

“Who, me? I’m not addicted, I don’t have a problem.”

“That’s the last time I am going to give in to drinking. Next time, I’ll try really hard.”

“No way, I’m not addicted to gambling, it’s a good way to make some fast money... “

“The only way to cope with my stress is to shop and shop and shop...”

“I can control doing drugs, I’ll stop it before I get addicted.”

“If anyone in church gets to know about my porn habit, I’ll completely lose face. I can’t discuss this with anyone.”

Be it alcohol, drugs or behaviors, addiction is reaching alarming numbers and is one that sweeps every society irrespective of class or economic status. Addiction not only affects the individual in question but also the family.

The myth commonly believed is that it can be controlled by willpower alone. But sadly, a majority becomes so dependent on a substance/ behavior that they no longer are able to abstain from it. Priorities change, perspectives are lost and the ability to make choices diminish, making it complex to break away from the cycle of addiction. The affected have different responses to the problem of addiction. Some deny it is a problem, others blindly turn a cold shoulder to its repercussions and the rest fight a battle of guilt and shame of not knowing how to escape from its chains. Perhaps, the problem is that people fail to understand what addiction truly is and struggle to discover ways to break free. Let’s take a closer look.

Addiction and its Symptoms

Conventionally, the term ‘addiction’ was used to describe dependence on substances such as alcohol or drugs. In recent times, however, it has also been applied to a range of behaviors which follow a similar pattern of dependence like in substance related addictions.

The progression of a substance addiction usually comprises of three phases: **use, harmful abuse and addiction**. The substance is experimented with, initially, to see what it is like or due to social pressure. Sometimes it is used to enhance a previously felt pleasurable experience. If the substance use climbs to a point where there is continued use despite its effect on family relationships, health and work, it turns to **harmful abuse**. **Addiction** soon follows when the intake becomes recurrent, maladaptive and persistent, despite serious consequences.

Behavioral addictions spring up due to some underlying issue, in majority of the cases. It could be due to an early experience that produced a high amount of gratification, a person's mental state or certain personality traits such as poor impulse control, pleasure seeking or a heightened sense of stress leading to a failure to resolve conflicts. Behavioral addictions are progressive and as debilitating as substance addictions.

The Symptoms of Addiction

According to ICD 10 - *International Classification of Mental and Behavioral Disorders* (10th Edition), addiction/dependence on substances or behaviors exhibits the following symptoms:

1. A strong desire or urge to use a substance or indulge in a behavior.
2. The inability to control or cut down the substance/behavior.
3. The need to use a substance/engage in the behavior progressively and increasingly to attain the same effect.
4. Abstinence from the substance/behavior leads to unpleasant physical and psychological signs of withdrawal. Common withdrawal symptoms include craving, irritability and depression.
5. Constant preoccupation with the substance/behavior.
6. Neglecting interests and alternative activities due to the amount of time spent in indulging in the behavior or in obtaining or taking the substance or recovering from its effects.
7. The persistent use of the substance or indulgence in the behavior in spite of the evidence of harmful consequences.
8. The addiction takes higher precedence over other social, work related and recreational activities.

The presence of three or more of the above symptoms is indicative of an addiction.

Kinds of Addiction

1. **Substance Addictions:** These are addictions where substances such as alcohol and drugs (either prescription or illegal drugs such as cocaine, heroin, marijuana, etc) are consumed.

2. Process/Behavioral Addictions: Unlike substance addiction, this is a psychological addiction to behaviors such as pornography, gambling, computer games, eating, exercise, surfing the Internet or sex. These behaviors can over a period become as habit forming as an addictive drug.

The extent to which each of these behaviors classifies for an addiction has been in debate.

Breaking Free From Addiction

One of the foremost steps to getting help especially for substance addictions is to get medical assistance by entering into a detoxification program. It is a process of getting the toxins out of the body caused by the consumption of alcohol or drugs. Detoxification also helps in the process of managing the physical symptoms of withdrawals in a less dangerous manner. Detoxification is the beginning of the journey but not an end. In order for the affected person to continue on the path to recovery, it requires working on the psychological, social and spiritual areas of life.

