

# Outsmarting Your Addiction



Take Full Responsibility  
for Your Life Choices  
& Regain Your Self-Respect

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## **Chapter 1**

### **The Name of the Game: How to Revive Your Ailing Self-Respect**

Most of us are aware that we want to be treated with respect by other people. You probably find yourself becoming upset, angry or hurt when someone acts in a disrespectful way toward you, because it feels as if that person does not value you enough to treat you well.

#### **Self-Respect: What Exactly Is It?**

Self-respect works in the same way as being respected by others. When you value yourself enough to treat yourself well, you are acting in a self-respecting way. If you take good care of yourself in healthy ways such as having clear and assertive boundaries, saying “No” when you need to, taking good care of your physical, emotional and spiritual needs, and putting your own important needs ahead of the needs of others, when necessary, then you are exercising your self-respect.

And you will find that others take their cues from you, in terms of how to relate to you. For example, when people hear you talking about yourself in a derogatory way and putting yourself down, they will likely think less of you. However, if they see you valuing yourself and living your life in that manner, they will likely value you more as well.

As Dr. Phil so aptly reminds us, “We teach other people how to treat us.”

### **Self-Respect Has Its Roots in Childhood**

The way you treat yourself often has its roots in messages that you were given about yourself in childhood. The ways in which you were treated by your parents, caregivers, siblings, teachers, and even your friends have led you to believe that you either were or were not worthy, valuable or cherished. And you have most likely brought these same beliefs about yourself into your adult relationships, coloring the way you treat yourself in present time.

But you do not have to continue believing something about yourself that is not true!

Of course, you are valuable and unique and special - you always were, and that is true of all of us. When you make the decision to empower yourself by choosing to believe the truth about who you are rather than what someone else may think of you, then you are on the road to self-respect.

### **Self-Respect And Addictive Behaviors**

Addictions can wreak havoc on our self-respect.

If you are grappling with an addictive behavior of any kind (such as alcohol or drug misuse, eating disorders, codependency in relationships, smoking, gambling,

internet addiction, or compulsive overspending), you know what I mean. On some level, you are aware that every time you indulge in that specific behavior, you feel badly about yourself. You know that you don't really want to be doing what you're doing, and that you would feel better about yourself inside if you could stop.

For many people with addictive behaviors, low self-respect has become a part of life - you may not even be aware of how different life could be for you if you could change how you act and thus how you feel about yourself. Life is so much better when we have our self-respect!

### **Self-Respect Is Earned**

Here is an easy gauge to see how well you're faring in terms of your self-respect. Ask yourself this question, and be willing to look honestly at your answers:

“What do I need to do, or what do I need to NOT do, to be able to look at myself in the mirror and be okay with who I see?”

Each time you ask yourself that question, listen for your true answer and actually base your behavior on what you have heard. If you do this regularly, you will build up your self-respect. That is the name of the game, and it becomes the basis for all your interactions, whether you are aware of that or not.

This may be a difficult change for you to make, however. If you are used to pleasing others instead of yourself, for example, your challenge may lie in learning how to put yourself first without feeling guilty or “selfish.” But if you continue to put others first and feel badly about yourself for doing that, your self-respect will suffer.

So here is the choice-point - what is more important to you: having other people like you or liking yourself? There may be times in life when you aren’t going to have both.

Every time you make the decision to like yourself despite any potentially negative consequences from others, you earn a little more of your self-respect.

### **Another's Perspective Might Be Helpful**

Learning how to treat yourself more respectfully will change your life. You will experience a profound shift in the ways you see your life, as well as your place in the world. Your relationships with other people will become healthier, as you begin to treat yourself in healthier ways. Although nobody’s life is ever “perfect,” living with non-negotiable self-respect is the most consistent way of living a rich and fulfilling life.

If you are having difficulty believing in yourself and treating yourself with self-respect, you may want to talk to some of your trusted friends or reach out to a skilled

therapist for assistance. This might help you to explore what is holding you back from giving up your self-sabotaging patterns.

Remember, it all starts with YOU - what do you need to do, or what do you need to NOT do, to be able to look at yourself and feel happy with who you are?

That is the name of the game!

## Chapter 2

### The Serenity Prayer: How it Can Help Your Recovery from Addiction

God, grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

These days, a lot of people have heard of the Serenity Prayer. Anyone who has gone to 12-Step groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Al-Anon knows this prayer as the group recitation at the end of these meetings.

But although you may have heard this prayer often, and perhaps recited it yourself many times, have you explored its meaning in a deeper way to see what it really means to you?

This profoundly simple piece of writing has many important spiritual lessons nestled within it. Let's look at each of the four parts.

