This is often called post traumatic stress disorder. If you are having recurrent nightmares about events, or if the images are such that they prevent you from functioning normally or at all, then these suggestions are useless and you should be seeing a psychiatrist. A combination of drug therapy and psychotherapy has proven to be somewhat effective in cases of post traumatic stress.

HUMOUR

Imagine for example you left a job after having multiple problems with your boss. You called him (her) a jerk and you walked off the job. Weeks after, you are still fuming because of the loss of income and feel angry with the boss and yourself. You lie awake thinking of excruciating torture for the boss. Vats of oil, snake pits...torments befitting a torture chamber in mediaeval Europe!

Now try this, instead of imagining the boss in a vat of boiling oil; try to change it to something funny. Imagine them in a funny situation instead of a hurtful situation. Imagine for instance them in a full costume at a fancy party. If everyone is in tuxedo and long dresses, imagine the boss in a clown costume with red wig, large shoes, buttons and a flower that squirts. Imagine all the details. Oddly, as you imagine all the details, you will feel that your anger towards the person becomes less and you will smile.

Forgiveness. This is by far the hardest method to release your negative destructive and unproductive anger at a person but in my cases, I have found it to be the most effective. Sometimes your anger is so well developed and you feel so entitled to be angry that humour will not work. In this case, I advise my Christian and religious clients to practice the following technique. It is loosely based on the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius. The Ignatian exercises were developed in the 16th century to allow Jesuit missionaries a means to control their emotions and be better able to face the hardships that would befall many of them.

Imagine a peaceful scene with all the details. It could be a lake, seashore, and a meadow wherever you feel yourself to be at peace. Close your eyes and imagine your limbs getting very heavy. Start by imagining your feet to be made of stones, move up to your calves and so on until your body is very very heavy. Then in reverse order lighten your body. This will put you in a relaxed state. The next phase of this technique is to pray and to ask Jesus (or your religious figure) to enter into the picture. Ignatius of course used Jesus. When you see Jesus imagine all your burdens and anger as a sack or a load of bricks. When Jesus appears in the scene in your imagination ask him to remove the burdens. Keep focusing on this until Jesus removes all the obstacles. When the image fades you can 'wake' up. I have found this exercise to be most effective when followed by a spiritual director trained in guided imagery of Ignatius. I have personally found it to be an amazing tool.

The third anger method is called stoppage. I like to call it diversion. When you feel negative images and thoughts and anger flooding your mind, immediately do something else. Call a friend, bake some bread, and go for a walk. The key is not to wait. The second the thoughts come.. divert do something else. Don't think just do. IF an upsetting memory keeps coming back, I have found that vigorous exercise like swimming, climbing or weight lifting will take my mind off it.

So you may ask, if I give up anger and become 'nice' will I be seen as a pushover and will everyone manipulate me?

The answer is to look at anger, at least uncontrolled anger with negative emotions and self defeating thoughts that may bring rise to the anger squarely. Your anger, your behaviour as a result of anger has not accomplished anything.

A case in point is to ask yourself if your manipulation of other people because you were angry or upset EVER achieved the desired result? Answer: NO

So what do you do?

The first step is to simply note that if someone is annoying you and leading you to think angrily about them, be that a boss, a child or a spouse or workmate, try to reward the positive behaviour instead. A wise man once said that you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. The Bible notes that if you really want to get back at someone, be kind to him or her. Thus, when and if someone is driving you batty and making you think about unpleasant things like revenge, FORGET their negative behaviours and reward the positive. Even if it seems obvious and manipulative, try it as it works. For instance, if your roommate is a slob, instead of nagging them to clean up, reward them with praise and attention or hockey tickets when they do clean up and pick up. It works

Secondly, if you are plagued, as many of us are, with self defeating shoulds. I should be better at golf, or I should be a better husband.... Try to write a rebuttal.

As mentioned earlier, the shoulds that we apply to ourselves, we often apply to other people with disastrous consequences.

For example, suppose that our mate has left us for a fishing trip for a week and we are furious because we think if they loved us, they should stay with us and forget the fishing.

