WITH THE EYES TO SEE
AND EARS TO HEAR:
DISTINGUISHING NON-ADDICTED
SOCIAL USERS FROM ADDICTS IN THE
INITIAL PHASE OF ADDICTION

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Beliefs, Attitudes and Values  
*Binary Patterns Prevail!*

- “Good”  
- “Bad”
Beliefs, Attitudes and Values

Binary Patterns Prevail!

- "Good"
  - Safe, Legal, Soft

- "Bad"
  - Dangerous, Illegal, Hard

- No good or bad mood-altering chemicals (MACs)

- Any MAC will do – few exclusive users among addicts in 2016

- The principles and criteria used to create such hierarchies interfere with identification and motivation to help
1. Personal using history

2. Social Comfort Level

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**Addiction: A Working Definition**

- Chemical Dependency is:

  *the overwhelming urge to recreate the experience of intoxication*
- The Overwhelming Urge
  Quiet, subtle, passive
  *NOT* earth-shaking!

- To Recreate
  *Do-over...*

- The Experience of Intoxication
  *Individual, NO standardized description or definition*

- Chemical Dependency is
  *the pathological love relationship*
  *that exists between an individual*
  *and the *reward* produced by MACs*
  *(Mood-Altering Chemicals)*
This relationship *transcends* all other needs and relationships.

- It is *multidimensional*.

- Initiated by a biochemical *moment*.

- The individual makes *meaning* of this and *commits* to its nurture and preservation.

It is the *commitment* to this meaning-filled relationship that establishes the foundation of addiction and provides the motivation to do whatever is necessary to sustain the relationship.
This relationship becomes the most fundamental and significant focal point for the person’s spiritual reality and functioning.

**Human Spirituality**

*It is defined by and composed of that which is of Ultimate Concern*

1. What is most powerful
2. What is most meaningful
All other dimensions of human existence adjust to accommodate whatever is at each person’s spiritual core

Physical
Cognitive
Social
Volitional
Affective

Each individual develops committed relationships with whatever is regarded as powerful and meaningful, relationships that form the core of the person’s existence.

The relative quality of these relationships falls on a continuum from

Alienation to Belonging

As we move through time, the quality shifts along this continuum.
We have at least one common purpose for living…

to make more power and meaning…

Our spiritual relationships are most clearly reflected in and exhibited by our behavior.

Our behavior is guided by

Ethics  Morals  Values

Individuals experience spiritual distress and tension most frequently when there is a lack of consistency and congruence between their behavior, growing from their commitment to what is of ultimate concern, and the ethics, morals and values they espouse.
Addicts then, are persons whose primary spiritual relationship is grounded in their commitment to the pathological love relationship with the reward produced by MACs. Their behavior supports and protects this relationship causing them great emotional pain unless they modify, compromise or violate their ethics, morals and values.

As a result, addicts will hear others say,

‘What happened to you?
This isn’t like you.
You aren’t the same person I once knew.'
The awareness that the behavior violates personal ethical standards results in **GUILT**.

Other pain follows... sadness, loneliness, disappointment, shame, fear....

Therefore, the second dimension of the person’s humanity violated by addiction is the *affective*

The other dimensions suffer in turn as they attempt to accommodate the addiction that consumes the individual’s core.
Cognitively, the person becomes preoccupied with MACs and their use, developing a thick, complex set of psychological defenses to numb the increasing emotional pain. The individual’s intelligence, imagination and creativity are all used in this process. Eventually other cognitive abilities are compromised such as memory, attention/concentration and psychomotor coordination. In some, the temporary cognitive impairment of intoxication becomes permanent.

Socially, an addict’s world is composed of those people willing to support their addiction, ACTIVELY. This group is divided into 2 subgroups. The largest is other addicts. The other is much smaller, those persons still willing to tolerate the addict’s increasingly erratic, destructive behavior.
Volitional. The person’s strength of will and willpower are compromised by addiction as well. Contrary to popular belief an addict’s will is *not* weakened by MAC use. Rather, it is focused. Focused on preserving, protecting and maintaining the most important relationship in the addict’s life – the relationship with addiction.

