

Are These 3 Traps Holding You Hostage?

Disassociation

A common clinical term used in the treatment of addictions and traumas is disassociation. Disassociation simply means that the addict disconnects from himself, and often from God. Many addicts disconnect while driving. Disconnecting is a way that many victims survive from the pain of their past. These victims most likely disconnected during their trauma as well. Disconnecting while growing up in a dysfunctional home may have been a survival tool in that unsupportive environment.

Disassociating or disconnecting is the very beginning of the addiction cycle, yet is still a separate stage of the cycle of addiction itself. Disassociation is necessary for putting the addiction cycle in motion. I compare this to an airplane traveling down a runway. There is a distinct time when the plane is on the ground and another distinct time when it has lifted off the runway and disassociated.

Disassociation is important to understand because it is when one is in a dissociated state they can use behavioral techniques to get grounded. Getting grounded can be as simple as making a phone call or going to a support group. It is while the addict is disassociated and not yet in the addiction cycle that he or she may still have enough sanity to keep the plane on the ground before it takes off to the next level, which would be the beginning of the cycle of addiction. This is crucial for addicts to understand so that they can be aware of when they are checking out and not totally available.

Many partners or spouses of addicts complain, "You aren't listening to me," or "You are not here with me; where did you go?" Friends and family of the addict are usually aware when

the addict is disassociating or disconnecting and not really listening. This is a common experience for the family of an addict. The spouse of an addict may often feel kept at a distance.

Disassociation is the stage that follows after the addict feels past or present pain. The addict needs to do something with the pain, so he or she disassociates. Then he or she enters into the beginning of the cycle of addiction.

The Altered State-Fantasy World

Another clinical term we use for trauma survivors and addicts is "altered state." Moving into the altered state is what the recovery community calls "the bubble." The bubble, or the altered state, is a place the addict may have created during childhood or adolescence that he or she identified as a safe place. Some people even have names for the place they go, though many addicts are not as sophisticated as this, and the altered state is simply a place to "check out" or fantasize. It is a place where the addict creates images or behaviors to begin to medicate.

The altered state can be very appealing and soothing. It is an emotional oasis that the addict may have created thousands of times. It can include pornography or fantasies about other people, even though they may not have actually had any affairs.

The altered state can be the emotional salvation for the soul's desert. For the workaholic, it's like getting a new job. For the sex addict, it's like getting a new relationship. For the spendaholic, it's like getting bigger and better toys. For the substance abuser, it's like getting a new beer or drug. The altered state temporarily eases their pain. It's the fantasy state that precedes the behavior and projects the behavior forward which will be helpful for them in some way to relax, escape, medicate or just numb out any real emotions.

The altered state is where the addict goes to emotionally and cognitively check out of reality. It is similar to the analogy of the plane. The addict has his or her pain agent, the plane is on the ground, and then he or she decides it is too painful to handle alone. So the plane takes off and begins to climb to a cruising altitude. The addict enters the altered state when he or she reaches the cruising altitude, and the plane levels off. The addict is now in a different reality. In this reality, the addict believes he or she is in total control. This is a very important part of the addiction cycle. Once the addict has entered the altered state, if he or she doesn't make phone calls to someone to whom they can become accountable or pierce "the bubble" somehow by getting back into reality, he or she will move into the next level of the cycle of addiction.

Pursuing Behavior

Once the addict has achieved the level of the altered state he or she created in the bubble, he or she will then head toward a destination. There are sophisticated and unsophisticated ways of doing this. Nonetheless, the addict will pursue a behavior.

The pursuit of behavior can be very complicated. It may be pursued alone, with others or in fantasy. The addict practices specific repetitious behaviors once he or she enters the altered state and will act out in some way. The addict is in pursuit, much like a plane going to its destination. He has gone from reality to fantasy, and now he is going to create whatever circumstances the altered state wants. The addict is trying to satiate something that is insatiable, even though he or she has experienced this many times. You and I both most likely remember this insanity.

During the pursuit, some addicts have specific places they go, people they see or phone calls they make. Whatever their place, they are in pursuit of a repetitious behavior. For

some, it may be a very clearly identified location. Some addicts have described it like this: "Yes, I was on my way to a particular place, and was totally out of control. I couldn't feel myself touching the ground at all." At this point, the addict has experienced all the physiological symptoms of being in the altered state and has pursued the behavior.

Pursuing the behavior is a very difficult stage to break unless you have the support of someone who can help you somehow pierce the bubble and get you back into reality.

I have observed this cycle of addiction in many addicts over and over again. This cycle is based upon new findings and research, since the first cycle was published several years ago. My encouragement is to identify where you are and to move on in the time you have today to recover. {eoa}

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