REASONS WHY HE (SHE) should stay with us

Because they married us

Because our house needs a lot of work in the garden and I need help

Because he (she) should care more about me

Because I work hard and try hard and deserve more attention

Rebuttal

Marriage is based on mutual respect and understanding. Sometimes that means that we need to respect the dreams of our mates

The garden can wait another week.

Why should he (she) care more? I have been selfish and critical for the past 10 years!

Why should anyone deserve more attention? What have I done to make the home pleasant?

CONCLUSION

Anger is explosive and sometimes when you are aware you are angry it is too late!

The best thing to do to help yourself with an anger problem is to think about the things that trigger you. Often this is a technique used in anger management.

The Volcano Factor

List the things that bug you. You can use the anger test or make up your own. Make a scale of 1-10. For example criticism of your work unfairly may rank as a 10 in your books.

Now fantasise that you are in that situation. Imagine someone complaining about your work and being rude to you. Try to be as vivid as possible. Write down the HOT thoughts as we did in the earlier examples. These are the thoughts that immediately come to mind.

For instance

That creep he doesn't know jack yet he criticises me!

That person is a complete moron cant they see the great work that I do?

That moron does not appreciate me; it is obvious they simply don't care!

Following the HOT thoughts make another column, this time call it COOL thoughts or more rational thoughts.

Go through the imagery again only this time imagining that instead of exploding with the HOT thoughts and telling the person off, or calling them a jerk you respond with the COOL thoughts

For instance

That person knows much about other areas but lacks expertise in my area. He (she) is having a bad day and it would be wise not to over react to what they say.

I do a great job but this person is focusing on some smaller aspects of my work rather than the big picture. I will not let that upset me or ruin my day.

Whether or not I am appreciated is not the issue. I am here to do a job to the best of my ability. Not everyone will or can like me.

Now with the COOL thoughts in mind, imagine your reaction.

It is clear that your behaviour, your reaction will be different once the cool thoughts are in place. There will be no explosion of rage, rather an understanding. You will not allow one person's bad day to ruin yours. You will not allow them such power over you.

Do this little exercise for all the things that you think really and truly disturb you.

SUMMARY

In summary about anger it is worth remembering that

- a) Anger is a function of your thoughts. People and outside events cannot MAKE you angry. YOU make YOURSELF angry by choosing to respond in unproductive and explosive ways to certain situations. What situations make you angry is a function of who you are.
- b) Most of the time, anger serves no useful purpose. In fact, it cripples you with rage and makes it impossible for you to see beyond your rage and to focus on more creative and helpful solutions.
- c) Thoughts that lead to anger are often, if not always distorted thoughts. The distortions make us see the world through a skewed glass. The world therefore is not as it is, but as we imagine it to be. This in turn leads us to anger when the image that the world presents to us, is different than what we think it must be. We think it must be so, because our thinking is dominated by cognitive distortions. Our anger is reduced when we begin to realise how many distortions have dominated our thinking, and start to replace them with more realistic or cooler thinking patterns.
- d) Usually your anger is because you imagine someone or something to be unjust or unfair. The ultimate form of this, is when addicts go on binges and respond in anger because they feel life itself is unfair.
- e) Once you start to see the world through the eyes of others, you will come to realise that not all actions are directed maliciously against you, nor is it the case that their actions are unfair

when seen from their point of view. The unfairness turns out to be a creation of your own mind. If you are willing to let go of the idea that your views of truth, fairness and justice are shared by everyone, then you will have a much easier time at dealing with your anger

- f) People feel they don't deserve your punishment or bad treatment, Your rage and tantrums will NOT make them change their behaviour, and it will only cause them to resent you more. So why keep it up?
- g) A large percentage of our anger and our subsequent outbursts are because we imagine that there is a blow to our self-esteem. We feel belittled or ridiculed and in some way we take this as a direct blow to which we are and feel diminished as a result.
- h) Frustration and anger can also happen because expectations are unmet. But these expectations if you think about them, are often unrealistic and cause problems especially when we impose these expectations on other people.
- i) Is it childish to pout that you have a right to be angry? Of course it is. Is there any advantage to feeling angry? Will you or the world really benefit from your rage?
- j) In order to be human, you rarely need rage. When you get rid of the sour, negative feelings that threaten friendships and other relationships and come to challenge your own distortions, life will be a lot happier for you.

