

Again a new year and new thoughts and enthusiasm. We at the Substance Abuse Council would like to profile another book, but this time with a broader spectrum. The title is "Addictive Thinking, Understanding Self-Deception" by Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. Dr. Twerski has an intuitive grasp of the disease of addiction and the knack of portraying real alcoholics in just a few insightful and carefully chosen phrases. Because he knows them so well, he makes it easy for others to understand them too. In this book, Dr. Twerski zeros in on the critical aspects of addictive thinking, shows it to us clearly through carefully selected examples from his clinical practice and general observations, examines its origins, and explores the importance of such thinking in a host of matters. We hope you will come away from "reading this book" better informed, and more knowledgeable about alcoholics and other addicts.

Chapter 1

What is Addictive thinking?

The phenomenon of abnormal thinking in addiction was first recognized in Alcoholics anonymous, where the highly descriptive term *stinkin' thinkin'* was coined. Old-timers in AA use this term to describe the "dry drunk," or the alcoholic who abstains from drinking but behaves in many other ways much like an active drinker.

Distortions of thinking are not unique to addictive disorders or chemical use at all. Thought distortions can be found in people who may have other adjustment problems. For example one young woman was procrastinating turning in her term paper for class. When asked why she didn't finish it, she said it was already finished. When asked why it wasn't submitted, she confessed that there were still some changes she wanted to make.

"But I thought you were finished." I remarked. Whereupon she confirmed "it is."

While her assertion appears illogical to most people, it can make perfect sense to someone who thinks addictively. Furthermore, although distorted thinking does not necessarily indicate addiction, the intensity and regularity of this type of thinking are most common among addicts.

Being confronted with the thinking of an alcoholic, or someone with another addiction can be very frustrating. Just as we couldn't force the young woman to see that she wasn't finished her paper if she still had things to edit, so we are unable to budge an alcoholic from the belief that he or she is a safe, social drinker. Someone close enough to observe a late-stage alcoholic sees a person whose life is steadily falling apart; perhaps the physical health is deteriorating, family life is in ruins, and job is in jeopardy. All of these problems are obviously due to the effects of alcohol, yet the addict appears unable to recognize this. He or she may firmly believe that using chemicals has nothing to do with any of these problems and seems blind to logical arguments to the contrary. Especially in the early stages, an addict's perspective and account of what is happening may look reasonable on the surface. He may sound convincing to friends, employer, doctor or pastor. Each statement he makes seems to hold up, and we can't convince him otherwise.

Obsessions and Compulsions in Addiction

The treachery of self-deceptive thinking may infect codependent family members as well as the chemically dependent person. "A codependent person is one who has let another person's behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behavior? Trying to drive away obsessive thought is like trying to get a coiled spring out of the way by compressing it. The more pressure exerted against the spring, the harder it eventually recoils. Not to oversimplify, we might say that the addicted person is plagued by the *compulsion* to use chemicals. A codependent person has an *obsession* with the addict's use and the need to control the addict.

Cause and Effect

Does an addict's distorted thinking cause an addiction, or does the distorted thinking result from the addiction? In a sense, it doesn't matter. In either case, treatment and recovery must begin somewhere. Since active chemical use stands in the way of success in treatment, abstinence must come first. After prolonged abstinence, when the brain again functions more normally, addicts can focus their attention on their addictive thinking. This book is intended to help the addicted, or codependent person identify his or her thinking processes and begin to overcome addictive thinking.

[Twerski, Abraham J. M.D. Addictive Thinking, Understanding Self-Deception: 2nd Ed. Hazelden: Center City, Minnesota, 1997 1990]