

# Supporting Family Systems

Creating a family-focused approach toward addiction recovery support services

## Understanding the Family-Focused Addiction Recovery Approach

Become a strong support for families, by better understanding and explaining both addiction and recovery in a way that can be easily understood.

Questions that we need to ask ourselves as practitioners working directly with families and individuals dealing with SUD, and the various mental health, behavioral, and personal struggles related to this illness.

### Curiosity - Recreation - Preference - Habit - Dependence - Addiction

- How does one actually arrive at “active addiction” in need of acute/residential treatment?
- When is it still reversible through talk therapy CBT/DBT?
- At what point has the behavior of an individual using substances surpassed all rational thinking, and become a lifestyle/obsession in need of re-conditioning and re-education?

### **The 80/20 split that we don't really talk about**

Not everyone that comes through the door is willing to change, or ready for help. The treatment industry was built to accommodate mostly those who “want” help, or are already willing to change. Most doctors' offices and hospital settings were not designed to treat the chronically resistant patient, and neither is the treatment industry.

There is a much larger percentage of the admitting population that is pre-contemplative at best, and are only admitting to treatment due to outside pressures such as; family, money problems, other people's concern about their use, restricted access to substances, and other various issues related to the regular use of substances. Because of this, we lose many individuals to AMA/ASA who may have a desire to change something in their life, but are not quite ready to “solve” or address the real problem.

### **This includes the family!**

Just because they call, or have made it into your office somehow, does not mean that they will change either... unless we can help them understand that changing may in fact help saved their loved one's life!

### **How can we define addiction in a palatable way that inspires change with the family?**

How do you define addiction?

How do you define recovery?

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## **We can use the newly adopted medical definition:**

Addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences.

Prevention efforts and treatment approaches for addiction are generally as successful as those for other chronic diseases.

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## **We can use the AA definition of addiction:**

The 12 Step fellowships may actually have the most comprehensive definition of alcoholism and addiction of any organization. In its most generalized understanding, the 12 Step fellowships define addiction and alcoholism as a threefold illness: a physical allergy, a mental obsession and a spiritual malady.

*A much larger and more detailed explanation exists within the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*

We can use a much more detailed brain disease model of addiction, or any of the other descriptions of how the brain works, and why the substance use is in need of medical care. These are all perfectly good options, assuming that the family or individual can comprehend them.

We have to find a way to explain the illness that works for you. It must become a standard for delivering a hard to swallow explanation about why their loved one is "stuck" and their rational, logical, and reasonable approaches have not been working. More importantly, it needs to help the family understand why it will take more than just abstinence and the relief of the symptoms to truly get well, and move beyond the emotional survival lifestyle that they have become accustomed to.

## **Try to keep is short and easy to understand**

It can be helpful to focus on the fact that their loved one is trying to survive their own emotional battlefield. They are likely using an adopted set of skills (drugs/alcohol/behaviors/etc.), which may have been useful in the beginning, but now require constant use to keep away the wave of fear and feelings that they have not developed appropriate skills to deal with. It is important to help the family understand that even if/when we take the drugs/alcohol/behavior away, they would still be left defenseless against what life has to offer at the moment.

Addiction is a progressively destructive set of actions, behaviors, and unhealthy life skills, developed to replace, or born in the absence of, other healthier more appropriate tools. These actions, behaviors, and life skills are used for chasing relief; relief from any and all feelings that may provide them with some form of discomfort.