

RE/FRAMING ADDICT/ION

not met, when there is a LACK, or a hole, or an emptiness, we strive at any cost to fill that hole, and perhaps not with what is actually lacking. We fill the emptiness, the hole, the space, the LACK with drugs, food, sex, video games, television, shopping and so on. This incredibly important reframe is at the heart of understanding not only what addiction is, but how it can be successfully treated. We live in an addicted society. We are programmed to see ourselves as “never enough”, never having enough, never doing enough. Simply “being” is

not encouraged, we are under constant assault through advertising, consumerism and news outlets to buy more, do more and compete with each other to HAVE more. We are told it is “normal” to wake up by drinking coffee every morning and to wind down from the day with a boozy drink in the evening. The reality is that this is far from normal. Our bodies are vastly intelligent. If we learn to listen to what they are telling us, we can use this intelligence to heal and thrive, without the use of uppers and downers.

THE BIOLOGY OF ADDICTION

The biological processes at work in the addicted brain are complex and intricate. We will attempt to cut through the doctorate-level education and stick to the basics of how the addicted brain functions. Observing your brain in this objective way will serve to empower you with the knowledge you need to self-heal.

Stress and Addiction

Stress is a primer for addictive behaviours. Think back to the last time you were stressed, did you reach for a cigarette, a coffee, a toke? Did you go online and distract yourself with funny cat videos? It is very common for us to adopt these behaviours as habits to deal with stress. So what is stress? Stress is when your body and mind have reached their capacity to know how to adapt or cope with a particular situation; when the demands of others and/or our environment become too much for our current ability to cope, whether consciously or unconsciously.

The Stress Response

When we are stressed, our bodies react by releasing two types of chemical messengers. The process goes like this:

1. STRESS TRIGGER (event)
2. STRESS (release of chemicals)
3. REACTION/THOUGHT
4. MEMORY ACTIVATION
(created in the hippocampus**)
5. EMOTIONAL RESPONSE
(anger, fear, dread, anxiety, created in the amygdala**)

****HIPPOCAMPUS: records memories of an experience, including where, when and with whom it occurred.**

****AMYGDALA: assesses whether an experience creates pleasure or aversion, and whether or not that experience should be repeated or avoided**

This response is then communicated chemically through neurotransmitters to the hypothalamus and registered as a hormonal secretion, communicated first to the pituitary gland and finally to the adrenal glands, producing cortisol, the dominant hormone in the stress cycle.

Hypothalamus > Pituitary > Adrenals = HPA Axis