



## Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

### ☐ Understanding Addiction

Some people see addiction as a disease in which addicts are afflicted and have little power over the cause or onset of addiction- to be a pre-disposition (the "addictive personality"). Others see addictive behaviors as a choice, and addiction as the direct outcome of this choice. In the case of "physical" addictions such as alcoholism or drug dependence, there are those who believe that susceptibility to addiction is passed on genetically. Others claim that addiction is simply the result of repetitive behavior that, in some people, leads to a physical or psychological dependence. Defining exactly what is meant by addiction is not simple. People often associate addiction only with alcohol or drug abuse, but it's clear that addictive behaviors go far beyond. In fact, the key to "addiction" is an obsessive and compulsive need or dependence upon a substance, an object, a relationship, an activity, or a thing. There are six clear indicators of an addiction:

**1. An Object of Desire.** This is the substance, thing, activity, or relationship that *drives* the addiction, whether it is alcohol, food, sex, gambling, pornography, drugs, or anything else that sparks obsessive ideas and drives compulsive behavior.

**2. Preoccupation.** There's an obsession with the object of

desire; a need for the thing that drives the addiction.

**3. Driven Behaviors.** There is a compulsion to reduce any cravings fueled by anxiety- a pursuit, hunt, desperate search for more to intensify the androgenous opiates and satisfy the obsession that drives the addict's behavior.

**4. Lack of Control.** Addiction always implies a lack of control over thoughts, feelings, ideas, or behaviors when it comes to the desired thing. Even when addicts try to stop or cut back on addictive behaviors, they fail. This is the hallmark and a central defining feature of addiction and dependence.

**5. Dependence.** There is a mental state of being totally engrossed on the object of desire, physical or psychological, so only that thing can satisfy the desire and fulfillment (at least temporarily).

**6. Negative Consequences.** Addiction is always accompanied by harmful consequences. Addicts don't become addicted overnight. There is progression as people first engage in the behaviors and experiences that may later become addictions, and a risk of creating an addiction over time. For most addictions "tolerance" is created through repeated use, in which more and more of the substance or activity is required to feel the emotional satisfaction that the addiction brings. Eventually the addict has to use (or engage in the activity) just to feel normal. This is what "dependence" truly means.

Accordingly, there is a continuum of addiction, ranging from pre-addiction to the advanced stages of dependence. The progression from use into addiction can be measured in two ways:

1. The effect that addictive behaviors have on effective and healthy personal functioning.
2. The intensity of cravings for the substance, activity, relationship, or thing.

When taken together, these two measurements can help people who engage in addictive behaviors gauge their progression into addiction. Whether physical or psychological, we know that addiction can be overcome. Millions have been helped into recovery, and many millions remain in recovery their entire lives.

### ☐ The Internal Struggle

When faced with a loss of health, when haunted by harm done to others, when hounded by the rejection of a parent or spouse, it is natural for the addict to try to relieve the pain. They hate feeling guilty, disconnected, empty, and alone. They long for acceptance and love. Yet, their addictions provide a remedy that helps to forget the pain--at least for a little while. Alcoholism drowns sorrow. Drug addiction turns lows to highs. Compulsive overeating fills one's emptiness. Obsessive work replaces insecurities with a sense of accomplishment. Sexual addiction mimics adventure and intimacy. Most people trying to

overcome an addiction soon realize that recovery is not spontaneous. It requires discipline and patience, and therein lies the problem with recovery. What is discovered-though too late- is that in exchange for relief and control, the addiction becomes a master. Even though the individual may tell him/herself they have everything under control, experience tells a different story. "If I could only quit." But they have become a slave to their own desires. Sadly, they want the addiction more than in wanting to quit. They believe they need and deserve the relief and the power that the addiction provides. At some point, they are forced to choose between their addiction and those who love them. They know what they desperately want. Deep down inside they don't want to lose those they love. Irrationally they think to themselves, "I don't know how I could survive without the "friend" that is destroying me." In essence, they feel trapped in an addictive cycle. Addiction's lure is its promise of immediate gratification, the quick feel-good. Being addicted means relying on immediate gratification and, as the pattern of addiction continues, one's ability to delay gratification erodes. Recovery, on the other hand, asks them to see the self-destructive bondage that provides predictable relief and power in an unpredictable and painful world. While recovery requires a physical tenacity, to bear the strain of withdrawal, it also requires a mental tenacity. Hopelessness, fear, self-pity, and resentments conspire to wear down resistance and draw the addict into relapse. But again, that bondage causes the person to maintain a self-defeating philosophy of life that underlies

their thoughts and actions. Like weeds with long roots below the ground, defeatist thoughts keep reappearing in order to challenge the philosophy behind the thoughts. Below, are several self-defeating messages commonly believed by people in the throes of addiction. When these beliefs are adopted as truths for all occasions, confidence is destroyed, as well as determination, and a willingness to seek support to continue the day-to-day internal struggle to achieve sobriety.

