

The Hungry Ghost of Addiction

In Memory of Our Daughter Ann Louise
1964-2012



by: Dawn D. Novotny © 2012

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1. The Hungry Ghost of Addiction Took Our Daughter

My daughter Ann was forty-seven, beautiful, funny, hypersensitive, and creative, and she loved her family, including her extended family. She kept all those who had ever loved her close in her heart of love—which was the reason she tried so hard to remain clean and sober. She didn't want us to worry or be sad or mad, and she didn't want to risk to losing any of us if we were to give up on her. She wanted our patience—even as she knew that, despite how much love we held for her, we were worn out. We were all bone-weary. The ghost of addiction was taking its toll.



Our daughter didn't want her fifteen-year-old daughter to have to drag her out of bed each morning before going to school, or to have her family intervene last Christmas by encouraging our granddaughter to move in with relatives. No, Ann wanted the clean and sober life more than anything in this world—but that possibility remained as elusive as holding a ghost in her palm.

Why, oh why, you may ask—as Bill O'Reilly did as he ranted after Whitney Houston's death—didn't we, the family, intervene? Insist that she stop drinking and drugging, put her in treatment, do something—*anything*? O'Reilly all but yelled, “Just MAKE her stop.” Anyone who has ever tried to *make* an addict stop, however, understands how hard—how impossible, really—this is.

Let me briefly recount the ways that our family (and most every other family who has lived with or near an addicted loved one) has tried to intervene. Over the years we have pleaded, reasoned, coerced, bribed, shamed, and even threatened to take away her children, call children's protective service, and force her into treatment centers. This past Christmas, after she and her new boyfriend arrived for dinner two hours late and stoned, I even went so far as to refuse to spend any more of my vacation time with her. It broke her heart and mine.

After the holidays, she tried again—for the millionth time—to get clean and stay sober. She even gained five pounds, which on her size 0 frame made a noticeable difference. She tried, and we tried, too, Mr. O'Reilly. What you have to understand is that the disease of addiction is more

powerful than any force on earth, including the love of family. That is the nature of addiction. Once it takes hold, the most common prognosis is death, jail, or insanity.

My daughter, like Whitney Houston and Marilyn Monroe, might not have been using illegal drugs at the precise time of her death (if you believe that you can't count a few or even several glasses of wine as a drug)—but it is the cumulative effects of the protracted use of alcohol and drugs that kills. It is rarely the sensationalized one-time overdose that ultimately kills; it is the long-term effects that wear out the mind, body, and soul of the addict. Addicts typically think they are different, that they can handle the drugs they use because they are unique. Addiction is a disease of uniqueness.

What will it take for families of addicts to get this? I know, I know, it's a dumb question—the truth is, they won't get it. Hope and desire blinds them to the depth of the disease. The ever-present, ghostly hunger grows with every relapse; often all it takes to give in is that first, innocuous glass of wine.

Our daughter was so proud two weeks ago when she called saying that, even though it had taken her twenty years, she had just received her associate degree in the mail. We cheered. She was trying so hard to better herself. The addict says to himself or herself, “When I get through this situation, *then* I will stop using and abusing drugs and alcohol.” But there is always the next thing to get through, and then the next. The hungry ghost of addiction waits in the night, more patiently than the most ardent of lovers.

I can't stop staring at the huge Albert Einstein picture that hangs in her living room. This morning, I used her favorite coffee mug, and old Albert's eyes stared back at me. Even he looks sad.

When clean and sober, my daughter, you were so inspiring, inquisitive, and funny, and you were the most loving creature I have ever known. Remember last year, when we went on that cruise to celebrate women in sobriety? Even though you were not entirely sober, I thought you would be inspired. You were, but . . . it wasn't enough. But we had such a wonderful time. Oh God, how I will miss you.

When we arrived at your house two days ago and your father walked into your bedroom, he stopped dead in his tracks, startled by the colorful array of clothing inside—never again to adorn your body. I heard him suck in his breath while his heart cracked wide open. Ever so softly, he uttered, “Ooooooooooh.” There are no adequate words to describe such an utterance, but one's heart knows that sound instinctively. I bit my lip to remain silent, to keep from reacting to the depth of his despair. We were already weary after traveling so far and listening quietly to our granddaughters arranging the memorial. We thought we would die choking down our sobs while trying to be supportive of the girls. The pain is so palpable for everyone. You were loved beyond measure.

So now, my darling, I look to John O'Donohue's poetry to say some of the words that are flooding my heart.

“Let us not look for you only in memory,
where we would grow lonely without you.
You would want us to find you in presence,
Beside us when beauty brightens,
When kindness glows and music
echoes eternal tones.”