#### **God, grant me the serenity...**

In the first line, the word "God" is used. For some people, this is an appropriate way to invoke that which they are praying to, but for others, the word "God" might be more

problematic. If that is the case for you, if you are having difficulty with that “religious” concept, I encourage you to have an alternate word that you can use. Some examples might be:

- Goddess
- Higher Power
- Divine Love
- Great Spirit
- Creator
- Universe or Universal Force

No matter what we choose to call it, most of us recognize that there is indeed a power greater than us. To test that theory, consider this: even if you don’t want the sun to rise tomorrow, it is going to rise anyway. Even if you want the grass outside to be purple, it is going to be green anyway.

There are many things we have absolutely no control over. Who is in charge of those things? It is that mystical, mysterious force that no human being totally understands!

So, let’s go back to that first line of the Serenity Prayer to explore some of its teachings.

**“God, grant me the serenity...”**

Ah, serenity! The dictionary defines “serenity” as tranquility, peacefulness and calmness. How we all long



to feel that on an ongoing basis! But for most of us, that sense of peace is elusive; try as we might, the stresses of the outside world at times seem to take all of that away from us.

However, serenity is a major component of physical and emotional self-care. When we do not feel serene, we can suffer for it in a number of ways.

Physically, our stress levels are elevated as we find ourselves worried, frustrated, even frantic. Our immune systems are affected by stress, which can contribute to such illnesses as heart disease, irritable bowel syndrome and cancer.

A lack of emotional serenity over time can lead to maladies such as depression, insomnia and memory loss, as well as addictive behaviors such as substance misuse and eating disorders.

Asking a higher power to grant us serenity makes a lot of sense to me!

**“...To accept the things I cannot change...”**

In order to accept the things we cannot change, we need to first understand that we can't control everything.

What kinds of things are we actually able to change? What CAN we really control?

Until we explore this idea, most of us think we can control many things that we actually have no control over at all.

For example, many people think we can change another person, if we just try hard enough. We believe that if we can just find the right words, or use the right amount of coercion, we can make others do what we want them to do. Sometimes we might even resort to shaming someone to “make them change.”

But the truth is that we can't *make* another person do anything against his or her will. We can talk and talk in the hope of persuading the person to do things our way. We may try to coerce the person by using force or perhaps employ a form of emotional blackmail. Or we might attempt to show the person how foolish he or she is for not following our beliefs or doing what we want.

But we live on a planet of free will, and the only time people change anything is when *they make the decision* to change. As human beings, we always have choices.

Believing that we can make someone else change is a common mistake that many people make. If you really look closely at the dynamics involved in this type of interaction, you will see that you have no power over anyone who does not choose to give that power to you.

**“..The courage to change the things I can...”**

Now comes the hard part - if we can't change another person, or what color the grass will be, or whether the sun will rise tomorrow morning, what on earth CAN we change?

And, of course, the only answer to that age-old question is “Ourselves.” We are only able to change ourselves, but that can entail some very hard work. In order to change something about ourselves, we need to first open our eyes wide enough to realize that our unhealthy behaviors have become problematic for us. We need to be willing to come out of our own denial and choose something different.

Let's look at an example. Let's say that the majority of your relationships and friendships are not fulfilling for you. One way you could look at it would be to decide that this is the fault of the people you are in relationship with, and that you are really a victim in all of this.

But a different, more courageous choice would be to decide to look inside yourself, to try to find out what your part in this might be and change whatever dysfunctional behaviors you are bringing to your relationships. It is only when we change ourselves that we truly begin to heal.

Perhaps you have an addictive behavior such as alcohol or drug misuse, an eating disorder, smoking or overspending. If you are choosing to continue to engage

in this method of coping with life, there is nobody who can make you stop - not until YOU make the courageous decision to choose another way to deal with your problems. Or perhaps you are in a relationship with an addict. If you have chosen to stay with this person, you may feel that you are giving way too much of yourself emotionally without getting much back in return. You may become angry with the addict for not giving you what you need, which could fill you with resentments. Just trying to get some of your own needs met, you might even find yourself becoming emotionally manipulative with your addicted partner.

Instead of trying to make the addict change, a healthier choice would be to decide what you are and aren't willing to put up with anymore and set clear boundaries. When those boundaries are crossed, you then have the option to make more courageous choices for yourself, such as to leave if you feel you are being treated disrespectfully.

It is not easy to take this kind of responsibility for ourselves - and that is why this part of the Serenity Prayer calls for courage. It doesn't require courage to do the easy things in life. It takes courage to be willing to change ourselves if we are not happy with something in our lives.

**“...And the wisdom to know the difference.”**

To me, this last line is the most important part of the Serenity Prayer. When we have “the wisdom to know the

difference” between what we can and cannot change, we can save ourselves a lot of trouble and a lot of energy.