HOMEWORK AND SOME SUMMARY

In essence, this chapter makes the point that your reactions and to some extent your feelings are created by your thoughts and how you see the world. This is especially true of anger. There is no external situation that can MAKE you angry, you yourself create the anger by your thought process.

The key, therefore to truly changing our behaviour and to have more even keeled reactions to events is to be aware of how and what we are thinking.

It is not enough simply to stop the behaviour, i.e. to stop drinking or lashing out at people, what must be looked at is the root cause and the root of the problem is our distorted thinking patterns.

Distorted thinking patterns cause misery in our jobs, relationships and our lives in total. They are the unheard shoulds and the judgements that we impose on those around us.

It would take years of analysis to discover where our distorted thinking comes from and in my opinion, such research is not relevant. It is enough to know that we suffer from this problem, to recognise it and to challenge our thinking process.

These chapters suggested writing down hot or immediate thoughts, and replace them with cool thoughts. It is also worth while to write down an immediate thought and to say to yourself, how is my thinking distorted in this case?

For example, a successful businessman got a letter from a friend asking him to do some work while his friend was on holidays. The businessman reacted in an explosion to the letter

thoughts

Why cant my friend see that I am busy, I don't need a to do list. My friend is simply inconsiderate!

I am an important person with many clients and a busy practice, I don't have time to waste on small things like this! I just wont do it!

REACTION

The businessman calls his friend and tells him off for being thoughtless and inconsiderate.

DISTORTIONS

a) Mind reading: His friend knows he is busy but would not deliberately tax him or be inconsiderate

.b) Magnification' It is just a letter, it is not a personal insult to the businessman's status. The businessman sees it as a direct threat to his self-esteem, which of course, it is not.

c) Self Centre. The businessman assumes that this is an attack and an insult. He is imputing motives that are simply not there and does so without checking the facts

MORE BALANCED APPROACH

The friend wrote a letter to encourage the businessman to keep up with the work that they had been doing together. There was no insult intended. The business man feels insecure and needs to remind himself of his success and how busy he is, but in the process has neglected or has been unable to see the intent of the letter. Instead, he reacted explosively.

Try little things like this on your own time. Make a chart like this example, or create one of your own. Of course the terms used for the distortions are not written in stone, and there are many more. A distortion is simply a thought that you have that leads you to interpret an event incorrectly. In our example, the businessman wrongly assumed that the letter his friend wrote was an insult instead of a note of friendship.

Start to realise that our very thoughts lead us to misery and begin to take control of your thoughts. Challenge them. Just because they come to mind does not mean they are correct, and often our immediate thoughts are incorrect because they come from deep-rooted problems or situations in our past. Our immediate thoughts need to be challenged because they are like automatic tapes that play in our minds. These tapes come from our childhood mainly and simply do not fit into an adult world. Hence many of our reactions to situations are very childish.

There are many routes in therapy that can help you to consider the response of what is called the 'child within' but again, these are long standing.

Homework

For one week, check all your automatic hot thoughts. These are thoughts that you have in response to a negative situation. Look at them carefully and see if you are distorting them. Remember if you have a drinking or addictions problem that this will be difficult because by this time you have become an expert in self-deception and lying.

In terms of anger and shoulds and oughts and all that we have spoken about, remember that one of the keys to joy in life is to simply enjoy the moment. How often do we rush through a shower or a coffee simply because we are passing through this time looking for some future appointment or future event. We miss so much pleasure in life, in our rush to do more, or to see tomorrow.

Instead, a very healing technique to anger, to self-defeating thoughts, is simply to stop and take pleasure in the moment. Eat your meal slowly, savour every morsel, and take pleasure in the wild flowers in the field, in the smell of new cut grass, in the song of the birds and the feel of the wind. In short, take pleasure in being fully alive.

The trouble with addictions, addictive thinking and distorted thinking, is that it robs us of the capacity to experience pleasure. We seek instead pleasure in the extraordinary, in the drugs, in the thrill because we have deadened our feelings and consider life to be a burden and a pain.

Once we have shut off our feelings, because we are afraid of them as is often the case with addicts, life becomes dull and grey and we are no longer able to enjoy our passions, or the things that make life meaningful to us. Life becomes a chore.

