



Katlyn's
Healing Center

Substance Dependence It's Not Your Fault



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Presentation Outline

The main points covered in this presentation are:

- **Research shows that childhood and adult adversity and/or trauma are the leading causes of addiction.**
- **The services and supports needed to address the effects of these experiences are not well-understood nor readily available to people who struggle with addiction.**
- **A treatment approach that effectively facilitates healing from the effects of trauma has the potential to greatly improve addiction recovery outcomes.**



Why Address the Effects of Trauma?

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) states¹:

- *“Trauma is a widespread, harmful and costly public health problem. It occurs as a result of violence, abuse, neglect, loss, disaster, war and other emotionally harmful experiences. Trauma has no boundaries with regard to age, gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, geography or sexual orientation.”*
- *“It is an almost universal experience of people with mental and substance use disorders. The need to address trauma is increasingly viewed as an important component of effective behavioral health service delivery.”*



How Does Trauma Lead to Addiction?

- Addiction is a normal human response to relieve the extreme emotional pain and suffering caused by trauma and adversity.
- Most often this trauma starts in childhood, with the abusive patterns experienced as a child often repeated in adulthood.
- Dr. Gabor Maté²: *“It’s just as many substance addicts say: they self-medicate to soothe their emotional pain—but more than that, their brain development was sabotaged by their traumatic experiences.”*



Dr. Gabor Maté on The Roots of Addiction

To view the video, click on the hyperlink below. When the video is complete, return to the PDF presentation.

Video from KidCare Canada Society: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCzXbsGAXil>



Roots of Addiction Video Review

- Dr. Gabor Maté teaches that addiction is *an attempt to solve the problem of unbearable psychic pain and distress* that arises from childhood experience.
- *It is not a genetic disease.* It runs in families because emotional patterns and behaviors that give rise to the pain are passed from generation to generation.
- Brain circuits that control reward chemicals and regulate stress do not develop as well in a traumatized child. So addicts look to soothe their pain externally.
- Maté states, *“Addictions, whether physical or behavioral, are all about trying to seek something from the outside that you’re not able to generate from within. And it all goes back to pain and loss, and in severe cases, trauma.”*



Why Opiates are so Powerful

Maté states in, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*², that:

- *“Opiates ... are the chemical linchpins of the emotional apparatus in the brain that is responsible for protecting and nurturing infant life. Thus addiction to opiates like morphine and heroin arises in a brain system that governs the most powerful emotional dynamic in human existence: the attachment instinct. Love.”*
- *“In short, the life-foundational opioid love/pleasure/pain relief apparatus provides the entry point for narcotic substances into our brains. The less effective our own internal chemical happiness system is, the more driven we are to seek joy or relief through drug-taking or through other compulsions we perceive as rewarding.”*
- *“The very essence of the opiate high was expressed by a 27-year-old sex-trade worker. She had HIV and has since died. ‘The first time I did heroin,’ she said to me, ‘it felt like a warm, soft hug.’ In that phrase she told her life story and summed up the psychological and chemical cravings of all substance-dependent addicts.”*



The Rat Park Experiments

To view the video, click on the hyperlink below. When the video is complete, return to the PDF presentation.

Video from MinuteVideos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbQFNe3pkss>



Rat Park Experiments Review

- The Rat Park experiments, along with human experience, show that **chemical dependence and lack of willpower are not the main factors causing addiction**. The extreme stressors and past trauma from our environment are more influential.
- Both rats and people can heal from trauma and addiction in the right environment (i.e. safety, supportive relationships, empowerment).
- When treatment programs fail to recognize the effects of underlying trauma, **they miss an important opportunity to help the addict release the stigma and shame associated with their trauma and addiction**, which is the first step in creating the understanding needed to heal.



What's Needed to Heal from Trauma?