When we can distinguish between what is in our control from what is not in our control, ***we can stop trying to control what we absolutely cannot control!***

The ripple effects of doing this inner work and changing what we are no longer comfortable with in ourselves can be far-reaching. The most important ripple effect is the increase in self-respect we feel when we finally become “real” with ourselves and take the appropriate actions that lead us to healthy change.

We begin to accept our own imperfections and develop some very necessary understanding and compassion for ourselves. This in turn helps us to be more understanding and compassionate towards others, even when we don’t like their behaviors.

In addition, when we start to respect ourselves more, we begin setting healthier boundaries with the people in our lives. We find ourselves taking personal responsibility for ourselves and our decisions, including the ways in which we’ve allowed others to treat us.

Developing the wisdom to know the difference between what you can and cannot change, and knowing how to change the things you can control, will create the serenity that you may have been seeking to find in your life. So,

the next time you hear or recite the Serenity Prayer, consider what this simple prayer really means, and how you can change the things you really can change so that you can have the quality of life you want.

## Chapter 3

### **Denial and Addiction: Becoming Aware of the Inner Voice that Leads to Self-Destruction**

Anyone who has been around 12-Step programs for any length of time has inevitably heard the old saying “Denial is more than a river in Egypt.”

Indeed, when it comes to addictive behaviors of any sort, denial is definitely a whole lot more than a slogan. It is often the underlying dynamic that keeps an addiction active, even when the addict really wants to stop the behavior.

In this newsletter, I will discuss the role of denial in addiction, and the staggering impact it can have when someone is either engaging in, or trying to recover from, an addiction.

#### **A Definition**

One dictionary definition of *denial* is “the refusal to acknowledge or accept what is true.” All of us use the defense mechanism of denial to some degree, in order to ease past trauma or to feel better about the world we live in. In fact, without a healthy dose of self- caring denial, it might be very difficult to live our day-to-day lives without going insane, especially when we hear about all the death

and suffering all over our planet due to wars, earthquakes and typhoons.

But when it comes to addiction, the use of denial can take on an even more menacing component - it gets in the way of one's self-respect, and in some cases, it can virtually spell the difference between life and death.

### **Types of Denial**

The refusal to accept or acknowledge what is true is a very fitting description of the denial of someone with an addiction. In most cases, addictive behaviors are used to change the way we feel about our lives, or to help us forget those things that make us not feel good about ourselves. If you are struggling with an addictive behavior, some of the ways you might be using denial might include:

- Rationalizing - making up excuses for why you can give yourself what you want when you want it. "I deserve a reward after working so hard" or "I can handle doing it just this one time."
- Blaming (aka Diversion) - shifting the focus of attention onto another situation or person so that you can avoid taking self-responsibility. "It's your fault that I am the way I am," otherwise known as the "You'd-Drink-Too-If-You-Had-a- Wife-Like-Mine" lament.
- Minimizing - discounting the seriousness of your addiction. "So, I drink and smoke pot every day, but at least I'm not doing heroin," or "I know I don't have



much money and I don't really need it ~ but this was on sale.”

- Anger and Hostility - used to push people away when you don't want to deal with their questions or concerns. This technique is often used in tandem with other forms of denial. “Don't you dare tell me how to live my life!” or “Get out of my face and leave me alone!”
- Self-Delusion - convincing yourself that you don't really have a problem at all. “I can stop whenever I want to ~ I just don't want to.”

The denial of addicts can be so strongly rooted that they might even decide to withdraw from their life tasks and loved ones in order to continue “using.” You (or someone you care about) may have chosen to cut ties with friends and family rather than stop your addiction. Perhaps you have embarked on a “geographical cure,” choosing to believe that you will be able to safely continue your addiction if you can live in a different geographical location. Or you might have lost your job, your home, or your children due to an addictive behavior, but still felt compelled to continue ~ all the while telling yourself that things aren't really as bad as they seem.

In fact, denial can even be at work when things seem to be going well in your life, especially if you believe that you don't deserve to have good things happen to you. This could lead to some very negative self-talk, as you strive to get back into your “comfort zone” of losing everyone and

everything that is important to you ~ because of the belief that you never deserved them anyway!

Worst still, you may be watching your health diminish as your addiction robs you of the ability to nourish yourself or obtain the medications you might need to be well. This can lead to devastating and potentially life-threatening consequences, which will negatively impact both yourself and the people who love you.

The most difficult part of treating an addictive behavior, or recovering from one, is that denial is such a strong component of the actual condition of addiction. When you need to suppress your feelings in such self-destructive ways, you will also need to find a way to “explain it” to yourself so that you can live with the often-dire consequences of those extremely unhealthy choices.

