

These 4 Pain Agents Keep You Stuck in the Addiction Cycle

Most addicts have experienced biological, soul and/or spiritual reasons for their addiction. What I have found in working with addicts is that they typically have a need to escape and not feel the pain they have experienced in the past. Many addicts have developed a coping mechanism to escape from the pain of a childhood and/or adolescent trauma. This coping mechanism for escape has carried the addict through most of his or her adult life. When things get difficult for the addict, he or she will do something to medicate the pain by taking an emotional aspirin (act out) to avoid dealing with the trauma from the past.

There are many pain agents (only four of which we will discuss here) that move the addict into the beginning of the addiction cycle. This cycle often starts with a shameful experience. In recovery, when the addict begins to understand this cycle, he or she will be able to short-circuit the necessity to act out.

1. Emotional Discomfort

Emotional discomfort is one of the primary pain agents that will move the addict to the first level of the addiction cycle and cause them to disconnect from their feelings. Emotional discomfort is basically a family of origin issue. The addict never learned how to identify feelings while growing up in his or her family. Consequently, many addicts have very primitive emotional skills. Therefore, when they have a painful feeling, they act out to feel better.

I remember knowing that when I felt any kind of emotional discomfort as an addict, whether hopelessness, anger, or confusion, I couldn't quite put my finger on it to identify it. Whatever uncomfortable emotional feelings I had, I knew

that if I just acted out in some way, it would go away temporarily. The interesting thing about this is, it worked! My addiction did temporarily medicate and seem to relieve the emotional discomfort I was feeling. Emotional discomfort for many addicts is the pain agent that moves them forward into the next steps of the cycle of addiction.

2. Unresolved Conflict

Some addicts have been victims of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and have unresolved issues about the abuse. Some have unresolved conflicts about their sexual identity or goals in life. Any kind of unresolved external or internal conflict can agitate the addict. It is this agitation that becomes part of this particular pain agent's unresolved conflict. The sense that "I don't have that skill mastered yet," or "I don't feel good about myself because of that," can trigger the addict into the addiction cycle. These unresolved conflicts agitate the addict, which is the beginning process for the cycle of addiction.

An example of a trigger point for this unresolved conflict might be growing up in a physically abusive home and having unresolved issues around the abuse. When addicts have unresolved conflict, they act out as a way to avoid, minimize or medicate this conflict. This can show up in their personal or professional life. For example, the addict may have an argument or misunderstanding with someone at the office and act out as a way to make themselves feel better due to their unresolved conflict.

3. Stress

Something we cannot avoid is stress. All of us have stress at some point in our lives. The way an addict medicates or avoids stress is by acting out. After the addict acts out, the stress seems to dissipate. However, the fact that the addict acted out creates more stress. This becomes a cycle for them as they

keep adding stress to the pain agent, and then repeat the cycle again and again. Many addicts set up these dynamics in which they repeat this behavior by creating stress so they can alleviate the stress again by acting out. Crazy? I know!

Addicts experience stress in several areas of their lives. It can come from the realm of their vocation. It can arise from financial pressure, as many addicts have difficulty budgeting money. Stress can be tied to close relationships, family of origin or children. It can be about spiritual issues. Just the everyday grind of driving through traffic can be stressful for some. Stress-pressure from outside can move the addict into a pain agent and back into the cycle of addiction.

4. A Need to Connect

Every human being has a need to connect. I believe that everyone is born with a need to touch and be touched, to be seen and to behold others. Many addicts act out as a primary way of being satiated inside. It is through this altered state and false nurturing that the addict feels like he or she is connected. This can be very confusing for the addict in recovery since experiences of acting out in the past have all been a way to connect through his or her addiction. This need to connect can move the addict into the addiction cycle if he or she doesn't find other ways to enjoy the true way of meeting the need to connect. I have found that when addicts feel this need to connect, they also feel pain, because they don't know how to get this relationship need met. The addict is faced with the pressure to act out in order to make the pain go away.

As an addict, you need to feel the pain and stay in reality. Find positive behaviors to reinforce that you have value and are worth recovery. You and your family are worth recovery so you can live a full life physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Time can become your best friend. The longer the time between your acting out behavior, at any level, the better your life can become. Without support, time can be the only thing that keeps you from your next acting out experience. I would encourage you to memorize your own patterns of pain. If you fall down, get up and get honest. Christ does forgive you and has given you the power to overcome by connecting and being honest with others.

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