- Dr. Judith Herman³ - *“The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of [loving] relationships; it cannot occur in isolation.”*
- *“Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety.”*
- *“No intervention that takes power away from the survivor can possibly foster her recovery, no matter how much it appears to be in her immediate best interest.”*



SAMHSA Provides Trauma-Informed Guidance¹

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) states that, *“six key principles fundamental to a trauma-informed approach include:”*

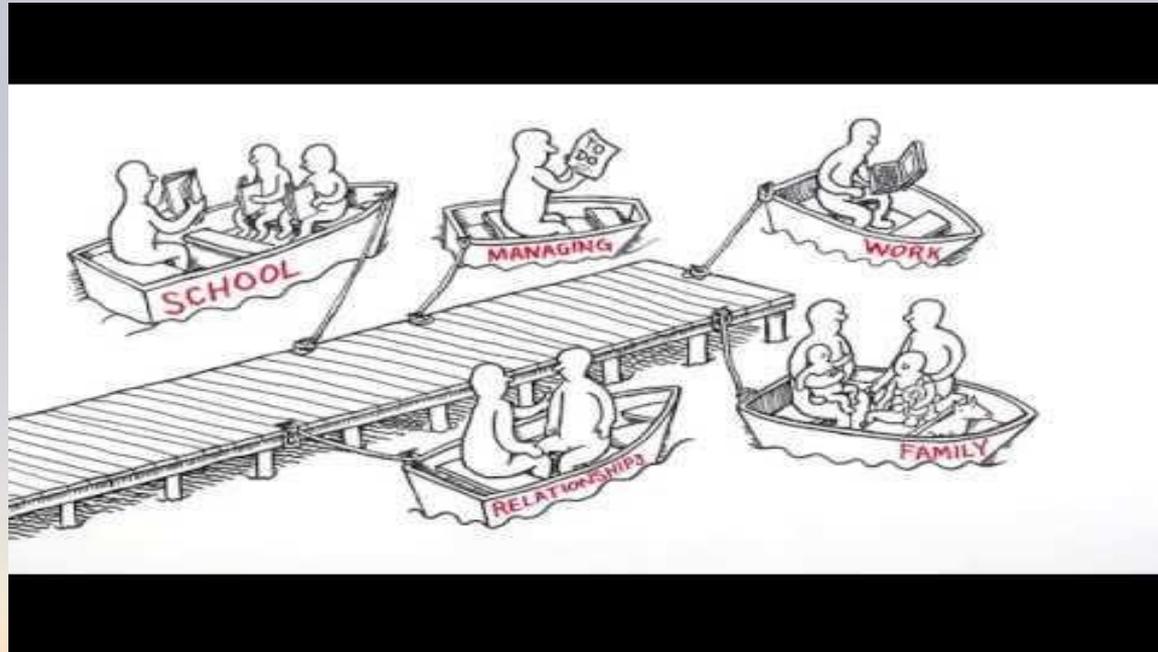
1. *“Safety: ...interpersonal interactions promote a sense of safety.”*
2. *“Trustworthiness and Transparency: ...building and maintaining trust with clients...”*
3. *“Peer Support: ...Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, enhancing collaboration, and utilizing their stories and lived experience to promote recovery and healing.”*
4. *“Collaboration and Mutuality: ...healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making.”*
5. *“Empowerment, Voice and Choice: ...Clients are supported in shared decision-making, choice, and goal setting to determine the plan of action they need to heal and move forward.”*
6. *“Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues: ...responsive to the racial, ethnic and cultural needs of individuals served; ...and addresses historical trauma.”*



Healing from Trauma by Re-Building Capabilities

To view the video, click on the hyperlink below. When the video is complete, return to the PDF presentation.

Video from Harvard Univ.: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NehuwDA45Q>



Building Core Capabilities Review

- People who have experienced childhood and/or adult trauma often lack much of the core capabilities for intentional decision making (agency), through no fault of their own. **This is why recovery from addiction is so difficult for trauma survivors.**
- The brain's reaction to trauma and stress is automatic, to help ensure our survival. It is **normal for survivors to be stuck** in this fearful, reactive mode, with less capability for intentional decision making.
- However, intentional capabilities can be developed or restored later in life with positive intentions and experiences. ***“Stronger brain circuits are built up through practice.”*** That is, **restoring intentional capabilities to the brain is an experiential process** (i.e. does not occur by motivation or cognitive processes).



