



Triggers: Addressing Negative Emotions

In addiction, negative emotions often play a significant role as they can become powerful triggers that fuel your addictive behaviours and hinder your recovery process. Understanding how negative emotions impact addiction is important if you want to overcome addictive patterns.

Negative emotions and addiction go hand in hand like ice cream and syrup, except this combination is definitely not as tasty. When we experience feelings like sadness, anger, or anxiety, it can create a perfect storm for addiction to take hold. Negative emotions can become a slippery slope, leading us down a path of seeking unhealthy coping mechanisms to temporarily numb or escape from these unpleasant feelings.

What if you had a rough day at work and your boss is that total buzz kill, and all you want, is to drown your sorrows in a glass of wine? Negative emotions can tap into our vulnerability and desire for immediate relief. Instead of addressing the root causes of our emotions, we turn to a glass of wine, a night at the casino, or a little cocaine use as a quick fix. This provides some sense of relief, even only for a short term. However recovery is not the quick fix we were used to but requires a lot of hard work.

Negative Emotions and Addiction

Negative emotions come in all shapes and sizes, much like the mismatched sock hiding at the back of your drawer. Common emotions like stress, loneliness, boredom, and low self-esteem, can act as pesky little devils, whispering in our ears, enticing us to seek comfort in addictive patterns. By identifying these triggers, we can better equip ourselves to navigate the treacherous waters of addiction. Loneliness and boredom is the enemy when we want to recover, so be vigilant about this.

While there are universal negative emotions that can trigger addiction, each of us has our own

unique set of emotional triggers. Maybe it is a specific traumatic event from your past that sends us reaching for a bottle, or perhaps it's the fear of failure that drives us to indulge in destructive behaviours. Recognising and understanding our personal triggers is like finding the secret key to our own emotional fortress. Once we unlock the code, we can start to dismantle the addictive patterns they fuel. The key is to sit with our negative emotions and then identify which ones are our triggers and then find solutions to deal with them.

Negative emotions are like roadblocks on our path to recovery, we will find them around every corner in life. They can trigger relapses and thereby hinder our progress and cause us to revert back to our old, destructive habits. It's like trying to climb a mountain while someone keeps cutting the ropes on our climbing gear. It is evident that the next fall may be the cause of our death.

Emotional well-being and recovery are besties, like two peas in a pod, creating a solid foundation for a fulfilling life. When we take care of our emotional health and address the negative emotions that fuel our addiction, we pave the way to sustainable recovery. By learning healthy ways to manage these emotions and cultivate positive coping mechanisms, we strengthen our ability to navigate the ups and downs of life without relying on addictive substances or behaviours to get by. (See the coping mechanism lessons for more support).

When life throws lemons at us, we can't always make lemonade, can we? Sometimes, we just need a solid plan B. Developing good coping mechanisms for negative emotions is like having a secret stack of lemonade recipes for every occasion. Whether it is engaging in physical activities, connecting with our support systems, or pursuing creative outlets, finding healthy ways to deal with emotions is key to breaking free from addiction's grip. Some of these negative emotions may also include facing our fears.

The Urge surfing lesson provided will help you understand how to ride out your emotional waves without getting knocked off your surfboard. You can furthermore do some research on the following emotional regulation techniques; Attention control, cognitive reappraisal and response modulation. It is vital to be equipped so that we are not consumed by negative emotions. Please see the following lessons that will help you with this: Stinking Thinking, The ABC Model and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which may help you find inner peace to avoid the pitfalls of addiction.

Recovering from addiction is not easy, especially when faced with negative emotions that can trigger cravings or even relapse. This is why it's crucial to build our emotional resilience. But, how can we strengthen our resilience?

Firstly, it's important to acknowledge and validate our emotions. Negative emotions are a normal part of life. Trying to suppress or ignore them will only make them stronger in the long run. We have to embrace them like an old friend who occasionally overstays their welcome. We must allow ourselves to feel, and then let those emotions pass through us like a wave.