- Ignore things and they will go away.
- You can do anything you want as long as it isn't hurting anyone else.
- People don't really care what happens to you.
- No matter how hard you try, you're never going to get ahead.
- You are not responsible for your behavior if you're sick.

As you help the addict identify with these or any other self-defeating messages, the challenge they issue to refute the message can include an acknowledgment that the message may be sometimes true, or often feels true. So, in order to be of help they should convert the messages into a more helpful philosophy: "I cannot ignore things and expect them to go away; I cannot expect people to hate me if I cause them discomfort; I cannot do anything I want just because I believe it isn't hurting anyone else...." Meanwhile, the messages they use to replace these philosophies should emphasize a kindness and concern for themselves and those around them that will attract them back to life and away from addiction. By challenging the messages of defeat and cynicism you can help them weaken the

power of the hidden enemy of their recovery: the thought processes that were cultivated during their addiction.

## 📖 Stages of Recovery

Freedom from addiction is typically referred to as "recovery." Although there are many prescriptions for recovery and the treatment of addiction, there are essentially just two ways to overcome addiction. The most effective way is abstinence, or the complete stopping of the addictive behavior. In this case, the addict never again engages in the addictive activity. This applies mostly towards addictions involving alcohol, drugs, and gambling, because it's impossible in the case of a food addiction, for instance, to never again eat. This leads to the second model for overcoming addiction. Many addicts are unwilling to give up their addiction. One telltale sign is that all addictions consume time, thought, and energy. They are not mere pastimes. They are obsessions and preoccupations that demand more time, money and energy- to the extent that it interferes with work, sleep, and relaxation. Their goal is to continue their addiction moderately and get it under control, without letting it control them. For many, this is an unachievable goal and often wishful thinking. For many addicts, recovery requires complete and lifetime abstinence. But for others, moderation and control may be an appropriate and realistic goal. In some cases, then, the addiction itself will clearly decide which route must be taken. But in many other cases, it is the addict who will have to decide which route to take. Just as addiction doesn't develop over-night, neither do

people recover from addiction in a single step. If successful, people enter recovery at one point and eventually undergo a major transformation, undergoing significant spiritual, personal, emotional, and behavioral changes. Although every addict's experience with recovery will be personal, there are five typical stages through which addicts pass on their way to lifetime recovery. These range from pre-recovery to the development of new ideas, behaviors, and lifestyle that maintain an addiction-free life. Each stage has specific tasks that must be worked through completely before people can move on to successfully complete the tasks of the next stage.

### ***Stage 1: Awareness and Early Acknowledgment***

This is really a pre-recovery stage that opens the opportunity for recovery with a growing awareness that there is a problem with addiction. During this stage people are still engaging in addictive behaviors and, in fact, are often pushed into the stage by the concerns of family or friends, or health, financial, work, or legal problems. The end of this stage is marked by an acknowledgment that action is needed to address issues. The tasks involve a shifting of perspective from outright denial to a willingness to consider the possibility of addiction.

### ***Stage 2: Consideration and Incubation***

This stage is still a precursor to actual recovery, but is the first concrete step towards recovery, characterized by a willingness to explore ideas about addiction and recovery. The primary movement during this stage involves

increasing knowledge about the realities of addiction and the impact that it has on the addict's own life and on the lives of others. I frequently engage a discussion of factual information on the destructive consequences with the individual

### ***Stage 3: Exploring Recovery and Early Activity***

This is the first clear stage of recovery. Beyond denial, rationalization and justification, this stage unfolds with a clear resolution to quit the addiction. Counseling tasks involve exploring ideas and activities of abstinence, self-control, treatment, and recovery. During this stage, people actively move towards stopping the addiction, and beginning treatment of some kind.

### ***Stage 4: Early Recovery and Rehabilitation***

Recovery involves a change in perspective, attitude, values, and lifestyle. Stage 4 marks the entry into full, but early, recovery. Although still fragile, this is the stage which most solidifies recovery and during which a new life is built. During this stage, people learn the skills, develop the behaviors, adopt the habits, and build the supportive relationships needed to maintain a lifetime of freedom from addiction.

### ***Stage 5: Active Recovery and Maintenance***

This is recovery proper. For many this is a stage without an end, for whom recovery is a lifetime process. It certainly is difficult to mark an end to the stage as it really "unfolds" into the life people will live for many years to come. By the time people enter

Stage 5, they are actively monitoring themselves, their feelings, thoughts, behaviors, activities, and relationships. Here, people are living out all they have learned as they ensure that each day is a day free of addiction.