As you view us beyond the veil of eternity, my precious one, I pray with all my heart that you finally see your worth through the love being offered to you. This is your legacy. Relatives from seven states continue to flood in; your daughters have made arrangements befitting a queen. Your ex-husband spent Sunday comforting your boyfriend, even as his own tears never stopped. The men sob in one another's arms as the women stir their tears atop the kitchen stove. Dishes pour in, and the phone never stops. Everyone says, “Oh, my God, not Annie.” Then they whisper—but I'm not surprised. They understand that the hungry ghost has won once more.

Rest, my darling, rest.

2. The Denial of a Deadly Disease

This is about addiction. Substance abuse is its other name. I know this world well, having been mired in addictions all of my life—either my own or those of others. I am a recovered alcoholic; I'm also certified by Washington State as a substance abuse counselor. I have worked in inpatient and outpatient treatment centers. I have been in private practice for almost thirty years. I know what I'm talking about.

Three of my four fathers were addicts/alcoholics, and one was violent when drinking. My mother was addicted to pills, depressed, and rarely left the couch during my teen years. My gentle stepmother was a late-stage alcoholic, the kind of alcoholic with a bulbous nose and popping veins on her face. My stepbrothers were alcoholics, too; they went in and out of the local jail like kids playing with a revolving door.

My much-loved mother-in-law was an alcoholic, slurring her words as she flipped her gorgeous platinum blond hair over her shoulders and repeated the same words over and over again. It broke my heart to watch—but that was before I ended up drinking the same way. Sloppy and unladylike, just another drunk with smeared lipstick.

Her son—my first husband, Joe DiMaggio, Jr.—died of an overdose at age 57. He was living in a junkyard in Northern California at the time; that is where his addiction took him. His beloved stepmother, Marilyn Monroe, died of an overdose as well.

My once kind-hearted son fights for his right to use the drug of his choice while on the merry-go-round of denial, tethered to the bars of rotating prisons and mental wards. Denial is a deadly disease.

To deny means to:

1. Declare untrue; contradict.



2. Refuse to believe; reject.
3. Refuse to recognize or acknowledge; disavow.
4. Create unconscious defense mechanisms characterized by a refusal to acknowledge painful realities, thoughts, or feelings.

Five Myths about Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse

Myth #1: I can stop drinking anytime I want to.

Maybe you can, but more likely, you can't stop. Either way, it's just an excuse to keep drinking. The truth is, you don't want to stop. Telling yourself you can quit makes you feel in control, despite all evidence to the contrary and no matter the damage its doing.

Myth #2: My drinking is *my* problem. I'm the one it hurts, so no one has the right to tell me to stop.

It's true that the decision to quit drinking is up to you. But you are deceiving yourself if you think that your drinking hurts no one else but you. Alcoholism affects everyone around you—especially the people closest to you. Your problem *is* their problem.

Myth #3: I don't drink every day, so I can't be an alcoholic; *OR* I only drink wine or beer, so I can't be an alcoholic.

Alcoholism is NOT defined by what you drink, when you drink it, or even how much you drink. It's the EFFECTS of your drinking that define a problem. If your drinking is causing problems in your home or work life, you have a drinking problem—whether you drink daily or only on the weekends, down shots of tequila or stick to wine, drink three bottles of beers a day or three bottles of whiskey.

Myth #4: I'm not an alcoholic because I have a job and I'm doing okay.

You don't have to be homeless and drinking out of a brown paper bag to be an alcoholic. Many alcoholics are able to hold down jobs, get through school, and provide for their families. Some

are even able to excel. But just because you're a high-functioning alcoholic doesn't mean you're not putting yourself or others in danger. Over time, the effects will catch up with you.

Myth #5: Drinking is not a “real” addiction like drug abuse.

Alcohol *is* a drug, and alcoholism is every bit as damaging as other drug addictions. Alcohol addiction causes changes in the body and brain, and long-term alcohol abuse can have devastating effects on your health, your career, and your relationships. Alcoholics go through physical withdrawal when they stop drinking, just like drug users do when they quit.

Alcohol has crashed through my life over and over again like a fast-moving summer tornado. Sometimes I have been the victim of their destruction; sometimes I have been the creator of their destruction. Does it really matter what or who causes the destruction as long as we can all hide behind denial? Perhaps it is *denial*, not the alcohol or the drugs, that's the disease.

Five myths about alcoholism and alcohol abuse. Authors: Melinda Smith, M.A., Lawrence Robinson, and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D, (c) www.Helpguide.org--Helpguide.org helps you help yourself and others to better health with expert ad free online resources.

