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The Link between ADD and Addiction

ADD, like Alcoholism, is rooted in biology. You can no more will the biological part of ADD away than you can an addiction to heroin. ADD is a medical problem and the brain of a person with ADD functions differently from the brain of a person without ADD. The difficulties with attention, concentration, impulse control and activity level is part of their brain chemistry and thus, the way their brain functions. Medications can be the missing link.

Having ADD is like living in a house with a window screen with large holes. You let in the fresh air, but cannot keep out the butterflies. Therefore, the ADD brain is flooded with things it does not want or need to know. It cannot select what comes through the screen. This can lead to increased sensitivity to sights, sounds and feelings. So, in treating the Addicted ADD person we need the 12-step program and we need to deal with the social, relationship, legal and financial consequences a person with ADD may have.

Having ADD is different from having a genetic predisposition for addiction. Either you have ADD or you don't. ADD, unlike addictions, does not need a trigger to begin. If you have ADD, you were born with it and will have it for the rest of your life. If you have a genetic predisposition to Alcoholism and then are raised in a family where you learn to use alcohol to deal with feelings, then the Alcohol Addiction will become actualized. If you never drink, you will never become an alcoholic.

ADD is not your fault. It is not a moral issue. It is a neurological problem. Your brain is configured differently and chemical messengers so not get where they need to be. ADD is not a fad. If we do scans of ADD brains, they look slightly different from non-ADD brains.

Addictions are not issues of character and morality. Like ADD, addictions are rooted in your genetics, biology and family history. They are activated by trauma, stress, life circumstances and learned behaviors. Both ADD and addictions are characterized by a loss of control. With alcoholism, you do not have control over your drinking...and with ADD, you do not have control over your attention, impulses or activity level. In both cases, you may lose your ability to control your behavior. Loss of control can cause shame. The desire to avoid feeling shame can create a craving for drugs or addictive behaviors, which in turn, leads to more loss of control and so on.

Often, the ADD person will self medicate. This is like putting out a fire with gasoline. We medicate to avoid pain, to feel good for a little while, to function better in the short run, etc. We know that approximately 35% of people with addictions have ADD. Closely monitored treatment and proper medication for ADD can be very successful.

So, what is needed:

1. Careful Evaluation
2. Education
3. Behavioral Management
4. ADD Support Group
5. ADD Coaching
6. A 12-Step Program
7. Medications

Clean, sober and miserable is not good enough. Every Addict needs to continue their program of recovery and relapse prevention. Please consider:

Because of the difficulties that many alcoholics have with drugs, some AA members have taken the position that no one in AA should take any medication. While this position has undoubtedly prevented relapses for some, it has meant disaster for others.

It becomes clear that just as it is wrong to enable or support any alcoholic to become re-addicted to any drug, it is equally wrong to deprive any alcoholic of medication which can alleviate or control other disabling physical and/or emotional problems. World Services, Inc., which writes AA approved literature, does not subscribe to the belief that alcoholics should abstain from medications to treat legitimate health concerns. Unfortunately, the people with the "Don't Take Anything" beliefs tend to be verbal about their convictions.

Please be open.

If you have any questions regarding ADD, such as ADD and the Student, ADD and Relationships, ADD and the Work Place, etc., please write your name and address on an envelope with your questions and I will attempt to respond with an article or other information within 10 days.