## **▣ Steps To Recovery**

Restoring and rebuilding life after addiction takes place only over time. How much time will depend on the commitment to recovery, and the personality, approach, and the spiritual obedience of the recovering addict. And few people can go this route alone, without the support of family, friends, and the Lord. Many of us have been in situations where we have friends or loved ones who we feel have alcohol or other substance use problems. But despite our pleas, they are unwilling to even acknowledge the problem, let alone do something about it. The most commonly stated explanation is that they are "in denial" and they have to "hit bottom" before they will be willing to change. But there are things you can do to help people before they ruin their lives. People either truly do not feel they have a problem or, at best, they are ambivalent about their situation. Sometimes they are heard saying things like "I cannot go on like this," but they have little idea what they need to do to address their problems. Rather than trying to "break through the resistance" by confrontational tactics (such as getting the person to admit they are an addict), I recommend using a style that some have called "rolling with the resistance" as you try to help the person make a meaningful change. I have found that one of the best early strategies is to discuss with the person

any ambivalence they may be feeling about their use. Remember it is very difficult for most people to give up something they know, no matter how distressing, to travel to an unknown place where they are being asked to give up some control and put their life in the hands of someone else. If you only give them feedback about the negative consequences of their use most substance abusers will be equally adamant about the positive benefits. When you say: "You are an addict and you must get help," the likely counter response is: "I am not an addict and I don't need your help." People are more likely to take action to change when they perceive they take personal ownership, not when they are told they have no other choice. It is important for you to communicate to the person that you sincerely believe they can make meaningful changes in their lives and that you will help them in any way you can to remove any barriers to getting the help they need. **Your goal should be to gradually help the person shift their primary focus from the perceived benefits of their use to more of the negative consequences of their continued use.** I have found that a very effective strategy is to discuss with the person their life values and goals and how their addiction may be compromising some of these aspirations. Statements like: "On the one hand you say you do not have a problem in controlling your life, but on the other hand it has had these negative consequences." The person should get a consistent message that while you may need to do things to protect yourself and others from the negative consequences of their addiction, you care about them and these are the reasons you are

concerned. You are willing to help them in any way you can to see that they get the treatment they need, but ultimately it is their responsibility for deciding to make changes or not. One thing is certain. Even if hospitalization and medical treatment are needed to break the stranglehold of addiction, each individual will need spiritual help to recover their sanity, sobriety, and self-control. Addiction involves our spiritual inner being. We have needs that cannot be met by filling them with food, alcohol, drugs, or work. Physical obsessions cannot satisfy our deep longings for satisfaction, security, and significance. To understand our addictions, it is important for us to see that our desires are not bad. Our longings for connection, significance, and freedom are given to us by God. What is killing the addict is the way they are trying to satisfy or deaden those God-given capacities. Addictions are powerful because the desires God made to serve us turn into cruel masters when we allow them to dominate our lives. Our desire to feel good has a God-given purpose. But when we believe we need relief now, and when our highest priority is to avoid pain, we set ourselves up for an enslaving, destructive dependency. When feeling good or feeling nothing is more important than doing good, loving others, or knowing God, we are ripe for addiction. Our desires reflect that we have been designed to worship. The philosopher and theologian Augustine was right when he said, *there is a God-shaped vacuum in all of us, and our hearts are not at rest until we find our rest in Him.* If we are not worshipping a good God who loves us, then we will end up

worshipping our own desires until they consume us. Addiction becomes an idol. When we stand in need of forgiveness, the God of the Bible makes an offer that asks for our invitation in return. In the Bible, Jesus pictures Himself standing at a door knocking, and saying:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me (Rev. 3:20).

Yet He knocks. He knows what we find hard to believe. He has come with an offer of relief and comfort and forgiveness and rest. He wants to sit down and eat with us at the table of our heart. He is waiting for our invitation to say something like, "Lord, come in. I've made a mess of things. Please come in and have mercy on me." When we finally invite Christ into our mess, we discover that He has not come to condemn us. Neither does He demand that we work harder to fix our broken lives. On the contrary, He comes as a loving Savior to the door of our hearts, knocking, waiting for us to say, "Yes, Lord, come in. Take over. Forgive me. Change me." At this crossroads of invitation, there is an opportunity for change. It is an opportunity to discover life through a process of admitting our addiction, acknowledging our pain, accepting responsibility for the damage we've done, pleading for mercy, choosing surrender, and caring for others. Here at this crossroads, our hearts can come alive in the presence of One who while knowing everything about us still wants to come into us and be the God and Lover of our souls.



# Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

From the desk of....