After working on hot and cool thoughts, or more rational approaches for a few days, retake the anger test. Did you notice a difference in scores? Keep working on substituting cooler thoughts for immediate and reactive thoughts and check your anger scores. Practice meditation.

For one week, take the time to explore. Marvel at the cobwebs in the rain and the dew, enjoy a sunset or a sunrise, and feel wet grass on your feet, take pleasure in life. I believe that as humans, we are very strange creatures. We are on a planet with infinite delights and pleasures that are simple to enjoy like a conversation, spending time with a friend, but instead we look to the extreme to imagine that gives us pleasure. We pave over the grass, we poison the air, we pollute the waters and instead we spend our lives looking for happiness in another person, in money, in sex or in power and we die, without ever finding it.

The key to happiness and to joy is in part, knowing that it is all around you. When you become able to experience the joy of the moment, then your guard will begin to drop and you will realise that you can reach out to others, speak with others and enjoy true living.

In terms of anger be aware that your thoughts cause the anger. Ask yourself if your thoughts are rational or distorted and then re examine the situation. In fact, after re examination of the situation, take the anger test. Your anger will not vanish over night but by stopping in this way, you will find that over a period of time, your anger will certainly be less explosive.

In the next chapter, I will devote time to life in recovery and expand upon the ideas of pleasure, love and God.

CHAPTER FOUR

Life in Recovery

A life of sobriety and in recovery is more than just a life without drinking or drugs. It is more than a life that is focused on avoidance. Rather, a life of recovery is to be seen in a positive light. It is life that will be worth living and you will be fully alive. To illustrate this, I have divided up what I call life in recovery in sections. The first section will deal with relationships.

Life in Recovery, the relationships

As an addict, you were used to suppressing your feelings. Perhaps you grew up in an environment where feelings were not encouraged or too explosive. Addicts use drugs and alcohol to numb the pain and to deaden feelings. Thus, when feelings such as anger or rage do occur, they are almost always out of control. No doubt this is why most relationships where alcohol or drugs are involved are linked with physical and emotional abuse. The myth of the happy drunk, is just that, a myth.

Relationships as an addict are short term, and almost always abusive. The addict cannot relate to anyone else, not even himself. He is not honest with his own feelings and emotions and therefore cannot hope to be open and honest to another individual.

The combination of repressed feelings, dishonesty and an inability to face themselves, means that the addict cannot love another person. He or she is incapable of giving of themselves freely to another, which is what love requires.

Often addicts will find themselves in relationships where they try to 'help' the other person, usually another addict. But given the fact that addicts have distorted thinking, and lie to themselves, they are actually not able to help anyone, let alone themselves until they admit their problem.

Relationships with addicts are based on drugs or alcohol and things, which normally accompany a relationship, like intimacy, are not present. The relationship is ripe with arguments, fights and abuse.

In recovery, you will learn how to deal with your feelings and not to repress them. Once you learn about your own feelings, perhaps for the first time you will be sensitive to the feelings of another. In recovery, you will learn the true joy of empathy with another person. Once you are

aware of your pain and your feelings in an honest fashion (Not the pity pot of the addict), you will be able to experience the pleasure of sharing the joy, the hopes and the despair of another person. For the first time, you will find that you can actually listen to another person, to your partner or spouse and not be thinking of your next hit, or your next party. In recovery, once you are aware of how to deal with and recognise your feelings and emotions, you will be able to love, which is the most rewarding and perhaps the most human of all emotions.

Love is more than merely being with another person, to love another person is to grow with the other person, to allow them to grow. Addicts cannot allow another to grow, they are crippled so they grasp and resist changes. To love another person is like watching a garden flower. You marvel in the beauty and the newness each day. To love another person is simply to marvel in the uniqueness of the other and the fact that they chose to share that uniqueness with you.

Love is not a feeling, nor is it 'falling in love', as so many TV commercials seem to indicate. Love is basically a commitment to another person. An addict is unable to make a commitment of more than 5 minutes, which is why relationships are often broken. Love is saying that you will be with that person, to share their growth, their pleasure, their pain, when times are good and when times are bad. It is a road and it requires discipline.