3. Alcoholic Blackouts vs. Passing Out

As my eyes slowly focused on the moving window, I realized that it was the rocking of the boat that was causing the movement, not my hangover. My

sense of relief was short-lived; I tried to recall the night before, and couldn't. I remembered the guests that we had invited for dinner coming down the stairs into the boat's galley. *What else, what else?* But no matter how hard I focused, absolutely nothing else would come to mind. Terror slowly began to creep through my body like strangling vines. What had I

done? What had I said? Had I embarrassed my husband? Was he angry or disgusted with me? *Oh God.* Shame flooded me, and I could feel my heart beating in my head.



I wanted my husband to wake up so that I could scan his face for clues. I desperately wanted to know about the night before, but didn't have the courage to ask him directly—nor could I admit that I couldn't remember. No, I would just have to fish for clues.

When his eyes opened and met my own, he smiled that sweet smile that he had given me every single morning for the ten years we had been together. Even when he was mad at me, the anger came after the smile. Oh, how I hoped that I hadn't done anything too offensive. It seemed that when I drank alcohol, every defect I possessed spewed forth, dragging me behind. I often became everything that I never wanted to be: un-ladylike, self-centered, angry, deceitful, untrustworthy, and unreliable.

I held my breath as my husband began talking about the fun things we were going to do that day, the last day of our vacation in the Bahamas. While I only half-listened, he planned our day of snorkeling. Apparently, we had also agreed to meet our dinner guests from the night before for lunch.

Coyly, I asked, "How did you think dinner went last night?"

"Great! Boy, were you funny," he replied.

As my breathing eased, I said, “Really? Did I say anything stupid?”

“Nope, you were just fun,” he said as he reached for his bathing suit.

Fun and funny are two words friends would rarely use to describe me, as I tend toward the serious side. This would be a perfect example of the “personality change” that is common among people that have a drinking problem. But I digress.

As my husband headed for the galley to make coffee, I rolled over and said to myself, “That’s it, I am *done*. I will never take another drink as long as I live.”

What happened to me that night is called a **blackout**—something that is not to be confused with **passing out**. Recovery Guy on HubPages describe blackouts this way:

“What is an alcohol blackout? This is not the same thing as passing out when you have had too much to drink. Passing out very much resembles sleeping. No, an alcoholic blackout is when a person has had a lot to drink and they go into this state of mind where they can no longer remember anything that they are doing, but they are still moving around, conversing with people, and possibly causing all sorts of problems.

Normally the human brain has the ability to keep recording whatever is happening in your life....whether you are hearing things, seeing things, tasting things....it all goes on the record. You might not remember every little detail but your brain actually has it all locked in there. Technically, you could bring these hidden memories out with hypnosis if you had to.”

Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, says:

“A **blackout** is a phenomenon caused by the intake of alcohol or other substance in which long term memory creation is impaired or there is a complete inability to recall the past. Blackouts are frequently described as having effects similar to that of [anterograde amnesia](#), in which the subject cannot create [memories](#) after the event that caused [amnesia](#). 'Blacking out' is not to be confused with the [mutually exclusive](#) act of '[passing out](#)', which means loss of consciousness. Research on alcohol blackouts was begun by [E. M. Jellinek](#) in the 1940s. Using data from a survey of [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) (AA) members, he came to believe that blackouts would be a

good predictor of alcoholism. However, there are conflicting views as to whether this is true.^[1] The negative psychological effects of an alcohol related blackout are often worsened by those who suffer from [anxiety disorders](#).

Blackouts can generally be divided into 2 categories, 'en bloc' blackouts and 'fragmentary' blackouts. En bloc blackouts are classified by the inability to later recall any memories from the intoxication period, even when prompted. These blackouts are characterized also by the ability to easily recall things that have occurred within the last 2 minutes, yet inability to recall anything prior to this period. As such, a person experiencing an en bloc blackout may not appear to be doing so, as they can carry on conversations or even manage to accomplish difficult feats. It is difficult to determine the end of this type of blackout as sleep typically occurs before they end.^[5] Fragmentary blackouts are characterized by the ability to recall certain events from an intoxicated period, yet be unaware that other memories are missing until reminded of the existence of these 'gaps' in memory. Research indicates that such fragmentary blackouts, also known as brownouts, are far more common than en bloc blackouts."

That night occurred twenty-eight years ago this month, and I have not touched a drop of alcohol since. Sober, I have had the opportunity to be everything I have ever wanted to be: considerate, loving, honest, trustworthy, reliable, and a lady. Sobriety rocks!

4. Shadowboxing with Addiction

As if the use of drugs and alcohol or participation in an addiction/attachment were not problematic enough, the in-between times can be even more painful to deal with, both for the addicted person and those around them. The experience is like shadowboxing



(sparring with an imaginary opponent)—you can never actually connect with an addict while they are moving toward the drug of choice, and addicts can't connect with themselves when they are preoccupied with the thing that has captured their energy.

