



Sober Buddha

—Counseling—

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HEALING INTERPERSONAL BOUNDARIES

THE LEARNING BENEFIT

Since projecting guilt and blame onto others is characteristic of the addictive thinker, most addicts find themselves in constant interpersonal turmoil. By becoming less sensitive and reactive to the speech and actions of others, the addict is better able to devote energy to personal healing and to attract positive support from people with whom they used to be in conflict.

THE FACTS

Addicts become desperate in their attempts to gain access to their substance of choice and to get people to enable them in perpetuating their using habit. In the process, they begin to lower their personal standards and are willing to do tolerate abusive behavior by others that they would not otherwise allow to happen.

THE VICTIM LOOP

The classic examples are the female who tolerates emotional and physical abuse in a relationship where drugs and alcohol are used or the beaten-down alcoholic man who settles for a mundane job and an insensitive boss because the work earns him enough money to support his habit.

The addict knows abusive behavior should not be tolerated, but the Victim archetype has gained control and the personal boundaries that once protected him from abuse are lost. The addict becomes subject to all kinds of mistreatment by others.

When victimization becomes an unconscious lifestyle habit, the addict usually stops trying to recover. People who occasionally offer help are rejected because they do not support the addiction. The addict takes more and more lifestyle risks, usually resulting in death, disease or incarceration. Only the rebuilding of personal boundaries between addicts and those people who harm them can overcome the victimization.

THE WRITING EXERCISE

Journaling can help you decide how to deal with your victimizers.

Identify the victimizer, i.e. – *“My husband Joe, age 50, married 20 years.”*

Describe the behavior you allow them to do, i.e. – *“He expects me to perform sexually for him every day, but he is emotionally cold and distant from me the rest of the time.”*

Describe what it makes you think about yourself, i.e. – *“Maybe I’m not really good for much else but being a sexual partner. “*

Describe how it makes you feel, i.e. – *“I feel cheap and worthless and helpless to do anything about it.”*

Describe how you act in response, i.e. – *“I let him do whatever he wants and pretend to enjoy it, but I always cry afterward when he isn’t looking. I get high after he goes to work just so I can stop thinking about it.”*

Now reverse your thinking and describe a healthier behavioral scenario in which to set and stick to personal boundaries:

Identify the victimizer, i.e. – *“My husband Joe, age 50, married 20 years.”*

Describe how you act to set a boundary, i.e. – *“I calmly tell him that I expect more affection and respect throughout the day, not just at bedtime. I don’t make love with him unless I really want to.”*

Describe what the new boundary makes you think about yourself, i.e. – *“I’m a good, lovable woman and deserve to be treated well. “*

Describe how it makes you feel, i.e. – *“I feel stronger and more independent, not a victim of his pressure on me.”*

Describe how you act after you have set your boundary, i.e. – *“I might stay up and read or play video games with my kids. I might choose to go to the gym or a meeting with girlfriends rather than staying in bed.”*