### **The Solution**

It is only when you can be aware of your own denial, and how you use it, that you can truly recover from an addictive behavior.

In addition, another thing to consider is the extent to which you feel powerless in your life. When you can accept and acknowledge that you will simply not be able to control everything and everyone in your life, you can be more honest with yourself about how you feel about that reality. If you can instead become aware of what you

really *can* control and how you can do that, your need for denial and other self-sabotaging addictive behaviors will decrease. You will be able to begin learning how to live life on life's terms.

Awareness is always the first step toward any change ~ if you are not aware of something that is not working for you, how can you change it? And SELF-awareness is what is required in order to outsmart your addiction.

The truth is that no matter who you are or what has happened to you in the past, you DO deserve to be happy ~ you DO deserve to feel the self-respect of doing the work it takes to change your destructive behaviors and live your best life.

Whenever you find yourself actively engaging in your addictive behavior, do your best to become aware that you might be in the throes of denial at any given moment. You may be minimizing, blaming, pushing loved ones away or telling yourself other “rational lies” so that you can justify your unhealthy behaviors. Developing the willingness to see yourself more clearly can be enough to open your eyes to the truth of your situation. That is when change can really manifest.

### **Reach Out for Help**

If you know that you are behaving in ways that are self-sabotaging, or that may be hurting someone else, but you

are feeling powerless to stop, reach out for help - from family and friends, from a reputable support group, or from a skilled professional who can help you make sense of your dysfunctional denial.

Everyone needs help at some point in their lives—it is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of strength and courage when we admit that we can't do something alone. It shows that you respect both yourself and your loved ones enough to start doing things in healthier ways.

Remember—it is never too late to give up your self-defeating patterns and begin to build the life you really want!

## Chapter 4

### **Allowing Discomfort: The Secret to Successful Recovery from Addictive Behaviors**

#### **Challenging Your "Yeah But's..."**

You've given it a lot of thought. You know that your addiction is overwhelming your life and causing you a lot of problems. You really want to stop engaging in these self-defeating behaviors and have a better life. You're so sure you're ready, but...

"It's going to be so hard!" you tell yourself. "How am I going to get through the rough times without having that substance or behavior to fall back on?"

The truth is, you're right! It will be difficult. When we have been soothing ourselves with long-held, dysfunctional patterns, habits or addictions, we have developed a "*comfort zone*" for ourselves. This means that we have been comfortable using these behaviors, and we will have to learn all over again how to live without them. For most people this takes some time, vigilance, commitment and yes - discomfort.

If you are at the point of feeling ready to stop your addictive behaviors, it is probably because you have already been living with the discomfort they have been causing in your life for a while now. But because there is

also discomfort when we begin doing things a different way, even if the new way is healthier and better for us, most of us don't stop engaging in these self-sabotaging behaviors until they have become truly problematic for us.

### **My Experience with Discomfort**

I often think back to the time when I was coming off Valium. Although it was over 20 years ago, I still remember it vividly. Because of the many lessons I learned from that experience, I choose to retain the memory.

When I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease in 1973, the doctors prescribed many different medications for me. One of these was Valium, which I took faithfully for many years just the way the doctor ordered. At that time, most physicians did not have as clear an understanding of either Crohn's Disease or of addiction as they do today, and I found myself paying the price for their lack of clarity.

Almost 15 years later I was still using Valium, as well as other prescription drugs and marijuana daily, mostly to manage the physical pain I was experiencing as a result of my illness. In the Spring of 1987, I finally made the decision to stop abusing these substances. I entered a residential detox center in Vancouver and, like most people who are in that situation, I was feeling miserable. Although there were several drugs I was detoxing from at the time, the one that I had the most trouble with was Valium.

It has been said that the withdrawal from Valium can be even worse than withdrawing from heroin. I am grateful that I have never had to come off heroin, but because I had been using so much Valium for so many years, my withdrawal symptoms were brutal. As the Valium slowly left my system, I found that everything I had used that medication to prevent became turned around and exaggerated. I had taken Valium all that time primarily to help me sleep and to ward off anxiety. During my withdrawal from it, I was virtually sleepless and extremely anxious most of the time.

The worst of these symptoms lasted for over a month, and I often felt as if I was going crazy. As I look back on it, I'm amazed that I was able to get through it! But even then, as difficult as it was, I knew it was the right thing for me to be doing. There was no question for me that I needed to stop abusing all mind-altering substances - I yearned to live a drug-free life. So even though what I was doing felt totally "wrong" both physically and mentally, I knew it was "right."