Once an attachment to alcohol, pills, food, pornography, gambling, religion, etc. crosses the line into an addiction, all available energies of the addict are pulled inward, rendering him or her unavailable for emotional intimacy. Their attention is focused entirely on the next time they will be able to self-soothe with whatever the thing is that has captured them. Total self-centeredness is the predominant state of being. Once they enter into the addictive cycle, addicts become like an elusive and hollow shadow.

Addictions are multifaceted. According to Gabor Mate, MD, author of *In The Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, “Addiction is any repeated behavior, substance-related or not, in which a person feels compelled to persist, regardless of its negative impact on his life and the lives of others.”

Addiction involves:

- 1) compulsive engagement with the behavior, a preoccupation with it;
- 2) impaired control over the behavior;
- 3) persistence or relapse despite evidence of harm;
- 4) dissatisfaction, irritability, or intense craving when the object, be it a drug, activity, or other goal, is not immediately available

At various times in my life, I have been that shadow figure—grasping for alcohol, cigarettes, sugar, and distorted relationships. The *thing itself*, or the *object* of my attachment, is not really important for the purposes of this article. What I am endeavoring to describe is the internal world that is commonly experienced by all addicts during the in-between times of an addictive cycle.

When I was addicted, if I was not drinking, I was either thinking about drinking or recovering from drinking. Driven by one hundred forms of fear, guilt, and shame, I was constantly trying to prove myself or control my world by playacting, caretaking, striving, planning, and scanning my exterior environment for danger. Exhausted by my efforts and interactions, I was once again driven to seek the blessed relief afforded by that first drink of alcohol. I would repeatedly tell myself things like:

“Hang on Dawn, just three more days until Friday night and you can relax with a few drinks. Now only two more days . . .”

“Let's see, now, if I take a Tuesday and Thursday class, I won't be able to drink on Wednesday nights, so maybe I should just take a Monday and Wednesday course.”

“Oh God, someone's knocking at my door; what if I open it and they can guess what happened last night? I wonder what *did* happen last night? I'll just hide until they go away, whoever they are.”

”I can't bear to look anyone in the eye because maybe they will know . . .”

“I wonder if I should hide this money in my glove compartment so I won't spend too much on drinks.”

“See, I can remember everything that happened last night, that should prove that I don't have a problem.”

“See, I make dinner every night for my children. We eat together while listening to Pachelbel, so who cares if I was too hung over to make that stupid PTA meeting?”

Tethered to the cycle of addiction, whether or not I was actually using that day, all of my available energies were focused on drinking or on the in-between thoughts and behaviors related to the last drinking episode or the upcoming drinking episode. There was no available energy left in me for a relationship with my partner, my children, or myself. When in active addiction, my body, mind, and soul remained elusive to me and everyone around me, yet we all kept dancing with the shadow.

5. Passion vs. Addiction

I thought I was through writing blogs about addiction—but that was totally unrealistic, since the components of this topic appear to be endless.

As Dr. Mate writes in *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, “Any passion can become an addiction; but then how to distinguish between the two? *The central question is: who's in charge, the individual or their behavior?* It's possible to rule a passion, but an obsessive passion that a person is unable to rule is an addiction. And the addiction is the repeated behavior in which a person keeps engaging, even though he knows it harms himself or others. How it looks *externally* is irrelevant. The key issue is a person's internal relationship to the passion and its related behaviors.”

That entire paragraph knocks my socks off because it captures the nature, the obsession, and the denial of addiction in one fell swoop. I'm not even talking about the late-stage effects of addictions, like sleeping under bridges or losing one's teeth—I'm addressing the silent addictions that happen behind closed doors in millions of homes every day, the addictions of people that appear “normal” to the outside world.



Let's look first at “. . . **repeated behaviors in which a person keeps engaging, even though he knows it harms himself or others.**”

The following example is a composite of several clients that I see in my practice, although it could have just as easily been my husband or me when we were drinking alcoholically:

John: “My wife says she is filing for a divorce if I don't quit drinking, and my kids are mad at me. So what if I get a little drunk a few times a week? I don't cheat, I bring home good money, I go to the kids' games at school, I go to church on Sundays, and I love my family. If she would

6. Addiction vs. Habit

“It is the nature of desire not to be satisfied, and most human beings live only for the gratification of it.”

—Aristotle

When does a **habit** become an **addiction**? I have heard it said that with a habit you are in control of your choices, whereas with an addiction you aren't in control of your choices—but what about a situation in which a habit slides into an addiction?

For example: It may seem like a harmless habit to drink on weekends, but what if it seriously affects your family? What if you say and do things that you would normally never do? Would you call this a habit, or an addiction?



