

## **Working with Addictions and Core Energetics**

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The workshop began with basic education on alcoholism and other addictions including handouts of basic information. Using some “psychodrama,” we depicted methods to recognize active addiction and the necessity of addressing it in therapy. We offered the participants a list of Pathwork lectures that would help a client a) see the destructive force of the addiction and be motivated to change, b) perceive his own God image and connect with it which is such an important element in recovery and c) identify his own intricate resistances to confronting the addiction.

Our seminar also included recommendations for using specific Core Energetic techniques during the various stages of recovery that would facilitate stabilizing a client’s recovery rather than jeopardizing it and inadvertently flooding a client into relapse, which are outlined below by Ann Bradley. We also addressed family members or significant others of the addicted who have their own specific adaptations to the problem and discussed how truly effective Core Energetics can be.

We discussed 12 Step programs (AA, Alanon, ACOA etc.) and how helpful an adjunct they can be to therapy. We discovered in our question and answer period that rehabs and self help programs are not as available in countries outside the U.S. We urged the participants to at least learn the general language and principles of 12 Step programs so that they can incorporate them into their therapy with addicts and their families.

I have broken the recovery process into four stages: day one to six months, six months to two years, two years to five years, and five years on. The first six months of recovery is a time of high anxiety, depression, feelings of deprivation, anger, insomnia, oral fixation, irritability, and edginess. To get a sense of what this time is like for your client, try to imagine that someone has just taken away your core defense overnight. Issues of survival, sexuality, and fears about the ability to be social come up. There is often guilt as the person remembers some of the things that she did while using. There is a recognition that her life has fallen apart and she is overwhelmed at the thought of trying to put it back

together again. There is a deep frustration at feeling powerless and a hopelessness at having to do this forever.

One of the most important phrases used in AA is *ONE DAY AT A TIME* and this is the first thing I would say about working physically with someone in early sobriety. Grounding helps bring us into the present and is very important at this time. These are people who have had a crutch and now they are without it. They need to feel their ability to stand, to feel their strength. At the same time these are people who have a lot of pride and self will so it is important to help them know that they can ask for support and that they don't have to do it alone.

One of the most important issues at this time is that these are people who have never been able to tolerate their feelings: they have selfmedicated. A person in early sobriety is being flooded with tremendous amounts of feelings. Since they haven't allowed themselves to feel for many years, they often don't know what they are feeling. A big part of early recovery work is helping your client to identify and tolerate feelings. It is also crucial at this time to teach them self-soothing, something that can replace the drug. You will want to do lots of breathing work and relaxation. These are people who have not felt much pleasure in their bodies so giving them that experience can give them a tremendous amount of hope. Get them on the roller and help them to breathe and vibrate. Any work that helps them to vibrate and feel the energy flowing in their bodies is going to be wonderful for them. Staccato breathing into the chest will help them to fill where they have been empty.

A lot of feelings will be coming up and you need to help them find appropriate ways of releasing them. This is absolutely not a time for regression or working on deep emotional issues, nor is it a time to work deeply in the body. The anger work I would do at this time would all be done standing. Mostly you will want to help this person to identify and express feelings as an adult. You can also do punching or hitting with the bataka. The main focus of the work of this time should always remain in not drinking or doing drugs. During this time your client is at great risk of relapse and can be easily overwhelmed by feelings, including pleasure. It is important to keep checking in with your client to see how much they can tolerate. And always leave plenty of time to help them feel grounded and safe before leaving. It is a fine line between helping them to release what is coming up and helping to keep them from being overwhelmed. Containment is just as important as release at this time.

Another important issue to deal with now is gratitude. Addicts are often bitter, resentful, and full of self pity. Helping them to express

gratitude is very strengthening and a big relief. You can do this during the breathing work by helping them to contact their hearts and speak the thanks that they feel.

The second stage that I have outlined is six months to two years. At this time the person's anxiety may begin to lower, insomnia begins to lessen, but family and friendship problems may begin to come up. The people who have been close to the addict may try to sabotage the sobriety at this time. There can be a deepening depression that happens as the person begins to get past the initial rush of recovery and realizes that this is forever. There can be many chaotic feelings and a lot of stress with changing roles. This is probably the thing which most marks this period. The person is past the early days, is beginning to be more aware of everything and everything is new. His total response to life has changed. This is not a time to make any big decisions. This is a time of learning how to live again and to find new and healthier ways of coping.

A helpful way to think about the addict for Core practitioners is in terms of character structure. I think of the addict as being both like the schizoid structure and the hysterical structure. Like the schizoid, the addict has not had a body. And like the hysterical, the addict has acted out a lot of feelings very dramatically without ever really feeling them. Thinking of it in this way, the work needs to be about building a strong container and helping your client to tolerate feelings. The physical techniques would be more grounding, soothing, relaxation, and breathing work as well as all standing techniques that encourage expressing and experiencing the feelings. The emphasis at this time should be on selfresponsibility and being an adult. And of course the other obvious character structure to be aware of on this work is orality. Your client needs to need but he needs to need as an adult. You can have your client stand and reach while asking for help and then hold him, letting him know that as an adult he doesn't have to do it alone.

Sexuality is the other issue that is big for the recovering addict. Many of these people have been promiscuous and are now tempted to use sex as another way of escaping. Doing roller work that helps your client to feel his sexuality and his pelvis and know that that energy belongs to him and he can keep it for himself can be empowering and containing.

Think of it as a time when your client is getting to know himself for the first time since childhood. A lot of the work can really be about the basics; what he is feeling and helping him to learn a new way of behaving with himself and the world.

The third stage, from two years to five years, is a time of

reconciliation and atonement. There is a settling in, a growing up, and a getting to know himself as he is. There is a deeper ability to be honest with himself. In this stage it now becomes appropriate to work with deep emotional and characterological issues. This is also a stage when addicts begin to address things in new ways and they may be feeling lonely. Discipline, commitment, and hard work are important now. This is a time to atone, to go back and make things right, to apologize for things he may have done that caused others hurt. There is a potential for humiliation and rejection in this process so your client needs tremendous support.

All Core techniques can now be used but be aware that each recovery process and each client is different. Be sure to stay in touch with how much your client can tolerate. In general, however, you can now do deep and regressive work.

Many addicts feel a deep longing for God so you can also do very deep spiritual work with these people, keeping in mind that atonement is crucial for recovery. There is a lot of guilt about the things they have done while using, and atonement helps them to begin to let go of that guilt. Self-forgiveness is also very important.

Finally, the last stage is from five years on. In AA they say that at five years you get your mind back. This period is marked by acceptance, maintaining discipline and commitment to life. At this time most of the anxiety and depressions of early recovery are gone and there may be periods of hopefulness. There will likely be a strong desire to help others and the luxury to look at all aspects of life. Peace and tranquility will hopefully be felt at times. Now you can begin to work with your client on his longings and fulfilling his life's purpose, connecting to his higher self in terms of life task and seeing his dreams. All Core work is appropriate at this time.

The joy of working with clients in recovery is that they have a deep commitment to life. The act of giving up the addiction is in and of itself a big "yes" to life. Core work used with the recovery process in mind is an incredible tool for working with addictions. Helping your client to reclaim her body and her feelings is exactly what Core is great for. I hope that these thoughts are a helpful map for your work.