I began to remind myself of that, and even developed a mantra that I repeated to myself many times a day. I would say to myself *"This feels wrong, but it's right. It feels wrong, but it's right."* In this way, I was able to stay in the discomfort that my harsh withdrawal symptoms were causing me. I was basically giving myself permission to be comfortable with my discomfort.

I still use that mantra sometimes. When I know that I am making a healthy choice for myself, but the change of my habitual pattern feels uncomfortable, I will remind myself that even though it feels wrong, it is the right decision to be making. Unless I give myself that permission to sit in the discomfort of my feelings, I will not be able to make important, self-respecting choices for my life.

### **This Too Shall Pass**

Another tried-and-true mantra you can use is a familiar slogan which is often used in 12-Step programs: "*This too shall pass.*" When I am having a particularly good time in my life and things are going well, I recognize that this too shall pass and I will once again, at some point, find myself in another growth period. When I have difficult times in my life, I now know for sure that this too shall pass and that I will feel begin to feel better. This understanding allows me to tolerate the discomfort that I temporarily find myself experiencing.

The purpose of addiction is to change how we are feeling, generally to keep us from feeling uncomfortable. Until you decide to allow yourself to sit in the discomfort of the feelings you experience sometimes, you will never be able to stop engaging in your addictive behaviors. Your need to mask your discomfort will always bring you back to making unhealthy choices.



## **How You Can Help Yourself**

The next time you're feeling some discomfort, try reminding yourself that even though what you're doing *feels* wrong, it really is right - and that your discomfort will pass. You can also choose to take some healthy, self-caring action, such as talking a friend or counsellor about what you're dealing with or going to a support group such as a 12-Step program. You could also try journaling, meditating, taking a walk, indulging in a luxurious bubble bath or taking a nap.

Some people also like to develop their own mantras or affirmations to fit what they are working on at the moment. Some might include things like "I am choosing to care about myself today" or "I deserve to have healthy relationships in my life." You can let your particular life circumstances determine the creative affirmations you come up with for yourself.

Seeing your discomfort as a positive rite of passage out of addiction will help you to "make friends" with it and become less uncomfortable. As your resistance to the discomfort decreases, your chances of being able to stop your addictive behavior and choose a healthier path for yourself will increase substantially.

## Chapter 5

### **Addiction and Relapse: A “Normal, Expected” Part of Recovery?**

Have you ever noticed that the same issue sometimes bombards us from all angles for a while? It’s funny how life seems to come in themes.

I’ve received several articles in my inbox, talking about addicts who relapse after they come out of treatment—or even after many years of sobriety. Most of these writers are telling me that relapse is a ‘normal part of recovery’ from addiction. Some are even trying to differentiate between a *lapse* and a *relapse* as if that jargon matters or is important. Basically, they’re saying that relapse is to be expected—and that we should not be too surprised or upset by it.

What??

First, I don’t agree with this premise at all, and secondly, I totally fail to see how it’s helpful for an addict coming out of rehab—or to their families and other loved ones—to be armed with that kind of biased and ultimately untrue information.

When addicts of any kind have been abstinent from their addictive behavior of choice for a time—such as when they’ve participated in a structured treatment program—a

“relapse” becomes nothing more than a decision to use again. They know what it’s like to be sober, to be living life on life’s terms. They’ve been doing just that for a while, so they have already proven to themselves and to us that they can in fact do this.

But what appears to happen, for some addicts, is that when life becomes just a little *too real* for them and they don’t feel like making the effort to shift, change, and grow to accommodate the hardships life can bring to any of us, they look for a way out—and the way out they’ve used before starts calling their name. These addicts begin to “slip”—another word for relapse—which stands for *Sobriety Loses Its Priority*.

And that is when the choice point happens.

It’s the same for all of us. None of us gets through this life unscathed, everybody has something difficult to deal with—and for some, it’s on an ongoing basis. I have Crohn’s Disease, for example, which is a serious, often quite painful and debilitating illness. I’ve now struggled with it for well over 40 years and have learned how to take much better care of myself—but because there is no known cure for Crohn’s yet, I continue to live with the symptoms to some extent daily. My own addiction began when I was diagnosed in 1973 and given as many prescriptions for Valium and strong opioid painkillers as I wanted. Couple that with the pot I was also smoking several times a day (I

do understand the lure of medical marijuana) and I became a full-fledged drug addict. Anybody's body would have become addicted to what I was putting into it day after day after day. My body definitely did.

Fast forward 15 years and I found myself at a pretty desperate bottom—extremely depressed, suicidal and still very sick physically. I'm so grateful that I reached out for help at that point and began to learn about addiction and recovery.

But...