Life in recovery also means forgiveness and making amends to those that you hurt. This is the 'fearless moral inventory' of the 12-step program. It is important never to forget this step. A life in recovery means that you take responsibility for the disasters that your addiction has brought to your family and friends and loved ones. Making amends, saying that you are sorry is very crucial. The reason is that if we are aware, deeply aware of how our addiction has hurt and almost destroyed our loved ones, and then it will act as a powerful motivation to prevent us from going down that road again. You will find communication in your relationships difficult. Where before you would drink or use when the going got tough or you did not get your own way, now you have to think about communicating with your loved ones.

Remember even though it may feel awkward to talk or to share, communication, even if it seems lame is important. In communication skills there are a few points to bear in mind.

HONESTY

Addicts are expert liars and fabricators, but a life in recovery means a life of honesty and that means no more stories or white lies. When dealing with your loved ones, it is important to be

honest. After all, do you not think they merit to be told the truth? You have lied to them for years, now start with the truth.

REPEAT PLEASE

When speaking to other people, it is important to clarify if they have understood what you said. So often we only half listen and never really hear what another is saying. Just ask if they understood your point. Don't accuse. You can also repeat what you said in a different way to make sure the point is across.

JUDGMENTS

Addicts are experts at making snap judgements and impulsive decisions. Yet when this happens, it closes the door on discussion. After all, your mind is made up why bring facts into the picture? You could try to say "This is not a bad idea but maybe we could do....." Try to listen to the other, and not pass judgement on them and their feelings. Accept what they have to say even if you disagree at least be aware that their feelings are real. For example if someone is angry with you, instead of writing them off, tries saying "I am sorry you feel angry.....(and then explain your point of view)"

THE BODY

We may be masters at lying and hiding our words, but the body does not lie. Someone's tight shoulders and clenched fists indicate they are angry. They may be smiling, but inside is another matter. Listen to your body. If you think you are happy watch your body. But don't assume that because someone has clenched teeth for instance that they are angry. They may simply have a raging headache. The best policy is to ask.

ANGER BEGETS ANGER

An angry person is not a communicator. They cannot hear or listen to another person. If you start to rant, chances are your spouse will rant back and there will be escalation.

If on the other hand you begin by saying "I was really upset when.....(the event). I was worried about you" This will not cause an anger arms race because the statement now focuses on how YOU are feeling, rather than accusing your partner of being a jerk. Always try to restore and recover the caring and nurturing feelings as these were all but lost when you were an active addict.

FRIENDS

A support network cannot be overstressed. There will be times when you need a reality check. Just because you married someone does NOT mean they will like all that you like, or even agree with you on all things. This does not mean the marriage is over. It simply means that in any healthy relationship, room must be granted to the other person. You cannot smother the other person. What is important is not that you agree on everything, but that you respect the other person, and they respect you. It is important that you respect your partner's opinions and listen without belittling them. If your partner prefers Opera to jazz what of it?

That is communication. Another key aspect in a relationship, especially one that has been poisoned by addictions is to forgive and forget. Once your family understands the nature of your illness, take them to Al-Anon where they can get support. Get people from the treatment centre to speak to them if needed.

Keep a check on egotism, when you are in recovery it is easy simply to focus on yourself and to forget anniversaries, birthdays, or calling home. This is a danger sign.

Identify areas of conflict in your family. If your son's friends have always been a sore spot with you and your spouse, identify this and work out in a mutual fashion what strategies can be put into place to help the situation.

THE NORMAL LIFE

Chances are you came from an addicted family yourself and have never had the occasion to experience normal life. In your family, decisions were either made by one person, or in the middle of a fight. Whoever yelled the loudest, won.

Of course, in relationships such tactics don't work. Normal, healthy relationships are based on trust and respect and decisions are discussed rather than handed down. The family makes the decisions and discusses the parameters. In normal families, people can compromise. In an addicted family compromise does not exist. Control is the key and the addict will do anything to manipulate and control. They will bully their children or spouse into getting their way. The addict controls everything, The kids have to have their homework done by a certain time, finish all the food on their plate. The spouse has to be home by a certain hour, cannot associate with certain friends and so on and so forth. The spouse tries desperately to accommodate and control the addict. The sad truth is, it is not the addict who is controlling that family, and it is the drugs.