**Bob Good**



**Sexual Addiction Group Meeting  
Tuesday Nights at 7:00 pm (SCA Office)**

An addiction is an enslaving, destructive dependency. Random House defines *addiction* as "the state of being enslaved to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming, as narcotics, to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma." Because a person can be physically predisposed to an addiction, and because of the likelihood of medical complications, addictions are often viewed as a disease. It would be a mistake, however, to think only in terms of the physical dimensions. Most addictions are also rooted in moral choices and spiritual needs.

Addictions come in all shapes and forms. It is a dependency on a substance, an activity, or a relationship that pulls the addict away from everything else in the world. It's characterized by desires that consume people's thoughts and behaviors, and is acted out in habitual activities designed to get the desired thing or engage in the desired activity (addictive behaviors). And, unlike simple habits or consuming interests, addictions are "dependencies" with real life consequences that seriously impair, negatively affect, and destroy relationships, health (physical and mental), and the capacity to function effectively. Addiction is debilitating.

In the end, addicts are "dependent" on that thing which dominates their thoughts and desires and directs their behaviors, and the pursuit of that thing becomes the most important activity in their lives. In the advanced stages of addiction nothing is as important as the addiction itself. It is likely that we all have seen people in the mirror of the following pages. Perhaps we have seen a person who is unwilling to feel the inevitable and inescapable pains of life. Or, someone that is uncommitted to relief and control. Have we seen a person vulnerable to addiction because of a refusal to believe that God alone can provide satisfaction and safety?

No matter how far an individual has progressed, desires will always be found within that oppose the grace of God. This newsletter is committed to the fact that, God can enable us to live so that we are not irresistibly controlled by God-substitutes that bind us like chains, sap our personal strength, and render us helpless to love Him or others. He can help us to develop a spirit of freedom so that we will be motivated more by the interests of others than by our own immediate pleasure. God can enable us to find in Him a trust and source of life that leads us to gratefully worship Him. When we lose hope in ourselves and in our consuming addictions, He can fill our hearts to overflowing with His amazing grace.

Sincerely,

Bob



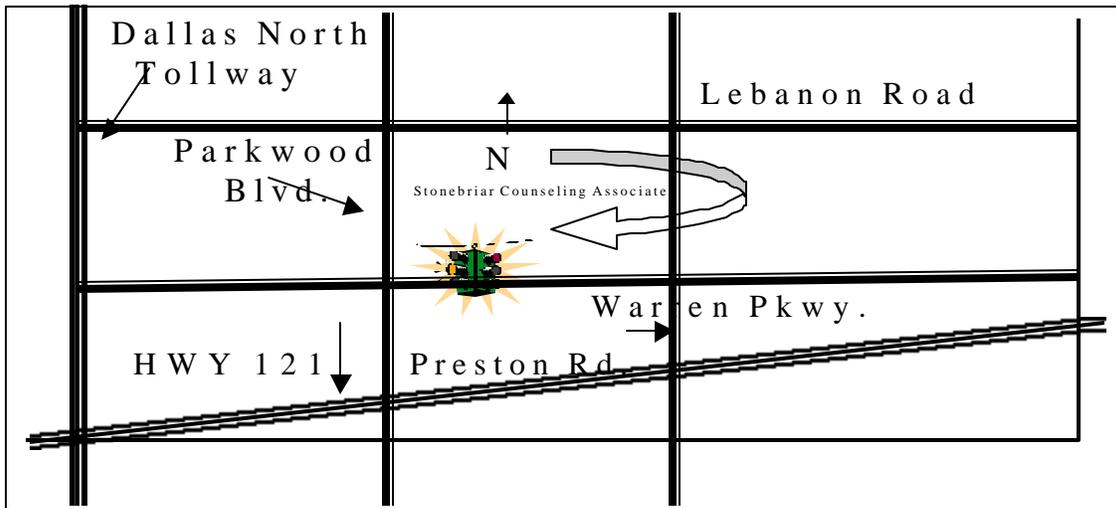
**Thanks To Stonebridge United Methodist in McKinney, Texas for the opportunity last month to speak to the Stephen's Ministers Group!**



Check out Our New Web Site:  
[www. Stonebriarca.com](http://www.Stonebriarca.com)



**Come Visit Our Location!!**



### **Mission Statement**

*Stonebriar Counseling Associates (SCA) is purposefully passionate in providing quality psychotherapy from a Christian perspective that influences the treatment of psychological, emotional, and mental health issues.*

To this end, SCA is committed to glorify God by:

- Believing that each person has the innate ability for personal growth and wholeness.
- Seeking a variety of approaches to help you learn new skills and find more choices so as to manage life's changes with a broader range of solutions for recognizing your strengths.
- Accepting all people with respect and love regardless of age, sex, race, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status.
- Thoughtfully affirming and carefully following the morals of the Christian faith and the ethics of the professional governing boards.
- Providing research and development for new and innovative programs, seminars, and workshops in order to further the well-being and self-sufficiency of each client.