

Could it Have Been You?

This article is primarily for those who are baffled by the phenomena of habitual drug use, otherwise known as Addiction. It is for those who might ask, "Why would one use to start with," knowing that it is an addictive drug that they are about to use? Why would someone do that? This is a common question from most non-addicted persons who have not learned, or have not come to believe in, the disease concept of addiction! Why even try this, one might ask?

Why would someone do something so risky?

Its because most people believe they are too strong to become addicted, or believe that they are literally invulnerable. They believe that they have enough self-control and strength of conviction or just are to smart, to become a slave to a drug. "I'm not like those people" one might say. Surely not everyone who tries drugs gets addicted, and for those who do, it is not equally easy. It is an unbelievable risk to take when you first try a "psychoactive" drug.

Just who, is it that becomes addicted?

There is really no way to know if you are or are not that person who will become easily addicted. No matter what you may think, you just cannot know! Many people think that they wouldn't like being under the influence of drugs, anyway. This is not true. They are called psychoactive for a reason. Pretty much everyone enjoys having his or her Dopamine levels shoot up dramatically. What do you think that amusement parks, with their "thrill" rides, are all about? It's all about the "Dopamine". People even become addicted to these rides. What do you think sexual orgasm is? It's all about Dopamine! How many people don't like sex? Of course, this doesn't mean sex has to consume them. Watch a modern day movie, and see how many of them do not include an explicit sexual scene.

Treatment is a subject of its own, when it comes to those who see Addiction as just a bunch of drug use. You need to know, above all, that treatment for drug addiction is possible, and it is effective! It is complicated to the outsider. These days most people are learning to understand that the brain is treatable with chemical interventions such as Prozac. Other drugs can help with things like craving, but most often behavior modification and education have the longest lasting effect. The important goal is the returning of the addict to normal functioning in society. Being an addict ruins your life! It takes time and patience to help someone learn how to function acceptably in the family, on the job and in the community, after living in the drug subculture. They have to learn or relearn normal social skills. Often, they

will have to learn work skills for the first time, because they were never acquired to start with. If these things are not addressed, we can find ourselves setting them up for failure. If these basic needs are not addressed, how can we expect that they will not return to drug use? To advance effective Treatment, in reality we need a very realistic set of expectations. For example: Relapse is part of recovery. Oh, a lot of people have a hard time with that one.

“We need to have a very realistic set of expectations!”

“Anyone might become addicted, because none of us are perfect.”

Some of us just choose not to become part of illegal, immoral conduct, thus they never try drugs and never find out if they are prone to addiction. A lot of people want to make drug use/abuse a question of morality or self control. This is bothersome, in that it denies all that we have learned about addiction. This kind of thinking promotes institutionalization, rather than treatment of what we have come to know as, a legitimate disease that can be treated. Besides treatment is more cost effective than incarceration!

People who think about addiction as I have just stated, do not or will not see it as a disease. They see it as a sin, or a crime, or a weakness. Yes it's true that was originally a choice made, but as we have come to know, we cannot determine just who will become addicted. Most in general, when someone first tries a drug they are convinced that they are not one of those who will fall prey to the insane world of addiction. People voluntarily choose to smoke, but they don't voluntarily choose to get lung cancer. When so many people try drugs (as we know very many do), and some become addicted and others don't, does this not suggest that those who do become addicted aren't choosing it? Who would choose that? People have trouble understanding that it's not about choice, morality, or will. When you enter an addicted state, it has become a Disease. If we want to deal with addiction, and expect to achieve positive results, we must deal with it as a disease. We have proven results taking place every day, everywhere on this planet in drug rehabilitation programs and 12-Step meeting rooms.

We ask, "What about moral accountability?"

The number of people addicted to, both illicit, and prescribed drugs is staggering. We know this to be true, and have known it for decades. California prisons have an 80% rate of recidivism on 1st terms, and “coincidentally” 80% of the inmates are there on drug charges. Draw your own conclusion on that one! Socially our problem is that we need for these people to be productive members of society; not the financial burden that they now are, using prison as a solution. We can focus on their moral failure and punish them, but that return rate tells us that it doesn't work. That is not, by any means, productive use of our resources and effort. We know

that we can change the brain state. If we truly want to achieve positive results, only by focusing on what we “know” works, and changes that “can” be made, will we be able to provide Treatment Treatment that will help people survive their addiction, and return to a full productive life in society.

People have a tendency to view the mind as some mystical thing existing outside of, but in some way attached to the body of humans. Our mind is the brain, a physical part of the human being! When drugs change your mood or perceptions it is done by changing your mind. That is the brain! People like to modify their brain state... There are two ways that we commonly change our brains. One is with drugs. The other, is through behavior... behavioral treatment therapies change the brain, through learning and support. Various behavioral therapies have been compared with use of anti-depressant drugs, and they both can cause the same kinds of changes in the brain. Brain change is brain change. There is no existing difference between biologically produced brain changes and behaviorally produced brain changes.

Will an Addicts brain go back to normal?

In many cases yes, but in those other cases, the individual has to learn to compensate, often through spiritual strength, sometimes by increased knowledge of the disease and/or knowing their own selves as individuals. This can be done either biologically or behaviorally or by a combination of the two.

Treatment of a mental disorder is usually accepted as a life-long process. We do not expect a schizophrenic to take pills for a couple of months, and then everything is all better. Most of us know that that would be a ridiculous expectation. More commonly understood, now, is the area of depression. It is widely accepted that drug intervention is fairly successful, but that it quite often needs to be accompanied by some form of counseling, often a “group” process overseen by a qualified counselor. People who suffer from depression very seldom have only one episode of it. They cycle and become depressed over and over again. The goal is usually to increase the intervals between the episodes. Though it has physical aspects, addiction is a mental disorder. We are trying to achieve the same results with it as with depression. People are often very critical of treatment for addicts, stating that they are often back using in “no time at all.” We don’t give up on people if they have a crisis with diabetes (often caused by eating something they shouldn’t). We just encourage and support them in their effort to abide by certain dietary limitations and to take their medicine properly. We don’t condemn or write them off, as failures. These crises usually take place throughout many years of surviving that disease. Addiction is also a chronic-relapsing disease, and most often total abstinence for the rest of life, is not achieved through the first episode of

treatment. High expectations, situations that initiate craving, and other pressures often trigger the same things that supported the original addiction. The craving returns and once again drive the addict back to the old people, places, and things! This is why we must recognize extended treatment as a necessary factor in success rates. They did not become an addict overnight and they are not going to recovery their lives overnight, either! We have to decide if we care about this huge segment of our citizens, or if we want to just write them off. Prisons do not help Addiction problems. Is punishment a proper solution, considering what I've just said? If it was your brother or daughter, or what if it was your father? Are we going to start locking up people who are overweight? Most often this is another type of Addiction! If you acknowledge the disease concept of Addiction then it must be treated as other diseases are treated. Is the day coming when we will reinstate the "Leper Colony" concept. That is... sort of what sending people with Addictions to big buildings with tall fences and locked gates, away from everyone else, is! Isn't it?