

BELIEFS THAT FUEL YOUR ADDICTION

After you encounter one of your triggers certain beliefs will become activated in your mind that lead towards the development of cravings or urges. These Beliefs include:

A. Anticipatory Beliefs: Initially these take a form such as "It will be fun to do this...It's okay to try it occasionally. This will relieve a lot of tension." The expectation that one will find pleasure and excitement from using.

B. Relief Oriented Beliefs: As the individuals start to rely on the drug to counteract feelings of distress, they develop relief-oriented beliefs, such as "I need cocaine in order to function, or believing withdrawal symptoms are intolerable." The activation of these beliefs leads to a craving. The assumption that the drug will relieve boredom, anxiety, tension and depression.

C. Addictive Beliefs: These are beliefs of anticipated deprivation and include thoughts such as: "if I can't use, I will be unable to bear the pain, there's nothing left in life for me, I will be unhappy, or I will lose my friends."

D. Helpless beliefs: These are beliefs that you cannot resist the craving and that you are helpless to do so. "The craving is too strong, I don't have the power to stop, or even if I do stop I will only start up again."

- These beliefs become self-fulfilling prophecies. Since the client believes he's incapable of controlling his urges, he's less likely to try to control them and, thus, confirm his belief in his helplessness in overcoming his addiction.

E. Fear that the Craving will never end: The conviction that unless something is done to satisfy the craving or to neutralize the distress, it will continue indefinitely and get worse.

F. Permissive Beliefs: After the cravings develop, you will not use unless you develop some permissive beliefs which give you permission to engage in the addictive behavior. This takes the form of: "I deserve it," "I'm feeling bad so it's OK to use," "My circumstances are different, it's OK for me to do this because of what I'm going through."

Countering Addictive Beliefs with Control Beliefs

Control Beliefs represent alternatives to addictive beliefs. Each addictive belief can be countered with a corresponding control belief. Some examples include:

- **Anticipatory:** While this may give me temporary pleasure, in the long run it gives more despair.
- **Relief:** I don't need this to function, there are alternatives to get what I want.
- **Addictive:** If I don't use I will be much happier than if I do use. It is in my best interest to stay drug free.
- **Helpless:** I am capable of withstanding the urges. If I tolerate this craving for a while, it will go away. If I resist the urges, I will feel stronger.

Countering the Cognitive Blockade

When you are not experiencing the craving, you are generally able to recognize the disruptive effects of the addiction on your life. However once the addictive beliefs are activated, a "cognitive blockade" inhibits awareness of the long-term consequences of your actions and your attention shifts to instrumental strategies to satisfy the addiction.

To counter this form of tunnel vision, prepare flash cards reminding you of the long-term consequences of your actions that you can refer to when you experience a craving to counter this cognitive blockade.

Exercise: Identify your addictive beliefs and counter them with corresponding control beliefs. Do an experiment, acting "as if" these beliefs were true and see what you find. Use your flashcards to counter the cognitive blockade.

