



Sober Buddha

—Counseling—

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FILE 1 AND FILE 2 THINKING

"Deviant personal meanings constitute the cognitive distortions that form the core of emotional disorders. Positive personal meanings constitute the cognitive rationality that forms the core of emotional health." - A. Beck

THE LEARNING BENEFIT

This quote from Dr. Aaron Beck, the father of cognitive behavioral therapy, explains that emotional health depends on clear, rational thinking. Even when dealing with addiction, a person can learn to shift the balance of thinking from negative to positive. This makes the addict better able to cope. Levels of confidence increase and interest in drugs and alcohol diminish.

THE FACTS

Human beings depend on language to give meaning to their experiences, whether they feel safe, confident and in control - or fearful and out of control. However, most people pay no attention to the kind of language they use to describe their daily experience. Addicts in particular fall into the habit of using negative language to describe their lives. Beck considered this "deviant thinking" because it led to depression.

In this exercise, words associated with the positive feelings and experiences are labeled "Good for Me" words. They are ego syntonic, meaning they create a healthy ego structure and make you better able to cope with life situations. Keep them in your mind's File 1 drawer. Three core "Good for Me" words are: optimism, compassion and capability. There are hundreds of others, like the examples below.

File 1 - "Good for Me" - Positive, safe and in control language.

Optimism - Compassion - Capability

* Love

* Success

* Companionship

* Safety

* Happiness

* Helping

File 2 words, are ego dystonic. They describe negative experience and are labeled "Bad for Me". This kind of language weakens personality confidence and ego strength and causes addicts to react blindly and without thinking when stressed. File 2 words also activate depression, because when a person thinks this way, the ego sees the world as too threatening to deal with. Vegetative symptoms like isolated drinking and drugging are common responses to living with File 2 vocabulary. Depression, anxiety and anger are the core "Bad for Me" words. These are the "deviant personal meanings" Beck refers. They block the ability to think or act constructively.

File 2 - "Bad for me" - Deviant personal meanings create fear.

Depression - Anxiety - Anger

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| * Loneliness | * Phys. / Material Loss | * Personal Inadequacy |
| * Defeat | * Restlessness | * Frustration |

THE WRITING EXERCISE

You are going to create a snapshot of the language content of your thoughts and feelings. Try to recall all the File 1 "Good for Me" and File 2 "Bad for Me" type words you think or say to describe a typical day in your life. Fill in each column with as many words as you can think of in 10 minutes.

Which column is larger? Which column's language is more powerful in your thought and feelings? File 1 or File 2? If File 2 is larger, consider what you can do to reframe your thinking and the language you use to describe your experience. Other Life After Rehab exercises will help you learn how to reframe your thinking. Remember that your language affects your thoughts and mood. Change the language, change the mood.

File 1

File 2