Just because you can control the time and place when you exercise your habit doesn't make it any less of an addiction if you lose control of what you do and say after you ingest the substance. Ask yourself, “Do I have a habit, or do I have an addiction?”

There are many definitions of addiction, but I prefer one stated in *Addictions and Grace* by Gerald G. May, MD: “Addiction is **any** compulsive, habitual behavior that limits the freedom of human desire.”

So if your habit leads you to act like a jerk (also known as a **personality change**)—if it limits your choices regarding your behaviors—perhaps you have crossed over from habit into addiction.

Does it really matter if it is “only” a weekend addiction and you can control your “habit” the rest of the week?

Richard Bach, author of *Illusions*, once said, “Argue for your limitations, and sure enough they are yours.”

When you see your freedom of choice compromised in any way, rather than arguing for your right to maintain your limitations, you might want to consider that you may have an addiction.

During the years that I used alcohol to escape my anxieties, I told myself that I wasn't hurting anyone but me because I was holding down a job, continuing to work on a degree, making dinner for my children every night, and running a household. I told myself that since I had never had a DUI, didn't drink every day, and didn't get drunk every time I drank, I didn't have a problem—despite the fact that my husband begged me to stop drinking because it changed my personality. When I drank, my **personality change** looked something like this: I became cute, funny, engaging and affectionate at first; then I became argumentative and/or totally disengaged as the evening went on and the drinks increased.

Here are a few questions, adapted from *Grace and Addiction*, to help you decide if you have a habit or an addiction:

1. How do I feel if someone threatens to take away my right to drink or get high?
2. When I have tried to stop or reduce my use of substances, have I experienced any stress reaction related to withdrawal (anxiety, agitation, irritability, resentment)?
3. Do I ever find myself making excuses, denials, or playing other mind tricks to rationalize my right to use substances?
4. Have I ever made resolutions to myself or someone else to reduce or even stop using, only to fail to keep my word?
5. Do I find myself anticipating the next time that I can drink or use without censor?
6. Do I sometimes struggle with thought of regrets or embarrassment when thinking of my last drinking or using episode?
7. Has anyone close to me ever told me that I drink/drug too much?
8. Has my drinking or drugging caused distress for anyone in my life?

Until you have honestly answered these questions—habit vs. addiction—you do not have the freedom to choose. You do not have drinking or using—drinking or using has you.

7. Is Drinking Affecting Your Relationship?

How do you know if you have a drinking problem? The following are things to consider if you think you might have a drinking problem:

1. When your partner says that he/she is **bothered** or **affected** by your drinking.

2. There are **consequences** resulting from your drinking. Are there arguments with your family? A disappointed or angry family member? Regrets about something you did or said at a party? Do you ever go home with someone you don't know, or promise yourself to not drink so much next time? Are there times when you don't remember much of the evening?

3. **You undergo a personality change when you drink.** Do you ever get louder or argumentative, silly or flirtatious when you drink? Do you repeat the same stories over and over, or think you can dance, or have a false sense of confidence when normally you're shy?

The **amount** you drink, **type** of alcohol you drink, and/or **frequency** at which you drink are not the place to look to see if you have a drinking problem. In fact, what is missing to complete the above picture is a plain old can of beer. People often think that because they only drink beer they do not have a problem with alcohol—but the only difference between drinking beer and hard liquor is that beer makes you pee more frequently. A shot of hard liquor and a 12-ounce can of beer have approximately the same amount of alcohol in them.

Speaking of frequency: I have a friend of 35 years who, when she is not dieting, has a drink or two every night—and **she does not have a drinking problem.** Why? Because there is never, ever, a personality change in her when she drinks. You would never know by her speech or behaviors that she has consumed alcohol. And there has never been a negative consequence as a result of her alcohol use; she can predict what her behavior will be like with 100% accuracy every time she drinks.



Many people can prudently enjoy a daily drink or two. I am not judging those who do. I have chosen not to drink, but I don't believe that everyone else shouldn't either.

I never drank every day, even when I was addicted, and I could frequently drink without experiencing any negative consequences. However, there were the other times, too—the times when the consequences were severe and either shameful, dangerous, or both. While I never missed a day of work or got a ticket for driving under the influence, I almost lost my marriage and my self-esteem, and I came close to losing my life on a few occasions. I call myself an alcoholic because I cannot predict what my behavior will be once I take that first drink. I have a drinking problem; so I have not had a drink in twenty-eight years.

8. The Short Alcohol Dependence Data Questionnaire

If your partner says that you have a problem with alcohol, instead of defending yourself or denying there may be a problem, ask them to tell you more about what they observe about your behavior when you are drinking.