A huge part of that choice to get help and stay in recovery was that I had to be willing to learn how to face a life that wasn't very pleasant without the use of mind-altering drugs. I was still in really bad physical pain every single day, continuing to frequently experience symptoms not unlike severe food poisoning. I can tell you that it wasn't fun—and now, over 35 years later, I still sometimes have days like that. And I'm still abstinent from mind-altering substances.

How, you ask? Simply because I make that choice every day.

What if I had been told all those years ago when I was in rehab, or later as I sat in meeting after meeting of Narcotics Anonymous, that relapse was “a normal part of recovery”

and that I shouldn't be too surprised or worried about it? I'm pretty sure I would have used by now, given a free pass like that.

But I have never relapsed, one day at a time.

In fact, when I had my third major surgery for Crohn's in 1988, a mere eight months after choosing to practice a program of abstinent recovery, I recall waking up in my hospital bed connected to a morphine drip that I could control with my thumb—very scary stuff for a clean and sober addict. I had informed the hospital staff that I was in recovery from addiction, but that didn't seem to matter. Of course, I immediately knew I was already buzzed and that I loved the feeling. Pain? What pain?? The pleasure center in this addict's brain was delighted!

But I also knew that it wouldn't take long at all for me to become addicted to this drug, it was just too good. So, I made the decision that within two days after the surgery, I would stop using the morphine—instead keeping ice packs on my deep abdominal incision and controlling the pain as best I could with extra strength Tylenol. I remember that the nurses were often quite irritated with me as I lay in that bed, sometimes screaming in pain but refusing their addictive meds. Little by little, day after day, the pain subsided—as major pain generally does when we give ourselves some time and learn healthier ways to deal with it. And I was still clean.

Now, I'm not trying to give you an "I walked to school for 5 miles in the blizzarding snow—and you should too" story. Everyone is different, and we all know what we can handle and what we absolutely can't. And some people who struggle with chronic physical pain or severe mental health issues, and who are not receiving professional help for that, may have a more difficult time staying away from addictive behaviors.

I deeply believe that there is a line between use and abuse. Sometimes we need medication, and sometimes that very medication can be potentially addictive. We need to be acutely honest with ourselves at those times (and perhaps accountable to someone else, like a sponsor) and not use to the point of abuse. That was an amazingly difficult time in my life, but the inner strength and self-respect I gained from that experience—as well as from a number of other physical and emotional hardships I've gone through during my many years in recovery but making the choice not to relapse over—have made me the person I am today, a person who's proud of herself and knows she can handle the tough times. I'm grateful for that, and I'd love it if we could all feel that way about ourselves.

Aren't we taking that possibility away from addicts when we tell them that relapse is a normal part of recovery, and that it's essentially okay if they choose that instead of squarely facing themselves?

And aren't we basically cutting their loved ones off at the knees by giving them that message too—by virtually telling them that they just have to put up with it when the addict they love relapses?

I've been in recovery long enough now to know people who've been given diagnoses of stage 4 cancer, or who have had to deal with the death of their child or someone else close to them—and who have *made the choice* to remain abstinent instead of trying to hide from some brutal realities of life. And I also know others who have had the proverbial 'broken shoelaces' and have chosen to use these as excuses to get loaded.

I'm reminded of Robin Williams—how very sad I was to hear of his death by suicide. I do so fervently wish there had been more help there that he could have accessed for both his depression and his evolving Parkinson's Disease. But at the same time, as I heard the details of how he took his life, I was struck by how much his recovery meant to him. It likely would have been a much easier death for him, had he used enough drugs and alcohol to simply overdose and pass out, never to wake up. But he made the choice to be clean and sober to the end—and I respect that decision.

It's up to the addict, whichever way they go in terms of staying abstinent or not—millions of clean and sober addicts the world over show us every day that relapse is NOT a

normal, expected part of recovery, while others use when they want to because it's the softer, easier way out.

But make no mistake, for the vast majority of addicts—at the end of the day relapse is a choice, nothing more and nothing less.

Sobriety Loses Its Priority.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Here are the 7 Tips for Outsmarting Your Addiction:**

#### **1. Tell Yourself the Truth**

**Do you ever try to convince yourself that things in your life aren't really how they seem to be?**

**Do you tell yourself that things are better or worse than they actually are?**

Like most people, you may be using addictive behaviors to change unpleasant situations and feelings that you experience. When you are feeling something that is difficult or out of the range of your “comfort zone,” the most natural thing to want to do is to find a way to change it so the uncomfortable feelings go away.

For example, if you are facing the prospect of losing your job, or a partner is talking about breaking up with you, it may be difficult to be honest with yourself because of the discomfort this could bring up for you. You might tell yourself that this isn't really happening or find a way to distract yourself.