1. The Beginning of Freedom – Acceptance

The destructive cycle that dependents get into is by using self judgmental statements- “I’ve blown it again, I will never be able to stop this behavior” or “I’ve made so many mistakes, I can never get on track again.”

Judgment/condemnation is the opposite of acceptance. Accept there is a problem: The road to recovery starts by an acceptance of oneself, a confession of one’s addiction and the circumstance one is in.

Acceptance does not mean resignation to circumstances or feeling like a victim. It is acknowledging there is a problem and that life has become dysfunctional. No one can change their life until they accept themselves as they are. This would mean to quit making excuses or pretending that the addiction does not exist or that it would mysteriously all go away. Acceptance releases a power to change and alter things in one’s life. Accepting that it is not only the body that needs to recover but also the mind. Acceptance is an act of the will that opens the door to change. It frees one to make constructive decisions for their life.

2. Renewing the Mind

Most importantly, to surrender, seek and ask God to work within the mind is the key to its transformation and renewal. What transforms in the mind and spirit translates into the body. To be set free, embrace the truth of what God has created us to be rather than holding onto every false belief/ condemning thought

that holds us captive in bondage. Meditating on truths on victorious living can break bondages and bring anyone to a place of complete freedom.

3. Explore the Reasons

The reasons for an addiction could be myriad. Common triggers that lead to the addiction need to be explored and understood as it can shed light on how the addiction works. To eradicate the addiction, tackle the reason! Some of the reasons usually cited are that of boredom, social pressure/influence, depression, anxiety, poor self esteem or difficult relationships/situations.

For instance, a drug addict continues his addiction due to his acquaintance with drug peddlers or users. A person addicted to pornography finds that the best way to kill his boredom is to indulge in pornography. Poor self esteem and the need for security can cause the sex addict to get into multiple sexual encounters.

Probing the reasons that lead to an addiction aids them to discover strategies that are used to tackle the very cause. The drug addict needs to find a new social group to connect with and also is helped with skills to assert himself when pressurized to take a drug. Getting involved in a vocation or learning a new skill during his pastime helps a pornographic addict make good use of idle time. Negative self defeating thoughts substituted with empowering winning beliefs can improve the way the sex addict sees himself. For those who are addicted to behaviors due to the inability to cope during stressful situations need to enhance their problem solving and adaptive techniques.

4. The Motivation Behind

There may be many good reasons to stop the addictive behavior ranging from health problems to relational difficulties to huge financial loss. But the important aspect is to find out the one factor that motivates the dependent to kick the habit. The first step is to dig deep into how the addiction has affected different areas of the dependent's life – such as the work/business, marriage, family, finances, spirituality or health.

Help the dependent to rate the area that is most important to him/her and discuss on what it is that he would like to see changed in this area. Take the person through a process of visualizing the good things that he/she expects in this area if the addiction were stopped. Build an action plan to work towards restoring that specific area of the dependent's life. Being constantly reminded of this motivating factor fuels the desire to getting free.

5. Look out for the Triggers

Once a dependent has made the choice to stop the addiction, there may be times in the process of quitting that there may be setbacks, often called as relapse. Relapse means slipping back to the addiction after a period of abstinence. Relapse usually occurs due to some triggers in the person's environment that prompts the dependent to crave and restart the addiction. Triggers vary for every addiction and for every addict.

For those in substance addiction, triggers can be a wine shop or a common place known for drug peddling. Pictures with suggestive content can be triggers for those addicted to pornography. Even certain emotional states such as loneliness, anxiety, depression or problems at work or within relationships can trigger a setback. Making a list beforehand by identifying people, places, things, circumstances that act as triggers is a proactive technique to deal with relapse. Knowing and planning what to do and say both in action and in words when faced with the triggers keep the dependent ready to face the thoughts of going back to the addictive behavior.

6. Record the Addiction Pattern

Although addiction symptoms are similar across all those who are dependent, patterns of use/behavior are quite different and varied. Maintain a record with the addiction patterns such as time, frequency, emotional state, precipitating factors that triggered the addiction. This helps the dependent to be prepared for what is forthcoming and take constructive decisions and choose alternative behavioral steps towards breaking free.