Normal families share their feelings and there is no element of sick control. In the addicted family, feelings are not discussed because the addiction can never be mentioned. Thus there is a lot of insecurity and lack of trust. In this conspiracy, every family member feels a burden of shame. It is important and necessary to share and to open up your feelings. Addicted families have been taught to hide and never share and yet it is essential to mental health that one shares and open ups.

Normal families get angry and have fun and relax in moderation. Addicts and addicted family do EVERYTHING to excess. The credit card bills are astronomical, the restaurant bills sky high, everything and life itself is lived on the edge. There is no such thing as moderation. In normal families, there are goals and traditions. Addicted families have no traditions since everything depends on the drug. It may be usual to go to church on Sundays but if Dad or Mom is too hung over most of the time, then the tradition falls away. Thus kids growing up in an addicted home are likely to have few or no traditions. Life is re invented depending on what state Dad or Mom is in.

In a normal family and in normal relationships, people look after each other. In an addicted family it is every man or woman for himself. The key is to look after you and to be a survivor.

EGO BOUNDARIES

As an addict, you take every small criticism as a personal attack on your honour. This was discussed in my section on distorted thinking. Of course, such hypersensitivity comes from the fact that the ego or the sense of self that the addict has is not very great. Addicts look at most events as a personal attack. If a boss tells them their report is not up to par, rather than asking how they can improve, the addict will blow up and attack everyone and everything. Anger is often a problem and this way of reacting to life has to constantly be checked or professional help is in order.

Life in sobriety will also mean other changes for the better. The first is that you will be able to admit your emotions and feelings and actually begin to work with them rather than ignore them. This means that you will perhaps for the first time be able to communicate without yelling, or losing control. You will start to feel the joys of listening to another person.

PLEASURE

Some people claim that the sober life is a boring life but I think that the opposite is true. It is only when you are sober and clean that you can begin to experience life as it should be experienced. You will be in touch with yourself and therefore able to respond to life's challenges and life's blessings.

Some people rush through life, planning for tomorrow or next week or moaning about the past. In so doing, they forgo the blessings of today. Life is full of rich treasures and the only time we have is this very moment. We cannot see the past, nor can we live in the future. This is the 12-step axiom of one day at a time.

This is all that we have. I believe that life is to be enjoyed and relished. Have you ever noticed the way the water falls when you take a shower? Or smelled freshly mown grass? Or marvelled at a sunset or tried to listen to birds, watched the cobwebs, followed tracks in the deep cool snow? Have you ever let yourself truly experience joy or have you always been thinking about tomorrow, another challenge, another hit or worried about some future disaster (remember my section on catastrophic thinking)

To stop and to enjoy life's pleasures is I think one of the great rewards of a sober life. A head that is not clouded with drugs is able to look at life, to enjoy other people, to love others and to love yourself.

Life in sobriety is not dull and grey but rather full of rich colour and texture. A life in sobriety is a life of maturity and responsibility. It is only when we are mature and responsible that we are able to look after other people, to enjoy their company and in turn to offer something of ourselves to others. A life in sobriety means that we can look at ourselves in the mirror and not be disgusted. We will slowly regain some of our lost self-esteem and start to feel good once more about ourselves.

When we are in recovery, it is important that we take the time to enjoy things around us. There is a wonderful book that describes this it is called thinking like Leonardo and the point of the book is that we often stifle our genius and creativity simply because we rush and we don't take the time to enjoy things around us. We are ashamed to develop some of our hidden talents like music or art, but it is only in the development of our hidden talents that we can come to a deeper appreciation of the beauties of life around us.

Moreover, it is only a sober life that is able to use its talents to benefit others and not merely to benefit yourself.

The 12 steps talks about making amends and apologising to others, but I would like to add a 13th step. In our new sober life, it is crucial that we begin to love ourselves, to look after ourselves as in so doing, we will be able to love others. This is what pleasure is all about. We live in a world of delights and delicate beauty. So many people deny pleasure. They rush through meals, don't exercise, and grumble when morning comes and for them life is a stress test. Life is meant to be enjoyed! I believe that those who rush through life and complain really hate themselves. They cannot see themselves as worthy of or deserving of pleasure and so they torture themselves by working extra ordinary hours, eating on the run, not exercising, not taking vacations, and so forth. Some dull the pain with drugs but there are those who simply endure life.

