Addiction – Is it a Disease?

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Learning Objectives

• To become knowledgeable about addiction as it relates to substance use or abuse of mind altering drugs or alcohol

• To understand the impact genetics and coping skills have on addiction and recovery

• To become knowledgeable of ways to decrease the impact addiction has on the afflicted
Is Addiction a Disease?

• Addiction is a brain disease that develops over time
  – For some people, addiction is evident upon the very first use
• The consequence is virtually uncontrollable compulsive craving, seeking, and use
  – This can interfere with, if not destroy, an individual’s functioning in the family and in society
• Using mind altering substances repeatedly over time changes brain structure and function
  – Effect can persist long after the individual stops using (wet brain)
• Mind altering substances high-jack the brain’s natural motivational control circuits
  – resulting in use becoming the sole, or at least the top, motivational priority for the individual
Genetics

• At least half of a person's susceptibility to drug addiction can be linked to genetic factors

• First a person has to experiment with drugs, then he or she has to repeatedly use them
  – At that point, genetic vulnerability helps determine who winds up addicted

• When it comes to tobacco, genetics account for about 75 percent of a person's inclination to begin smoking
  – Genes also account for 60 percent of the tendency to become addicted and 54 percent of one's ability to quit
Coping Skills

• Addiction is due 50 percent to genetic predisposition and 50 percent to poor coping skills

• Your genes are not your destiny but your children are more likely to have an addiction if there is a family history of addiction.

• Let good coping skills be the legacy you pass on to your children
  – You can help your children lead happy lives by teaching them healthy coping skills. Set an example with your recovery or behaviors and coping skills
Addicted to JUST One Substance?

• If you have a family history of addiction, you can become addicted to any drug
  – If at least one of your family members is addicted to alcohol, you have a greater chance of developing an addiction

• All addictions work in the same part of the brain
  – (cross-addiction)

• If your brain is wired so that you are predisposed to one addiction, BE MINDFUL that you are predisposed to all addictions. This is especially important for women who develop eating disorders or addiction to tranquilizers or pain relievers
Common Misperceptions

• If you are addicted to cocaine and want to quit, then you have to stop using all addictive drugs including alcohol and marijuana
  – You may never have had a problem with alcohol or marijuana, but if you continue to use alcohol or marijuana, (even casually), they'll eventually lead you back to your drug of choice
  – Recovery requires total abstinence

• One addiction can lead to other addictions, and one drug can make you relapse on another drug
  – This is one of the consequences of a brain that's wired for addiction
  – Process addiction is to be monitored – gambling is NOT a good idea for those predisposed to addiction
Coping Skills

- You don't recover from an addiction (just) by stopping use
  - You recover by creating a new life where it is easier to not use
  - If you don't intentionally create a new life, the factors that brought you to addiction will take you back to old coping skills
  - You don't have to change everything in your life. There are a few behaviors that have caused trouble in your health or your life. They will continue to cause trouble until you embrace better coping skills
  - The more you try to hold onto your old lifestyle and coping skills, the less likely you will recover
Thank you!!!