Secondly, practice self-care. We must engage in activities that bring us joy, whether it's dancing like nobody's watching, indulging in our favourite hobby, or binge-watching a pleasure show. By taking care of ourselves, we are building a fortress of emotional strength that can withstand the storms of addiction triggers.

The saying goes, "No man is an island." So also do we need an emotional support system to be our lighthouse in addiction recovery. We have to surround ourselves with people who genuinely care about us and our sobriety and provide the emotional support we need when facing triggers. Communicating our needs to our support system is key. We have to let them know how they can best support us in times of temptation. Maybe we need a text message reminding us of your progress, or perhaps we could benefit from a shoulder to lean on when things get tough. More importantly, we need to know that building a solid emotional support system isn't just about taking from others; it's also about giving. We have to be that support system for others in their struggles. By being there for each other, we create a web of mutual support that can help us resist addiction triggers together.

Making use of therapist may be a powerful tool to help us address negative emotions that fuel addiction triggers. They can help us unravel the mysteries of our emotions and uncover the roots of our triggers. Through therapy, we can gain insights into underlying causes that brings about negative emotions. It could be unresolved trauma from childhood, a deep-seated belief or a vow we made to ourselves that needs re-evaluation. Identifying and addressing such emotions can help us build resilience against our triggers and even help our healing process.

In the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) lesson the focus is on identifying negative thought patterns that fuel emotions and behaviours and then to challenge those thoughts. It's like playing emotional chess with our brain, strategically outmanoeuvring those sneaky triggers.

Therapy is not a one size fit all, so we have to find the approach that works for us. There may be some trial and error, but once we find the right fit, therapy can be a game-changer to help us manage negative emotions and defeat addiction triggers. In my personal life, I find comfort in scripture and having a support system that always takes me back to remind me that I am created for a purpose. My need is encouragement, but your needs may differ. Your needs may be acceptance, security, respect, affection, approval, comfort, appreciation, attention or support. Knowing what we need, will help us flourish in the long term.

Addressing addiction triggers is to have a personalised battle plan. We can grab a pen and paper or smartphone and get strategic. We have to start by identifying our specific triggers. Is it stress? Certain environments? People? Maybe we struggle with emotions like sadness, anger or fear? Once we have identified our emotional triggers, can we create a plan that targets those triggers.

For example, if stress is a trigger, we can develop a stress-management techniques such as deep breathing exercises, meditation, or engaging in physical activities. As the saying goes, if we fail to plan, we plan to fail! Having a plan in place is what will arm us with a defence against

the powerful emotional triggers we experience.

But the buck does not stop there. Creating a plan is great, but putting it into action is where the magic happens. Implementing our plan is what will help us manage triggers effectively. We may even have to go as far as creating a daily routine that includes self-care activities, practicing meditation, or see a therapist on a regular basis or become part of a support group. Fortunately for me, I am at a Discipleship School which is my safe place to implement the strategies I have learned and the beauty of it, there is room for mistakes.

As we grow, our plans may evolve over time. We must always be open to try new strategies and adjust as needed. Our journey will consist of constant growth and adaptation. In my case, there is no strong need for counselling or therapy anymore, because I have developed a strong support system in whom I trust and can be totally honest with at all times. I also have my faith I can turn in times of dire need.

I also find myself in a safe and nurturing environment where I can just be me. What does that mean? It means I can do things that bring me joy. I can work in my garden; surround myself with nature or just listen to soothing music whenever I feel stressed. I have also developed other techniques like writing (even songs) and slowing down my thoughts, assessing if something is worth worrying or if I am just over panicky for no real reason. So go ahead and work through the many techniques available and find your sweet spot.

We **HAVE TO** also take care of our physical environment. It's harder to overcome negative emotions when we are sleep-deprived, malnourished, or living in chaos. Self-care needs to be prioritised in all aspects of our life and our environment may become a sanctuary for emotional healing.

Addressing negative emotions and managing triggers is not easy, but with the right tools, support, self-compassion, we can manage the rollercoaster ride of emotions and come out stronger on the other side. When we acknowledge the role of negative emotions, identify specific triggers, and implementing effective coping strategies, that will add a lot of weight in breaking free from our addiction.

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