Physical. This is the last dimension of the human being to experience debilitation and deterioration as a result of addiction. By the time an individual exhibits physical signs and symptoms of addiction, they are hollow inside. The other dimensions of life suffering and grossly diminished.
Chemical Dependency is the pathological love relationship that exists between an individual and the reward produced by mood-altering chemicals (MAC).

Spiritually, this relationship is the most important element in the person’s life from which the person derives all power and meaning.

This relationship transcends ALL other human needs and relationships.

**Experimentation: Where it begins**

*Discovering the mood swing*

- Learned by Experience
- Feeling Identified as Pleasant, Positive
- Amount Used, Mood Shift – *Controllable*  
  *(Germ of the Illusion of Control)*
- *Trust* Relationship Begins to Develop
Once the commitment to and relationship with the MAC-induced reward is made, it remains.

What changes over time is the identity of the reward.

Few addicts are identified, diagnosed or even noticed at this stage because they appear to the casual observer as behaving exactly like true social/recreational users of MACs.
Non-Addicted Social User
(NO Addiction)

Definition: The use of MACs is to enhance an already pleasurable experience

- Use is anticipated and planned
- Follow rules, own and society’s
- Behavior is appropriate
- Amount of MAC used and mood can be controlled
- On a rare occasion the person may use too much but, “experience was worth it”

Non-Addicted Social Use (cont.)

- MACs are associated with
  - good times
  - fun
  - relaxation

- NOT bothered by the absence of MACs

- No emotional costs
First Phase of Addiction: Pursuit of Pleasure

Definition: The use of MACs is to create a pleasurable experience
- Use is anticipated and planned
- Follow rules, own and society’s
- Behavior is appropriate (usually)
- Amount of MAC used and mood can be controlled, at times with difficulty
- Occasions when too much is used increase

First Phase: Pleasure (cont.)

- Good times, fun and relaxation are associated with:

  MACs

  - Bothered by the absence of MACs although others may not be aware
  - Emotional costs are experienced, at least as frustration and irritation because of the absence of MACs
Second Phase: Pursuit of Relief

- Addicts notice, as we all do, that living comes with occasional stress, pressure and pain
- MAC use is instrumental, used to relieve the experience of stress, pressure and pain
- Notice Happy Hour and pharmaceutical ads

Third Phase: Pursuit of Normalcy

- Perception of time is compressed
- Addicts notice that stress, pressure and pain are not occasional but seem constant
- To function normally and experience at least minimal quality life, MACs are used
- MACs are identified as the reason life is worth living, allows the addict to function and perform in all areas of life
Fourth Phase: Pursuit of Oblivion

- Qualitatively different than the first three phases – *no longer life-oriented*

- Addict wants *out* of life
  *In search of the eternal high*

- Extremely small percentage of addicts

- Over-represented in media presentations

Common Behaviors

Addicts develop and engage in typical behaviors and patterns of behavior *for the purpose of protecting the relationship with the addiction*. Remember, the fundamental source of *power* and *meaning* for an addict is found in the pathological love relationship with the *reward* produced by MACs. The addict’s commitment to this relationship supersedes all others.
**Trouble? How to determine**

**Harmful Involvement**

A person is harmfully involved with mood-altering chemicals if they experience **ANY** interference in **ANY** important area of life.

- Useful as a working definition of abuse
- Can be used effectively by non-professionals, *not diagnostic*
- Data-driven
- Affirms the reality of the individual
- Non-judgmental
- Non-threatening
- Can begin the process of gross discrimination of addictive behavior vs. abusive behavior
**“Abuse” Vs. Dependence**

- MAC use interferes with life... and use changes or ceases to stop interference
- Suffer harmful consequences... and use changes or ceases to stop consequences
- Change use to accommodate lifestyle... “I didn’t like what it was doing to me so I quit.”
- Human needs and relationships are more important than the reward produced by MACs

- MAC use interferes with life... and use continues without change
- Suffer harmful consequences... and use continues without change
- Change lifestyle to accommodate MAC use...
- The relationship with the reward produced by MACs *transcends* all other needs and relationships

**Now What?**

Always a pertinent question

1. Recognition
2. Willingness
   - Honesty
   - Openness
3. *Talk! About everything*....
4. Reach out
   - Beyond own comfort zone
   - To others
   - To professionals

5. Be aware of own feelings – especially fear