There is a telos or a purpose to our enjoyment of life. I think that the more we are able to enjoy life's moments, the soups, the sunsets, the fresh breezes, the more we will be able to reach out to those around us. The more open we are to the joys of life, the more we can incorporate that into our soul as it were, and the more we will be able to share our joy with others. Joy, pleasure is not a thing to be pursued for its own sake, it is rather a consequence of a life of mature sobriety. It is a consequence of a life lived to a higher purpose. Life no longer means just you, now life incorporates other people, other things. That makes a lot of difference indeed.

HEALING: AN OVERVIEW

As you progress in recovery it is important to take it slowly. At first, concentrate on your own healing. Think of it as you being a fireman with a broken leg. The fireman cannot rescue anyone unless his or her leg is healed. You are in need of healing at the moment and must remember that.

In the second phase, when you are comfortable with the idea of recovery and have had some sobriety under your belt you will begin to make amends and think of the people you have hurt. You will find that communication becomes less of a chore and more of a pleasure even though at first it is strained. You will begin to make commitments. You will learn to deal with your emotions.

In the third phase, you will start to experience the joys of living. Your issues will be a tendency to believe that you are totally cured and thus get bored in AA/NA meetings. Remember that the meetings are not so much for you but you can also inspire others to save their lives. It is important that you keep on track and although other areas in your life, work and love are beginning to take shape there are other things to consider.

Life in Recovery : Work issues

As an addict you took all things personally and thus were liable to fly off the handle at every perceived insult. Now that you have learned to accept yourself and understand that you are a worthy person, not every slight will cause you to quit or fly off the handle. In fact, you will respond in a much more mature fashion to slights and problems at work. Instead of quitting, or fighting, you will seek ways to improve your work.

STRESS

As an addict, life seemed overwhelming. The slightest stress was cause for you to abuse and to use drugs. If it rained, that was a good enough reason!

As someone in recovery, you can make use of the cognitive tools and have learned to look at things that stress you with an analytical mind rather than reacting. You can evaluate what causes the stress and instead of panicking or running, which is what you did as an addict, you will be rational enough to take stock and assess the situation with your new found communication skills.

TIME MANAGEMENT

As an addict, there was never enough time to do anything. You wanted it all to happen yesterday and patience was not in your skill set. Now in recovery and living in sobriety and joy, time becomes a commodity that you can use wisely.

You will plan.

CHANGE

As an addict, change is something that is frightening. It is the unknown and the unknown may hold terrors for you. Change happens in life, and in recovery you will come to appreciate that change is welcome. Change signifies that you are growing and learning not dying.

Challenge:

Look at change by going with the flow. Change happens, we get older. Instead of resisting and fighting change, look at it from its positive benefits. A new job may not be the end of the world, in fact it may offer you more than you had hoped for.

Control

In order to keep from getting stressed out with change, try to think of ways in which you have control in your life. Be proactive, don't wait for situations to become emergencies. Find ways to incorporate a measure of control. For example, if you are on an exercise program, do it regularly and every day rather than trying to get it all done in the weekend. Studies have shown that when we feel that we are out of control our stress levels rise considerably. In scuba diving, the key to relax even in an emergency situation is to be in control and be calm.

Commitment

Commit to what you do. Don't find excuses for doing poor jobs or for quitting. Find your meaning and security by learning who you are and what you value and love and what you want from life. Once you are aware of your personal purpose, this forms a strong base upon which you can commit yourself through difficult times. One of the great tragedies today is the number of individuals who have no sense of value or personal purpose. They drift and as such they are unable to commit to a course of action. Life is a meaningless jumble of grey for them and commitment and dedication are impossible as they have no base from which to draw.

Contact

It is important to maintain your friendships. Surround yourself with people who are positive and making changes in their lives. Keep contact with your family. Remember always that no one is an island.