The following information comes from **Moderation Management**, a program that helps people to drink moderately. I am not a fan of moderate drinking especially if one is an alcoholic. However, I found their self-assessment questionnaire most helpful and they were generous with allowing me to share their material.

Please read each question carefully, but do not think too much about its exact meaning. Think about your most recent drinking habits and answer each question by using the criteria listed below. Go ahead, be brave. Take the short quiz below to consider if drinking may be affecting your relationships:

The Short Alcohol Dependence Data Questionnaire

1. Do you find difficulty in getting the thought of drinking out of your mind?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
2. Is getting drunk more important than your next meal?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
3. Do you plan your day around when and where you can drink?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
4. Do you drink in the morning, afternoon, and evening?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
5. Do you drink for the effect of alcohol without caring what the drink is?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
6. Do you drink as much as you want irrespective of what you are doing the next day?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
7. Given that many problems might be caused by alcohol, do you still drink too much?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always

8. Do you know that you won't be able to stop drinking once you start?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
9. Do you try to control your drinking by giving it up completely for days or weeks at a time?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
10. The morning after a heavy drinking session do you need your first drink to get yourself going?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
11. The morning after a heavy drinking session do you wake up with a definite shakiness of your hands?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
12. After a heavy drinking session do you wake up and retch or vomit?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
13. The morning after a heavy drinking session do you go out of your way to avoid people?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
14. After a heavy drinking session do you see frightening things that later you realize were imaginary?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always
15. Do you go drinking and the next day and find that you have forgotten what happened the night before?
Never Sometimes Often Nearly Always

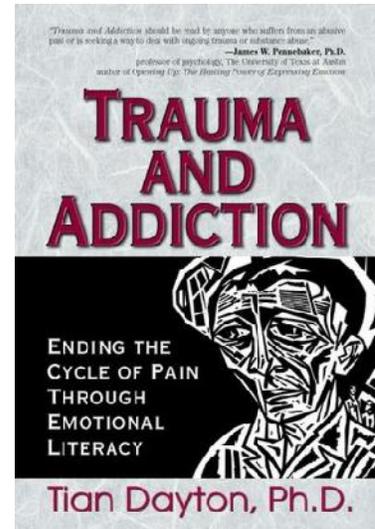
Scoring:

To figure out your score, give yourself zero points for each “never” answer, one point for “sometimes,” two points for “often,” and three points for “nearly always.” Out of a possible total of 45, the guidelines for interpretation are as follows: 1-9 is considered low dependence; 10-19, medium dependence; and 20 (or greater) high dependence. (

Moderation Management Network, Inc., 2795 East Bidwell Street, Suite 100-244, Folsom, California 95630-6480)

9. Addict, Co-Addict: A Family Affair

I have been reflecting on the tragedy of having an addiction for the last few chapters, and now I want to turn my attention to those who are in a relationship with an addict, and even more broadly examine the dysfunctional patterns that created through association with addicts. The term “codependency” was originally associated with a person in a relationship with an alcoholic. Over the years, the term has expanded to include any person in a relationship that exhibits dysfunctional patterns of living. Co-addicts learn ways of acting and reacting when relating to an addicted person (similar to those in relationships with someone who is affected by mental illness or is abusive). Living in dysfunctional or traumatic environments sets up a pattern whereby a person’s way of being in the world is contingent upon the behavior of others. This is especially likely to occur if a person is unstable in some way to begin with.



Dr. Tian Dayton addresses these issues in her compelling book *Trauma and Addiction*: “Because of the unpredictable, uncontrollable and inherently traumatic nature of substance abuse and addiction, people who are chemically dependent, or those in an addict's family system such as a spouses, children and siblings, usually experience some form of psychological damage. Family members as well as many addicts present disorders that extend across a range of clinical syndromes, such as anxiety disorders, reactive and endogenous depression and substance abuse, as well as developmental deficits, distortions in self-images, confused inner worlds with disorganized internal dynamics, and codependence.”

Co-addicts believe that, because they don’t directly use alcohol or illegal substances, they have escaped the effects of a dysfunctional family system. They fail to see how their behaviors—perfectionism, hypervigilance, caretaking, and controlling and/or avoiding feelings—pollute

every relationship and perpetuate the disease. This is where the term “co-addict” comes from. Dysfunctional systems are often referred to as “the gift that keeps on giving.”

If you have grown up in an environment in which mental illness, rage, ongoing depression, alcoholism, strict religiosity, or physical or sexual abuse was present, then you have been affected—which means you are hard-wired to repeat reactive behaviors in your primary relationships.

Addicts shouldn't rely entirely upon self-assessment to see if they are addicted. Likewise, I appeal to potential co-addicts to ask family members to tell them how they are affected by their behaviors.

