



Is Our Use Really a Choice?

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The DSM-5 Criteria for Substance Use Disorder

1. Taking the substance in larger amounts or for longer than you're meant to.
2. Wanting to cut down or stop using the substance but not managing to.
3. Spending a lot of time getting, using, or recovering from use of the substance.
4. Cravings and urges to use the substance.



The DSM-5 Criteria for Substance Use Disorder

5. Not managing to do what you should at work, home, or school because of substance use.
6. Continuing to use, even when it causes problems in relationships.
7. Giving up important social, occupational, or recreational activities because of substance use.
8. Using substances again and again, even when it puts you in danger.



The DSM-5 Criteria for Substance Use Disorder

9. Continuing to use, even when you know you have a physical or psychological problem that could have been caused or made worse by the substance.

10. Needing more of the substance to get the effect you want (tolerance).

11. Development of withdrawal symptoms, which can be relieved by taking more of the substance.



Diagnostic Criteria for Substance Use Disorder

They now categorize SUD along a continuum, which was not done before.

❖ If you have 2-3 symptoms = mild disorder

❖ If you have 4-6 symptoms = moderate disorder

❖ If you have 6+ symptoms = severe case



The Discerning Features:

❖ How much distress is it causing you?

and/or

❖ How much clinical impairment is there?

If you have either one or both, then it's a real problem. You can tell yourself you don't care that you can't stop, that it doesn't bother you, but then can't keep a job or a loving relationship = evidence of the disorder.



The Denial that Keeps the Cycle Going

- ❖ Despite obvious evidence to the contrary, so many people will refuse to admit they have a problem controlling and enjoying their drug of choice.
- ❖ They want to hang on to the belief that willpower alone is involved and if they just try harder or figure out that perfect formula, they will have it licked.
- ❖ They hold on to a false idea that they are “choosing” to use.



Choice is Not at Play

There was a neuroscientist who did some experiments on himself – he had a student put electrodes into his brain to stimulate his foot to flex, while he was going to point it.

What he noticed was that his brain kept telling him that he was choosing to “change his mind” about his foot - even though he was trying his darndest to point it, he couldn't when the electrode was in his head.

When his foot would flex – because of the brain stimulation, his mind would trick him into believing it was “a choice”. He watched as his mind told him that he was ‘deciding’ to not point his foot.

Susan Peirce-Thompson, PhD

This is HUGE! And it totally applies to all of us who have struggled with giving up our substance.



Choice is Not at Play

- ❖ As Dr. Peirce-Thompson explained, this is nothing more than a capitulation to the demands of your brain.
- ❖ The reward circuitry is activated by the craving - the urge and if you succumb to it, you tell yourself, “I’ll stop tomorrow but today I’m deciding it’s ok to drink.”
- ❖ You fool yourself into thinking you are making a choice – but you’re not. The fact is you do not have a choice.



Predisposing Factors

- ❖ If you come from an addictive/trauma-based family system, denial was the organizing principle of the system,
"We don't talk in this family about what is happening",
- ❖ You will have learned to continue along this path –
"I don't really have a problem".
- ❖ Almost all of us have had some periods where we believed we had regained control. Those fuel the false belief that we are "fine". Too often, these periods are followed by even less control.
- ❖ But our minds don't hold on to the latter – instead, we cling to the fact we 'once' were able to control the amount.



Getting off the Merry-Go-Round of Denial & Relapse

- ❖ We have to both **Want** and **Like** the idea of living a sober life.
- ❖ You must embrace life in recovery – which begins with abstinence.
- ❖ Goes beyond the drastic changes required of you - the loss of a lifestyle, the memory of the pleasure that it once gave us, friends, family, and the ability to numb out.
- ❖ Instead, we come to see how much better we are, and we build on that each day.



Choose to Live the Life That is Waiting for You

Quality recovery is more than just stopping.

It will mean that you both **WANT** and begin to **LOVE** the rewards of sobriety:

- ✓ waking up with a clear head
- ✓ healing your emotional wounds
- ✓ replacing destructiveness with productiveness
- ✓ connecting with others more intimately
- ✓ knowing yourself better
- ✓ living joyfully and giving back to the world



Getting off the Merry-Go-Round of Denial & Relapse

- ❖ Can you accept that powerless means you cannot do it alone
– your will power is not the answer?
- ❖ Will you stop being afraid to deal with your emotional pain in
order to face life without some compulsive distraction?
- ❖ Will you trust that you are enough and that others will
support and love you through the journey?

I hope the answer is a resounding “yes” as this program is
designed to help you do just that.


