

THE BIOLOGY OF ADDICTION

WHAT IS ADDICTION?

Take a moment and write down what your definition of addiction is.

What does an "addict" look like to you?

Visualize this person.

Our understanding of addiction is rooted in the word itself, formed from the Latin word "addictus", and has several meanings, including "to yield, sacrifice, devote, sellout" and addicted: to give over or award (oneself) to someone or some practice". This definition attached itself specifically to narcotics at the turn of the century, but modern addictions recovery specialists and doctors, including expert Dr.Gabor Mate, have redefined the term to include any strong physical, emotional and/or psychological dependence on a substance or behaviour that has progressed beyond voluntary control. Regardless of the outcome or potential to cause personal harm, or to disrupt close relationships, this person will continue using the substance or partaking in the behaviour. Addiction is a chronic and progressive condition with genetic, neurobiological, hormonal, nutritional, psychosocial, environmental and spiritual factors contributing to its development and manifestation. In short, addiction is much more complex than what we can see on the surface.

With this reframed understanding of the definition of addiction, recall the visualization you created for the "addicted person". Does your definition still fit this? Society has a narrow and stigmatizing definition of addiction, usually portrayed as an unstable, unpredictable crack-cocaine addict shooting up in the alleys of the DTES, living on the streets, or the person who simply doesn't know how to stop at one drink, and spends the majority of their time and money at the liquor store. Have you asked these questions or have you heard this from others: "Why don't they just stop drinking/using?", "They should just go get a job.", "They got themselves into this position, so why should I be the one to have to help them?." This rhetoric is still very common. With this new definition, you will begin to understand that addiction does not just encompass drugs and alcohol. Addiction can manifest in the forms of overeating, undereating, sex, videogames, television shows, work, exercise, the internet, sugar, shopping and gambling, to name a few.

THE ORIGINS OF ADDICTION

We must begin asking a new series of questions:

Not WHY the addiction, but WHY the PAIN?

Addictions recovery specialist and expert, Dr. Gabor Mate, journalist and author Johann Hari and a host of researchers, doctors and modern specialists are uncovering provocative research and evidence to support the idea that addiction manifests in a person due to traumatic incidences in childhood. We can break this even further down to say that it

is not simply the incident but the separation from essential SELF that occurs within the trauma; a separation from our spirit, from our essence as a spiritual being and the pain that follows. Let's explore this even further, with an understanding that as a spiritual being, we need love and connection with other spiritual beings and when this need is