At that exact point, you have a choice - you can either try to numb your fears and anxieties about the situation by

engaging in an addictive behavior, or you can tell yourself the truth about your reality and deal with it in healthier ways.

Becoming willing to tell yourself the truth is the first step in **outsmarting your addiction**. No matter what is going on in your life, when you are honest with yourself you will respect yourself and be on the path toward wellness.

## **2. Ask Yourself “Why NOT Me?”**

**How many times have you asked yourself “Why ME?” when your life took a turn you didn’t expect?**

When your life circumstances leave you feeling frustrated, sad, lonely, angry or ashamed, it is easy to begin to experience some self-pity.

When you find yourself asking “Why is this happening to me?” you might want to turn this around and ask yourself **“Why not me?”**

Sometimes it helps to know that you are not the only person going through tough times. Understanding this can help lead you out of the shameful feelings you may have, allowing you to face the truth about your reality.

Difficult things happen to people all the time - it is part of being human. You have a choice about whether to be “in

the problem” or “in the solution.” If your life seems to be full of problems, it is best to face them head-on and begin to find solutions.

Asking yourself “**Why not me?**” is the second step in **outsmarting your addiction**, because as you feel less isolated and more connected to those around you, the less need you will have to engage in the addictive behaviors you have used in the past.

### **3. Take Full Responsibility for Your Life Choices**

**Do you have a tendency to blame other people and situations for your lot in life?**

**Is it sometimes hard for you to admit that your choices are contributing to the life you are living today?**

Although you did not choose to be an addict, every time you indulge in an addictive behavior, you are making a choice to continue turning your back on your own life. You have the right to make that choice, just as you have the right to change and grow. Ultimately, it is your decision, and it always will be, regardless of your life circumstances.

If you are unhappy with your situation, it is **your responsibility** to do something about it. If you need help to do that, reach out! You may be surprised at how many people will be there to assist you when you make the

healthier life choices necessary to **outsmart your addiction.**

#### **4. Be Curious About Yourself**

**Are you curious about the underlying cause of your addictive behaviors?**

**Do you wonder what your life would be like if you stopped your addictions?**

When you can be curious about yourself and your life, you can then develop your ability to be more spontaneous and increase your enjoyment.

For example, the more spontaneous you can allow yourself to become in your life, the less need you will have to try to control the people and things around you. When you decrease your need to control situations that are actually not in your control to begin with, you will also decrease your need to engage in your addictions.

Having the willingness to be curious, spontaneous and more able to go with the flow of life is the next step in **outsmarting your addiction.** You will then be able to accept the surprises that life brings every day, without feeling like you have to change your reality with addictive behaviors.

## 5. Make Friends with Your Inner Critic

**What kinds of messages does your Inner Critic tell you? And whose “voice” is that, anyway?**

We all have one of those message-centers in our heads - you know the one, the little voice that tells you all kinds of negative things about yourself and the world around you. This voice may tell us that we are fat, ugly, lazy, stupid - the possibilities are endless!

Perhaps there is something you really want - maybe it's a new job, or a relationship, or a car, or maybe you want to stop an addictive behavior that seems to be overtaking your life. This voice is the one that will tell you all kinds of excuses about why you'll never have it. The most common excuse it comes up with will be some version of “how unworthy you are” to have what you want.

“Making friends” with that inner voice does not always mean accepting what it tells you as the truth. What it does mean is that you must learn to both hear the message and explore it to see if there is any truth to it. In order to **outsmart your addiction**, you must be able to distinguish between fact and fiction. Then, if you do discover any truth in the message your **Inner Critic** is giving you, you will become more able to make a choice about how to change your behavior.

Suppose you are spending more money than you have, for example. Your **Inner Critic** might be telling you to slow down and pay off some of your debts before you make any more unnecessary purchases. Listening to this inner voice could prove to be a very positive strategy for your future peace and happiness.

On the other hand, your critic could also be telling you what a stupid person you are for spending money that you don't have. It might tell you that nobody else is as foolish as you are when it comes to buying too much. This will only serve to make you feel even worse about yourself than you already do, which may not inspire you to make any positive changes. In situations like these, you would be wise to not trust your inner voice or to take its advice!

You have created your **Inner Critic** because you want the best for yourself. This voice may sound very much like your parents or teachers did when you were growing up. By unintentionally constructing these “negative” messages about yourself, you may in reality be trying to motivate yourself to do your best. However, while these messages may have worked fine as a coping mechanism in childhood, they can wreak havoc in your life as an adult.

Even so, be aware that your **Inner Critic** may really want you to succeed and may well have some important things to tell you about yourself that will lead you toward success.

Befriend this part of your critic and learn what you can from it.

