

ADDICTED
TO LIFE

Worksheet



BlueChipMINDS

Notes:

DEFINING ADDICTION

In the context of this module when we're referring to the terms 'addicted' or 'addiction', it's in relation to being in a state where you are physically and mentally dependent (consciously or unconsciously) on a thing, thought, idea, feeling or person.

What you want to be able to do as a result of completing this module, is notice what you really are addicted to and create cravings for the feelings that will propel you forward naturally.

The aim is to help you distinguish between the addictions that provide intrinsic motivation to move you forward in life and the things you are dependent on such as people, food, substances, situations and media that produce feelings that ultimately move you further away from the life you want to experience.

Once you identify your addictions, you will be able to consciously use your brains subtle urges for good.

Notes:

THE MAGIC OF MAYBE

The world we live in is changing at a rapid pace, and with that change comes opportunities both good or bad for us to become dependent on things that may not serve our evolution.

For instance, most humans carry a mobile device, connected instantaneously to a world of distraction, often these are not benign distractions, but distractions that are sticky and malevolent, effectively priming your brain for reward, and the release of the feel-good neurochemical dopamine. Neuroendocrinologist, Robert Sapolsky calls this priming “The magic of maybe”. When you reach for your device to check email, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, in search for a response, your brain is really looking for another hit of dopamine... in fact Sapolsky’s research uncovered that you enjoy a 400% spike in dopamine each time



you check your device. This is both distracting and addictive. This unconscious addiction has people looking at their phones at least 96 times a day checking status updates every 10 minutes.

What’s common in any form of addiction is its ability to increase levels of dopamine, a molecule that sends messages across the brain’s reward centre. It’s what gives you a feeling of pleasure and reinforces behaviours. Initially this response was to reinforce behaviours that are critical for survival, such as eating food and having sex, however the reward centre is now reinforcing behaviours that may be detrimental to leading a fulfilled life and realising your goals.

Challenge:

Become aware of how often you reach for your device (phone, tablet or computer) to check email, social media, news, messages etc. Is there a real (productive) need to check the device or is your brain seeking another hit of the emotions you feel from what you might find?

Reflect on your insights below or with your buddy.

THE BRAINS RESPONSES

Most people are not aware of the way their brain works and its main functions of survival and safety through pattern recognition. It loves the safety of the familiar. Familiar people, places, routines, emotions and behaviours. It wants to keep you in the safety of the known regardless of whether it's actually good for you.

Your brain thrives in the known.

You may discover that familiar people, places, routines, emotions and behaviours no longer serve you and decide to make changes. Most people begin to make changes on one level, such as their environment, unaware that changes need to be made consciously, subconsciously and environmentally, through persistent effort, to rewire the familiar and now outdated neural pathways.

Sometimes we think we have been successful in making external changes, such as leaving a bad relationship, surrounding ourselves with different people, moving to a new location, changing our job, creating new routines and behaviours, only to discover that we are still experiencing the same unwanted patterns and emotions. The external world changed, but thanks to our brains need for safety and familiar, our internal world stayed the same.

Why does this happen? It happens because the brain has likely become addicted to the feelings from your past experiences and continues to seek out situations and relationships that feel familiar to satisfy the need for safety and familiarity.



How does this happen? When you experience any kind of stressful situation such as a bad relationship, disagreement, unfulfilling job, health scare etc, the situation usually causes you to feel an emotion (which we tend to label as negative). When this happens, the emotion triggers your brain and body to move into the automatic survival responses because your emotions are telling it you are under some kind of threat. These are usually short-term survival mechanisms. You are designed to be able to cope with short term stress using your primitive stress response system, this is how you survive and thrive in the world. However, for most people once their stress response is activated, they find it hard and sometimes impossible to deactivate it, leading to mental, emotional and physical turmoil and breakdown.

THE STRESS RESPONSE

Your body is equipped with an incredible stress response system. When that stress alarm goes off, your brain sends a message to your adrenal glands that a stressful situation has presented itself, the adrenal glands then create a rush of energy by releasing adrenaline, norepinephrine and cortisol to help deal with the stress.

You will know that the adrenal glands have been signalled because you will feel your heart pounding, your muscles will tense up, your attention focuses, you will begin to breathe faster, sweat and you will experience that surge of energy preparing you to get the heck out of the dangerous situation.