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in numbers, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”

—Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

In my family, there are co-addicts who suffer from severe depression or eating disorders, who act out rage on others and exert extremely controlling behaviors upon everyone around them. I have other family members who hide behind rigid religiosity and self-righteousness, and refuse to examine their behavior or beliefs, believing their views to be the only “right” ones. It's painful to watch these dysfunctional patterns continue, and even harder to see how they negatively affect all of my other family members. It has always been difficult for me to understand how people minimize, deny, or outright refuse to see how their own behaviors affect those around them. As a mental health professional, I can only understand such blindness as some kind of needed defense mechanism. But the truth is this: If one family member is affected, all family members are affected. Everyone is responsible for being rigorously honest about their behaviors.

It's my belief that breaking the chain of addiction or co-addiction—repairing, changing, altering, and/or accepting the ways in which we think, feel, and behave—is the responsibility of every individual. Twelve-step programs are available for all manner of addictions and dysfunctional

relationship patterns. Though they may not be the only solution to addict and co-addict patterns, they can be a good place to begin to sort out the layers of conditioning and beliefs that are affecting you and those around you. I recommend that you investigate a twelve-step program as a place to start. After all, they are free—except for your involvement and commitment, of course. There is hope to heal your pain-filled inner world.

Below is a partial list of existing twelve-step programs for addicts and friends and family members of addicts (borrowed from Wikipedia):

- AA - [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- ACA - [Adult Children of Alcoholics](#)
- [Al-Anon/Alateen](#), for friends and family members of [alcoholics](#)
- CA - [Cocaine Anonymous](#)
- CLA - [Clutterers Anonymous](#)
- CMA - [Crystal Meth Anonymous](#)
- [Co-Anon](#), for friends and family of [addicts](#)
- CoDA - [Co-Dependents Anonymous](#), to end patterns of dysfunctional relationships and develop functional and healthy relationships
- [COSA](#) - formerly Codependents of Sex Addicts
- COSLAA - [CoSex and Love Addicts Anonymous](#)
- DA - [Debtors Anonymous](#)
- EA - [Emotions Anonymous](#), for recovery from [mental and emotional illness](#)
- EHA - [Emotional Health Anonymous](#), for recovery from [mental and emotional illness](#)
- FA - [Families Anonymous](#), for relatives and friends of addicts
- FA - [Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous](#)
- FAA - [Food Addicts Anonymous](#)
- GA - [Gamblers Anonymous](#)
- [Gam-Anon/Gam-A-Teen](#), for friends and family members of [problem gamblers](#)
- HA - [Heroin Anonymous](#)
- MA - [Marijuana Anonymous](#)
- NA - [Narcotics Anonymous](#)
- NAIL - [Neurotics Anonymous](#), for recovery from [mental and emotional illness](#)
- [Nar-Anon](#), for friends and family members of [addicts](#)
- NicA - [Nicotine Anonymous](#)
- OA - [Overeaters Anonymous](#)
- OLGA - [Online Gamers Anonymous](#)
- PA - [Pills Anonymous](#), for recovery from prescription pill addiction.
- SA - [Sexaholics Anonymous](#)
- SA - [Smokers Anonymous](#)
- SAA - [Sex Addicts Anonymous](#)
- SCA - [Sexual Compulsives Anonymous](#)

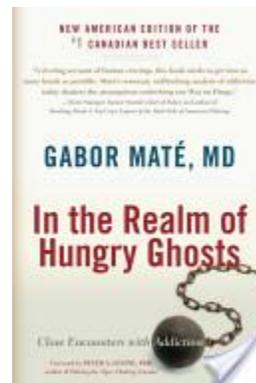
10. Compassionate Interventions for Addiction

"Addiction floods in where self-knowledge—and therefore divine knowledge—are missing. To fill the void, we become attached to things of the world that cannot possibly compensate us for the loss of who we are."

—Gabor Mate, MD

The focus of my blog, *The Faces We Live*, is to show my readers the many faces we humans wear. Having many sides to our personalities is what makes us all unique, and is a natural part of being human.

When I started blogging about addictions, I could never have imagined that my daughter would die in the middle of the series—but that is what has inspired me to write about the hungry ghost of addiction.



Please consider this in: The “addict” in us is just one aspect of our overall makeup. At worst, it can be an all-consuming, destructive aspect; at best, it can be an annoying distraction that eats up our precious time and attention. Nevertheless, this addiction part of ourselves can be seen as a protective quality within us, something that is truly endeavoring to calm us down and give us a reprieve from our daily strife. In that sense, it sometimes does its job perfectly well.

Addiction’s only goal is to “make the moment livable,” regardless of whether it’s at the expense of our family, health, or dignity. This part believes that if we just eat that box of candy or have a few drinks or a smoke or view a little pornography, then we’ll be able to relax and forget our troubles. These choices usually only succeed temporarily, and foster the very thing that may be killing us and/or our relationships in the long run. Addictive behaviors deceive us into thinking that we are in charge of our choices, and that we can stop anytime we want; they allow us to rationalize and minimize our behaviors. This part of our personality says things to us like, “What’s the harm in a few drinks?” or “I work hard, why can’t I hit the slot machines occasionally? It’s my money!”—even while our family complains that we are short of money or never spend any time with them, or nag us about our drinking habits.

The hungry ghost of addiction patiently waits to gobble up our time, energy, attention, and often our health and finances. Addictions kill our aliveness and robs us of the availability we need to be able to offer in our relationships. And, all too often, addictions can be deadly, as was tragically the case with my daughter.

What should we do about the impulse to give in, to seek that comfort at any cost? Completely eradicating any attachment or addiction just because we want to is an unrealistic goal. If we could do that, we would have done it already. Instead, I offer the following alternative:

Every time you want to “relax” or escape by succumbing to your addiction, I encourage you to ask yourself with compassionate curiosity: “Why? Why do I want to escape in this way? What will this action give to me?” Gently observe yourself, without any judgment. You might consider writing down these questions in your journal, along with the answers that arise when you think about them. Journaling will help you to see and monitor your progress.

Dr. Mate, who specializes in the treatment and study of addictions, sums this up beautifully:

“Instead of hurling an accusatory brick at your own head (e.g., ‘I am so stupid; when will I ever learn?’ etc.), the question ‘Why did I do this again, knowing full well the negative consequences?’ can become the subject of a fruitful inquiry, a gentle investigation. Taking off the starched uniform of the interrogator, who is determined to try, convict, and punish, we adopt toward ourselves the attitude of the empathic friend, who simply wants to know what's going on with us.”

I have found this kind of gentle questioning—combined with patience, and a continuing practice of heartfelt understanding and ongoing compassion—helpful for myself and for the clients I work with.

11. Celebrating Each Person's Unique Multiplicity



Please visit my blog, *The Faces We Live*, if you're interested in reading more about personal growth and development. Having been a lifelong seeker of ways to expand, advance, and improve my emotional, psychological, and spiritual potential, I wish to share my journey and learnings with you.

What I know for sure is this: The moment that each of us is willing to claim our “inner barbarians” with some degree of self-acceptance and compassion, we will stop projecting those aspects of ourselves onto our “enemies.” If I want peace on earth—and I do—it truly must begin with *me*.

No matter the topic or particular series I pursue, my intent is always to provide examples of people's different—often conflicting—parts. I use myself and my own experiences to illustrate how parts or shadow sides can be expressed in the real world—largely because I know myself better than I know anyone else.

I also know for sure that every part of me that I disown, despise, or refuse to acknowledge will become hostile to me and to others, thereby perpetuating misery like a cloud of radiation blowing where it will.

My hope is that my blog posts will facilitate another path to understanding the me that is me and the you that is you.

Please, please let us look at the devil within, the ways in which we all “miss the mark.”
Addiction to people, places, and things is just one example of the internal “lepers” we all have.
For it is not our shadow (or devil) that is intrinsically evil; rather, it is our refusal to acknowledge
our shadow that contributes to the evil that eventually manifests itself outwardly—in addictions,
in prejudice, in jealousies, in greed, and in wars.

*The range of what we think and do
is limited by what we fail to notice.*

And because we fail to notice

that we fail to notice

there is little we can do

to change

until we notice

how failing to notice

shapes our thoughts and deeds.

—R.D. Laing

12. About Dawn

Dawn DeLisa Novotny, MSW, LCSW, MTS, CDP, CP, is a clinician, teacher, author, spiritual director, and national workshop leader. She has been in private practice in Sequim, WA since 1987. She specializes in systems theory, focusing both on the “external” (family, culture, projected roles) and the “internal” family system (internalized roles, parts, archetypes, ego states, internal conflicts, etc.). As a clinical practitioner of psychodrama, sociometry, and group therapy, Dawn utilizes a variety of action methods. She conducts workshops in California and Washington State. Dawn holds master’s degrees in clinical social work and theology; is state-certified in the field of chemical dependency; has completed a two-year post-graduate program in spiritual direction (sponsored by the Jubilee Community for Justice and Peace and the Vancouver School of Theology); is a nationally certified psychodramatist; and completed Internal Family Systems’ advanced training in 2004. She has served as an adjunct professor at Seattle University, and also as an instructor at Peninsula Community College. Dawn is the author of *Ragdoll Redeemed: Growing Up In The Shadow Of Marilyn Monroe*.

www.thefaceswelve.com

dawnnovotny@olympen.com