Summary of Healing Requirements

To help shift brain circuits out of survival mode and restore normal cognitive capabilities, we need:

- **Safety** – to be free from perceived threats and have a consistent caring presence in our life (i.e. supportive relationships, loving connections).
- **Understanding** – to understand the effects of our emotional wounds and learn new healing skills and self-care practices.
- **Empowerment** – to encourage practices and choices that lead to *creative actions and healing experiences*. Caring support, increased understanding, and individual effort to apply new skills and practices are the keys to healing.

These are the conditions needed to facilitate healing from the effects of trauma. However, as noted by SAMHSA, “... *most people go without these services and supports¹.*”



What Does This Mean for Addiction?

Because most people struggling with addiction have suffered from childhood or adult trauma and are trying to relieve their pain,...

- Our approach to treating addiction and related health problems could benefit by including an element that effectively facilitates healing from the effects of trauma.
- This “trauma-informed” component could be offered as an adjunctive treatment to existing treatment therapies, but...
- It requires services and supports—**caring relationships, collaboration, mutual self-help, leveling of power differences**— that are not normally part of our existing healthcare and treatment systems.



Are There Examples of Trauma-Informed Approaches?

- The Center for Addiction Science at the University of Tennessee College of Medicine has two outpatient clinics that use a trauma-informed approach for addiction treatment.
- Dr. Daniel Sumrock, the Center's Director, says⁴: *"My patients seem to respond really well to this."* He goes on to say, *"I've seen about 1,200 patients who are addicted. Of those, more than 1,100 have an ACE score of 3 or more."*
- Sumrock calls addiction, *"ritualized compulsive comfort seeking"* which he says, *"... is a normal response to the adversity experienced in childhood just like bleeding is a normal response to being stabbed."* That is, it's an attempt to relieve pain from an injury.



Our Experience with a Trauma-Informed Approach

- After conducting several Healing Workshops and follow-on support groups to facilitate healing from the effects of trauma, our approach appears promising, particularly for those who have experienced childhood trauma (ACEs) and those struggling with addiction. Here's feedback from one participant:
- *"The Healing Workshop has educated me in the ways that trauma changes us and that we have the power to rewire our brains. To hear someone tell me 'I was a good person' and 'it wasn't my fault' seems like such a simple thing, but it was the simple thing I needed to hear. Processing those words, giving them meaning, allowed me to open to the healing message that is so lovingly given in this Workshop. I have come to see myself as a person capable of giving and receiving love, of proudly letting my scars show and my wounds heal now that I no longer flagellate and punish myself for the things that were done TO me."*



Benefits of Peer Relationships and Support

Dr. Judith Herman³ - *“Treatment outcome research until now has mainly focused on individual psychotherapy. Yet [groups have] shown great promise for trauma recovery because groups can offer such a powerful antidote to the shame and social isolation that afflict trauma survivors. By offering a safe and relatively structured context for peer relationships, groups provide survivors with an experience of acceptance and belonging.”*

Groups also provide the occasions for healthy feelings of pride, as members discover that they have much to offer one another. And as group members take in the compassion of others, they gradually develop self-compassion. ...we conceptualize groups as a ‘bridge to new community,’ helping survivors reconnect with society from which they have felt so alienated.”



It's Not Your Fault; You Could Start Healing

- The **objective of our approach is curative**, by facilitating healing from trauma (the root cause of substance dependence and many other behavioral health problems) and empowering clients to make healing choices.
- **Most behavioral health therapies and medications are not curative** for the effects of trauma and treat only symptoms. Because of this, it is common for trauma survivors to need these services and supports for extended periods.
- If you have struggled with substance dependence and would like to try a different approach to healing, please review our “Start Healing” presentation and related resources at www.katlynshealingcenter.org. You could also sign up for our online Healing Support Program for additional help and guidance.



References

1. SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative. (2014). *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4884.pdf>
2. Gabor Maté, MD. (2008, 2009, 2010). *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books.
3. Judith Herman, MD. (1992, 1997, 2015). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
4. Jane Ellen Stevens. (May 2, 2017). *Addiction doc says: It's not the drugs. It's the ACEs...adverse childhood experiences*. ACEs Too High. Retrieved from <https://acestoohigh.com/2017/05/02/addiction-doc-says-stop-chasing-the-drug-focus-on-aces-people-can-recover/>