Norepinephrine is a hormone similar to adrenaline it's released from the adrenal glands and the brain. Its primary role, like adrenaline, is arousal. It helps to make you more awake, focused and more responsive. It also helps to shift blood flow away from areas where it may not be crucial such as digestion and skin, to more essential areas like the muscles you may need to run away from the stressful situation.

Cortisol is a steroid hormone and is also produced by the adrenal glands. It takes a little longer, a few minutes, to feel its effects when you are stressed. Optimal amounts of cortisol can be life saving as it helps to maintain fluid balance and blood pressure while regulating some body functions that aren't crucial in the moment like reproductive drive, immunity, digestion and growth. If you constantly stew on a problem or ruminate over something that stresses you, cortisol will continuously release and can cause serious illness.

The **hormones** Estrogen and testosterone along with your **neurotransmitters** dopamine and serotonin also affect how you react to stress. These hormones and neurotransmitters are turned on during the stress response and give you that rush of energy – or what we know as a adrenaline rush. This rush of energy causes the brain and body to wake up. The rush feels good and makes us feel alive, this self-made mix of chemicals become highly addictive.

The long-term impact of a stressful situation will be determined by a number of factors including;

- What you've learned growing up
- The stories you tell yourself about the situation
- Your ability to see the situation from multiple perspectives
- How you personally handle stress

At a physical level it could take anywhere from 30 minutes to a couple of days to return to your resting state. And here's the catch, once you return to your resting state, your brain and body wants more of those chemicals because they made you feel alive.

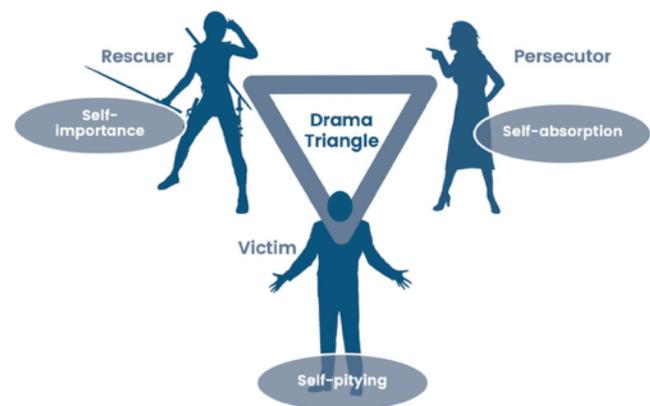
EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCY

When you unconsciously associate the problems, stress and conditions in your life such as meaningless relationships, negative social media feeds, purposeless work and drama with that rush of energy as part of who you are, your brain ends up becoming dependant and accustomed to the stress chemicals and the emotions that these conditions produce.

You can unknowingly become dependent on emotions such as anger, frustration, judgement, sadness, guilt, shame, insecurity, suffering, hopelessness, powerlessness, fear, depression and even hatred because of the rush they give you.

When these highly addictive chemicals are repeatedly released, they endorse who you believe you are and lead to characteristics like selfishness, self-absorption, self-centredness, self-importance and self-pitying. The thing is, these stress chemicals were designed to do this for you, their purpose is self-preservation and survival.

You will see how, for some people, these same tendencies show up in the drama triangle. The victim may be addicted to self-pitying and the feelings of shame, powerlessness and insecurity, the persecutor could be dependant on self-absorption and the feelings of frustration, judgement, hatred and anger and the rescuer could be addicted to self-importance and the feelings of guilt, suffering and pain.



When you pay attention to your language (inner and outer voice), you will be able to detect any emotional addictions that have a hold on you. Notice how often you say or think you are frustrated, angry, annoyed etc, this will give you a clue as to what your brain is seeking out.

It's completely natural to react to negative situations, whether it be your ex, your dwindling bank account, posts on social media or the news. However, when you keep that reaction going for extended periods of time, then you're giving your power away to things outside of you, you are allowing people and situations to control your thoughts, feelings and actions. You are transacting in drama and choosing to step into the role of victim, becoming susceptible to influences outside of you.

The problem arises when the drama of life and the chemicals of addiction become so overpowering and hard to break away from that;

a) We don't even realise they are in control of us and

b) We can't stop them long enough to begin to dream of something else or believe that life could be different.

This is why people find it hard to move past the drama in their life as they are addicted on a deeper level to the chemicals these emotions produce.

EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCY

1) Uncover the emotional dependencies that don't serve you.

How do you frequently feel? What unwanted emotion do you experience on a regular basis?

Hint: What messages do you get from your body, what does your inner voice say and what words do you use frequently to describe the unwanted events in your life to other people?

(You may like to ask a loved one what they hear you say often)

2) Uncover the elevated emotions that serve you.

How do you feel when you are performing at your best? What emotions do you experience when you feel safe?

EMOTIONAL ALCHEMY

With emotional intelligence you can notice the early triggers and feelings in your body, then shorten the refractory period (Then length of time it takes for an event to no longer affect you).

When you do this, you do two things;

1) You step into the role of a Self Author

2) You begin to strength your inner world by creating a pattern interruption.

You can reload the survival-related emotions like fear, anger, and sadness with elevated emotions like love, joy, and gratitude and begin to move your body in new ways.

When you fully embody higher emotions such as love and feelings of wholeness and awe your body will believe it's no longer under threat. When this happens, despite the conditions or threats in your external environment, the body believes it's safe enough to use its energy for growth, repair and new challenges.

Your body and brain is now believing there is no real-life threat in the outer environment. Your ability to transmute survival emotions into love, gratitude, and other elevated emotions allows your body to switch from the stress response back to a state of homeostasis and rerouting your addiction to something that serves you.

Creating elevated emotions has the potential to produce an ecstatic experience. In these moments of awe, or what is known in the world of science as Flow, the brain releases norepinephrine and dopamine into your system. Just like when you are stressed, these same addictive neurochemicals are being released, causing your heart rate to increase, tightening your focus and making you sit up and pay attention.

During this process, parts of the prefrontal cortex begin to shut off, and dialling down the characteristics of selfishness, self-absorption, self-centeredness, self-importance and self-pitying that come with stress, instead you experience the empowering side effects of Flow; things become easy, time is distorted and your sense of self vanishes as you become totally absorbed in what you are doing. These characteristics of flow often leave you feeling empowered to self- author your life.

The other advantages of creating this elevated altered state is that it turns off the brains filtering system giving you access to fresh perspectives and more potential combinations of ideas. As you continue to tune into the elevated emotions you can experience an afterglow of serotonin and oxytocin, leading to feelings of peace, well-being, trust and sociability.

**“The experience of Flow lifts the course of life to another level.
Feelings of alienation give way to involvement, enjoyment
replaces boredom, helplessness turns into a feeling of control”.**

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

EMOTIONAL ALCHEMY

When you experience moments of Flow they become intrinsically rewarding and you become addicted to life. Instead of being driven by things such as comfort, money, power, fame or anything external that creates a superficial motivating force. Csikszentmihalyi describes people who are internally driven, and exhibit a sense of purpose and curiosity as 'autotelic'.

“An autotelic person needs few material possessions and little entertainment, comfort, power, or fame because so much of what he or she does is already rewarding. Because such persons experience flow in work, in family life, when interacting with people, when eating, even when alone with nothing to do, they depend less on external rewards that keep others motivated to go on with a life of routines. They are more autonomous and independent because they cannot be as easily manipulated with threats or rewards from the outside. At the same time, they are more involved with everything around them because they are fully immersed in the current of life.”

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

1) When was the last time you did something that was intrinsically rewarding (autotelic)? What were you doing & how did you feel?

2) Transmute the emotions that don't serve you (Keep you in drama) into elevated emotions that inspire you to take positive action (autotelic nature).

Reflect on your answer to activity 1) on page 7. If you could no longer be dependant on the emotions you listed, what elevated emotions would you choose to replace them with?

ADDICTED TO LIFE

Armed with knowledge of your deepest longings, and an understanding of exactly how to prime them, you can continually move through the stages of adult development and transform your life.

Are you trading your life for the
addictive and distracting
“Magic of Maybe”
or are you living an autotelic life of
“Purposeful Possibility”?

1) Review your current goal. Is it linked to a purposeful vision that scares and excites you?

Y / N

if No, what is the vision of the future that you want to create for yourself?

ADDICTED TO LIFE

Do you have a blueprint written out of who you are 'being' and how you are 'feeling' in your future vision? Y / N

If Yes, continue to review your blueprint daily and become emotionally involved with who you are being.

If No, use this space to write out a description of who you are being in your Vision and how you are feeling.

Notes: