

THE BEHAVIORS OF ADDICTION

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There are a number of "side" behaviors that often accompany addiction which are not actually part of the addiction. It's simply that addiction is so inherently anti-social that many of these behaviors go hand-in-hand with it, required because they're needed to maintain the addiction.

The Side Behaviors

- C Denial. Addicts often deny that there is an addiction. Denial is a way to ignore or dismiss the idea of addiction and avoid seeing a problem. Sometimes, addicts will acknowledge being addicted, but nevertheless dismiss the significance of the addiction. Cigarette smoking is a good example of an addiction that people readily acknowledge, but frequently do nothing about. They deny the reality of the addiction. Overcoming denial is always the first step in treatment of addictions.
- C Selfishness. Addictions make people selfish and blind them. Nothing is more important than the addiction itself. Everything is geared towards getting the dependence met, and the deeper into addiction the greater the selfishness.
- C Covert Behavior. Addictive behaviors eventually become a source of concern for others. Consequently, in order to meet the needs of the addiction, addicts often hide their behaviors from others. Addicts are often sneaky, running the gamut from hidden drug use and illicit sex, to drinkers who hide their alcohol, smokers who sneak cigarettes, and people who hide their eating.

Paying the Price

Although these sort of behaviors or consequences often accompany addiction, they are neither always present or inevitable. Some addicts, in fact, are quite open about their addiction and are not in denial at all. Neither are they in denial about the possible consequences of their addiction. They have chosen to pay the price, although they may not realize what their use will really cost them or others. Perhaps more to the point, they don't care about the price. Perhaps this is a different form of denial.

Living With Addiction

In some cases, addicts learn to live with their addiction and find ways to meet the needs of the addiction without having to give it up and enter treatment. Others form and live in a society composed of other addicts, and thus choose an entire life style that supports their addiction. It is also quite possible to be addicted and have access to the desired object without having to sneak around or engage in illegal or dangerous activities. It depends on the addiction itself and the circumstances of the addict.

But addicts who successfully live with their dependency represent only a small percentage of addicts. For most addicts, the addiction eventually requires some form of underground behavior in which keeping the addiction secret is paramount, second in importance only to the addiction itself. Denial of the addiction is an important tool in the arsenal that keeps addiction alive.

Beyond Denial

The first step in recovery is getting beyond denial -- recognizing that addiction makes life unmanageable for addicts, and keeps them powerless. It is not possible to overcome a problem unless one first acknowledges there is a problem!

References:

Source: The Behaviors of Addiction, by Phil Rich, Nov. 11, 1999, SelfHelp Magazine, accessed on August 8, 2004
<http://www.selfhelpmagazine.com/articles/atd/behaviors.html>