

Healing Addictions

by [Dr. Marianne Rolland](#)

What is addiction? In our experience it is one of those concepts that everyone seems to have their own definition for. Interestingly, each person's definition tends to be tailored such that his or her behaviors don't qualify as addictive. Ironically, those who seem to spend the greatest amount of time fine tuning their definition of addiction in order to absolve their behavior of that label, likely make choices that are most deserving of being called addictive. So why do we run from identifying with addiction? Quite simply because at the very least most of us acknowledge that addictions are not healthy and that once an addiction is identified, it calls for a re-evaluation and change in our lives. However, that acknowledgment requires being honest with ourselves and addiction and honesty are fundamentally opposed to each other. Addiction is a running from self. It is fear. It is dishonest. It is self-betrayal. It is not knowing how to love oneself, for fundamentally, loving oneself begins with self acceptance and if we are afraid to face the truth of what we are feeling and creating in our lives then we are certainly not accepting ourselves.

At the core addictions are our attempt to fill ourselves up with something outside ourselves. Addictions are the symptoms of the loss of connection with the force of love within us. They are a way to hide from ourselves when self-judgment, self-hatred, shame and guilt have shaped an image of ourselves that we don't wish to face. They come in all shapes and sizes. There are addictions to substances such as alcohol, caffeine, nicotine and heroin. One can be addicted to work, to relationships, to food, to exercise, to caring for others; basically to anything that removes us from our own feelings. Addictions reflect a loss of faith in ourselves and in the belief that we are capable of creating a sense of joy and fulfillment from within. Addiction is the beggar's cup that will never be filled, because every time we hold it out to be filled by something outside ourselves we reinforce the feeling of being alone, empty, inadequate, incomplete and dependent on something outside ourselves and the cup grows larger and deeper. Every time we turn to addiction to fill the hole within we only dig it deeper.

The word addiction literally means 'without voice.' You can also think of this as without choice or without power. We are powerless to that which we are addicted to and will choose the object of our addiction even when, at some level, we are aware of the harm that it brings us. Despite negative consequences better judgment is overwhelmed and we chronically choose the object of addiction. We give our power away to that which we are addicted to and surrender the power to choose that which serves our highest good. Over time the shame, regret and judgment of betraying ourselves gives rise to guilt, self-criticism and remorse and we go running to the mind numbing refuge of our addiction. The pain generated by the addiction drives us back to the addiction. Of course, a very convenient part of addiction is that we fervently deny that any pain or suffering that we are experiencing in our lives has anything to do with addiction. Most often it is the ones closest to us that bear the brunt of the blame for the chaos that addiction spawns.

This perspective on addiction may be different for those who through treatment centers or twelve step programs have been presented with the disease model of addiction. We will not enter into a debate about which analysis is "correct" because ultimately the perspectives are not mutually exclusive. The disease model identifies a physiological source for addiction. Our perspective has no need to dispute this. We simply take it a level deeper by acknowledging that the truth is in the body. Stored within cellular memory is the truth of everything you have ever experienced. Unlike the mind, which is constantly concerned with being right and creating a comfortable and safe version of reality that provides an illusion of control, the body is incapable of lying. It is incapable of experiencing one thing and calling it something else. Only the mind does this. If, as the disease model would say, there is

something akin to an allergic reaction to certain objects of addiction that trigger an uncontrollable and compulsory need for that substance, then we would say that the relationship with that substance and the experiences and feelings that are born of that relationship are powerful teachers in that persons journey of self discovery.

If you want to believe in a disease model of addiction, go right ahead. The fact is that alcoholic behavior, for example, doesn't describe addiction; it describes an expression of addiction. Deeper than the possible presence of some physiological difference within the alcoholic that makes them powerless to alcohol is the inner conflict and rift that will have that same alcoholic unconsciously choosing other addictions once they put down the bottle until the source of their perceived disconnection from self is healed. I have been to many Alcoholic Anonymous meetings where many 'recovering alcoholics' as they would say, would proudly proclaim their liberation from alcohol while chain smoking, eating donut after donut and drinking 5 or 6 cups of coffee in an hour. Granted one could argue that addictions to nicotine, sugar and caffeine are less harmful then an addiction to alcohol, but that misses the point. Without journeying to discover the source of our motivation to look outside ourselves for fulfillment and emotional soothing, we trade one addiction for another and move no closer to the true magnificence and freedom of self-love.

The first step in healing addictions is to acknowledge that we have abandoned ourselves. Whereas there may be common themes, the reasons for this abandonment are as numerous as those facing addiction in their lives. Many addictions begin as an unconscious attempt to flee the tyranny of the mind. The constant judging, criticism, analysis, labeling, describing and defining of the mind that comes to us through our internal dialogue can be enough to drive any of us mad from time to time. But, for those with a deep rejection of self the noise of the rejected pieces of ourselves trying to assert themselves can be overwhelming. Addictions can grow out of the desperate attempt to find some relief from this onslaught.

In the [Core Emotional Process](#) the mind takes a back seat. There is no judgment in this process. Each person's truth is honored completely. In this process the addiction is not right or wrong, bad or good. It is simply what was necessary to bring the client to a willingness to take responsibility for their lives and heal. Through simple deep breathing one is initiated on a journey of surrendering to the bodies innate healing power. Without the minds interference and it's attempts to control with fear, the body can feel its way back to the source of the self rejection, release the energy of old wounds and heal.