7. Behavioral Change

Making the decision to quit the addiction is the initial step but next comes actions that show the addiction that one means business. Behavioral measures are important to start the process of quitting. Removing things that are connected to the addiction is a vital step, such as alcohol bottles, syringes, internet connections, magazines laden with obscene content. For those dependents where the addiction involves the company of others, informing them about the decision to quit is necessary. Deliberately engaging oneself in learning a skill or a sport can take off the focus from the substance or the behavior. Routines and environments that typically lead to the addiction can be altered. Making changes in lifestyle such as exercise, eating healthy, following a regular sleep schedule can bring about some structure to daily routines.

8. Management of Stress

Stress or difficult situations are a part of life. The tendency to relapse is greater when stress shows up or when one is faced with a hard decision/problem. The

addiction is often seen as a stress/ pain reliever, however, the opposite is true. In an effort to numb the pain, the person relapses hoping to stop 'after this just once' but the addiction kicks off again leaving the person fraught with added stress and guilt of the addiction. Using relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and muscular relaxation techniques can alleviate anxiety. Seeking the assistance of a professional for stressors that are chronic or recurring can go a long way in coping effectively.

9. **Seek the Support of Others:** Finding a person either a spouse or a close friend who can be accountable to is crucial for those in the addiction. Being honest and accountable to the person regarding all your struggles can help. Professional counseling is a critical part of recovery where a counselor can provide the knowledge, the tools, the support and the strength to conquer the addiction.

Family members of a person chained in addiction are as negatively impacted as the dependent itself. One of the biggest issues is that family members find it difficult to understand addiction. In addition, the concept of addiction has a tag of strong emotions such as shame, guilt, irresponsibility, failure that is sadly seen as a reflection of the family's ineffectiveness. This leads to the dependent and his family staying indoors and keeping things shut and closed rather than educating themselves about addiction and finding useful resources to get help. They begin to develop maladaptive ways of coping in an attempt to re-establish the lost equilibrium. During which time communication gets broken, the problem is kept away from other relatives and friends and constant attempts are made to cover up the consequences of the dependent's actions.

Here are a few things families can keep in mind.

1. **Be informed about addiction and the chances of relapse.** The beliefs the family holds about the addiction influences the way they think behave and act towards the dependent. Thus, being aware of the signs and symptoms of addiction gives a better understanding of the problem. Relapse can be part of process that leads to getting free and should not be considered as a failure on the part of the dependent.
2. **Build a relationship with the person:** The relationship between the dependent and the family usually becomes strained over time, due to the addiction. The addiction must be seen as the enemy and not the addict. Constant personal criticism can lead to the dependent finding it difficult to make changes that he/ she wishes to make in the recovery process. Be aware that the process of recovery is hard work to the dependent's physical, mental and emotional life. Choose to be encouraging, supportive and patient as the

dependent makes the journey. Instill hope no matter how hard the struggle may seem.

3. **Allow for consequences to be the teacher:** When a dependent's behavior results in certain consequences such as getting a warning at work, running into debts, etc., it is imperative that the family does not bail them out but allows them to take responsibility for their actions. If the dependent is not allowed to experience the pain of the cost of his addictive behavior, motivation to change is limited. Facing the consequences forces them to focus more on the impact the addiction is having on their lives and thereby motivates them to seek help/treatment.
4. **Seek support and professional help:** Seeking help to deal with your emotions and situation is not a sign of weakness but an attempt to help yourself take responsibility towards your well being, To be an effective and supportive caretaker, family members must be willing to do all they can to improve their quality of life.

As elaborated, addiction clouds every aspect of life and impacts the individual as well as the family immensely. Being stuck in an addiction can diminish the very purpose for which one was created. Every human being was created perfect and is designed for victory and not slavery. Addiction can be compared to slavery. No one needs to be burdened by a yoke of slavery, when freedom is freely available.

Choose to live a life of freedom!

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