Conditioning and Fitness

Keep healthy by eating well and exercising. Also never neglect your spiritual dimension. I believe that it is vital to being human that we understand that there is a higher power, an ontological other upon which our actions are based. Life is not made up on the fly but there is a pre ordained purpose found in a loving and merciful God.

EVERY DAY TIPS

The following is great advice for anyone in recovery or for anyone in general.

Give yourself a break

Deep breathing is the most basic relaxation technique. When things get stressful take a few deep long breaths.

Broaden yourself

Life is not meant to be lived in the bunkers. Take up a new sport or hobby or take a class. Get new friends, visit different cities. The more developed and varied your interests are the better you will be able to cope.

Reach out to friends

Distress causes people to focus too much on themselves. Try to volunteer to help others in need. Caring for someone or something else not only gives you good feelings, it pays off in terms of better health and coping skills.

Positive self talk

You are so used to negative talk, try to pep yourself up with positive talk. Encourage yourself!

A laugh a day

Nothing can replace a great laugh

Be human

You are not superman or superwoman. There are times when you will fail. When stress overloads you stop and think. Can I control it? Can I fix it? If not, it is best to walk away. Be patient and gentle with yourself and learn when to walk away.

HOMEWORK

1) Repeat to yourself that recovery really means living life to its fullest. You deserve the change to live life to its fullest without drugs or alcohol and without the distorted thinking that goes along with addictions or dysfunctional living. I believe that the root cause of many personality disorders and addictions themselves is a low sense of self worth. Somewhere along the line, you got the message that you were less than other people or simply not deserving of the good life. It is important that you always remember that to love others, you must first build yourself up to the point that you accept and love yourself. That does not mean you stop changing, it simply means that you have a mature appreciation for who you are and what your limitations are. Limitations are not weakness anymore than being born with brown or blue eyes is. Limitations are what makes you a person and sets you apart from everyone else. Always bear in mind that you are

unique with unique gifts to contribute to the world. Read your journal and write how you are enjoying life to the fullest. Compare some early journal entries with what you are doing now. Write how life has taken on more meaning. Be as specific as possible. Volunteer to help others.

2) Spirituality is often neglected in our society and has been passed off as childish by some. It is my belief that without a sense of spirituality, without an awareness that we are not the arbiter of right and wrong, and that there is a larger purpose in life, our life will become meaningless to us. We will find ourselves asking “Is this all there is to life”. Spirituality, an awareness of God and the practice of religion, will I think enable us to reach beyond ourselves and give us the strength to find meaning when life seems to go awry. Try to read some spiritual books in your tradition or attend Church, Temple or Synagogue. Now is the time to develop fully as a human being and that entails consideration of the spiritual side of life.

3) Learn to laugh at yourself. There are many unhappy people who take life too seriously. They imagine that all bad events are directed at them. They are convinced that if they fail the sun will not shine and so on and so forth. Life is meant to be enjoyed not endured. Always remember that in the end what is important is not how many buildings you have named after yourself, or what books you have written but rather how you have lived your life. Your legacy should be one of making an impact on those around you. Strive to be known as a kind, tolerant and patient person. Life is lived in the small moments when what we think are great tasks are interrupted. Life is not about our great tasks. What we think is great and important in the large scheme of things is really irrelevant. Think of the Great Pyramids. They are wonderful buildings, but what difference have they made to the course of the rivers or the songs of the birds? Nothing. Remember that all that we do is of little importance except when we influence others. We are put on earth I believe to reflect and to show love and kindness. Write down what is important to you and how and where you see growth and change. Think of the earlier hot topic work that you did and see how you have become a more tolerant and loving person.

SOME REFERENCES

This is by no means complete but represent some books that I have found useful.

“The Recovery Book”, Al Mooney, Arlene Eisenberg and Howard Eisenberg,(Workman Publishing: New York, 1992) This book discusses all aspects of recovery and is an excellent resource

“Essentials of Chemical Dependency Counselling” Gary Lawson, Ann Lawson, Clayton Rivers (Aspen Publications: Maryland, 2001) This is a more serious book but gives a good oversight on the counselling aspect.

“Addictive Thinking, Understanding Self Deception” Abraham Twerski (Hazelden; Pittsburgh, 1997)

An excellent overview of the lies that the addict uses.