## **6. Surround Yourself with People Who Want the Best for You**

**Do you feel that your relationships are not as supportive as you'd like them to be?**

As you make the choice to live a healthier and more joyful life, you may find yourself running into opposition from the very people you thought would back you in this new direction.

This generally occurs because those people are used to you behaving in certain ways. For example, if you decide to stop using drugs and alcohol, there may be people who actually encourage you to keep using them. The reason for this is that if you stop your addiction, then others who continue theirs may find themselves seeing their own behaviors more clearly, and they may not want to do that.

In order to **outsmart your addiction** and live a healthy life, you will need to surround yourself with people who truly want you to change and grow. These are people who will celebrate your successes and encourage you when you go through the inevitable harder times. You will also want the best for them, and this mutual support will become the building blocks for the new dynamics in your relationships.

**Don't be willing to settle for less!**

**7. Ask Yourself “What Do I Really Want in My Life?”  
And GO FOR IT!**

**Do you know what you want from your life?  
Do you believe that it's pointless to stop your  
addiction because your life will never be any better  
anyway?**

The truth is that you are the only one who can decide the direction of your life. Even when it feels like you have no choices, you are actually choosing the behaviors you are engaging in - and making the decision to have, or not have, what you really want in your life.

The last step in **Outsmarting Your Addiction** is to ask yourself some tough questions in order to determine the course of your life. If you want to go down a different path than the one you have been travelling, you must first have a sense of where you want to go.

When you ask yourself **“What do I really want in my life?”** your starting place may be a simple answer such as “I want to stop using drugs” or “I want to be in a healthier relationship.” Or perhaps you long to change your disordered eating patterns so that you can enjoy food and stop being ashamed of your body.



## **Whatever it is that you want, you can have it!**

The trick is to become more self-aware of your desires and needs, and then to discover what you need to do to accomplish your goals.

You may want to do some research on the Internet or go to the library to find more information. Perhaps you know someone who is already doing what you want to do, who might be a mentor or “sponsor” for you. It may be wise for you to enlist the services of a counsellor who can help you make sense of your life and assist you in taking some new and improved steps.

### **The Bottom Line**

In order to **outsmart your addiction**, you will need to change your “same old, same old” patterns and choose something different. It is amazing how even small initial changes can create a much healthier life than the one you have been living.

Even if you are feeling afraid at this moment, don’t let that fear hold you back from **outsmarting your addiction** and living your best life.

You can do it, and you don’t have to do it alone. Reach out for help if you need it!



## About the Author



Candace Plattor, M.A., is a professional speaker, a TEDx speaker, an award-winning author and an Addictions Therapist in private practice. She specializes in working with the family and other loved ones of people who are struggling with addiction, in her unique and signature Family Addictions Therapy Program. As a former addict with over 36 years clean and sober, Candace has learned

that overcoming addiction is a family condition: everyone in the family is affected by addiction and everyone needs to heal. For more than three decades, she has been helping both addicts and their loved ones understand their dysfunctional behaviors and make healthier life choices.

The results Candace achieves have been astounding: addicts stop using and families regain their lives from the ravages of addiction. Not only has her success led to a waiting list of clients but she is a sought-after leader in the field of addictions. As the developer of the Love With Boundaries Family Addictions Therapy method, Candace now works with her team of top counsellors, helping both the families and their addicts break the devastating cycle of addiction for good.

If addiction is causing pain and suffering in your family, and you're ready to do what it takes to reclaim your sanity and serenity so you can live your best life, please visit <https://lovewithboundaries.com/intake-questionnaire/> for a FREE 30-minute consultation.

## **About Love With Boundaries**

Love With Boundaries offers counselling to help families come out of the pain and suffering of addiction—forever. Our therapists can show you how to love with boundaries and provide insights and techniques to stop enabling the addict you love so that they can make that all-important choice to recover from addiction.

<https://lovewithboundaries.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/LovingAnAddictLovingYourself>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/candaceplattor/>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CandacePlattor>

## Resources

### **TEDx Talk: How to Love with Boundaries**



### **Get Inspired Talk: Empower Addicts to Choose Not to Use**



### **The Candace Plattor Show**

## **Books by Candace Plattor**

*Loving an Addict, Loving Yourself: The Top 10 Survival Tips for Loving Someone with an Addiction*

*Loving an Addict, Loving Yourself: The Workbook*

*Self-Respect Sunday for Your Soul . . . If You Love an Addict*

*The Truth About Addiction: Understanding Addiction in a New Way*

*The Difference Between Helping and Enabling: Learn How to Help the Addict You Love Come out of Addiction - Forever*

*Voices of the 21st Century: Women Transforming the World (Anthology)*

*Voices of the 21st Century: Women Empowered Through Passion and Purpose*