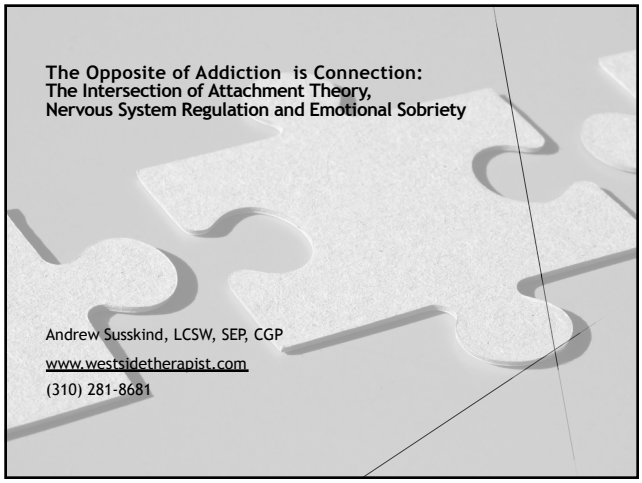
The Opposite of Addiction is Connection:
The Intersection of Attachment Theory,
Nervous System Regulation and Emotional Sobriety
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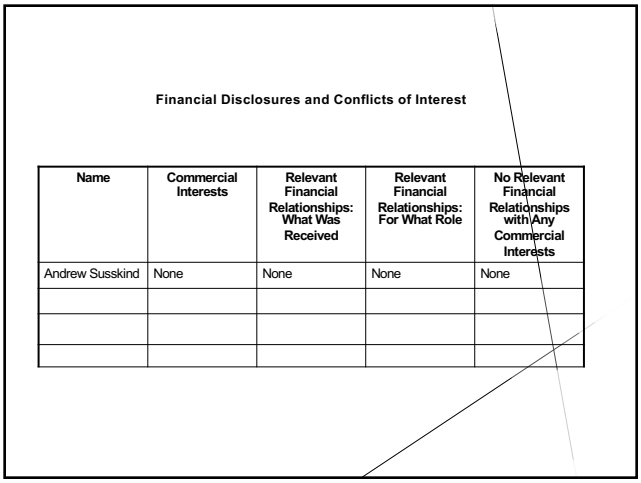
Financial Disclosures and Conflicts of Interest
Name
Commercial Interests
Relevant Financial Relationships: What Was Received
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No Relevant Financial Relationships with Any Commercial Interests
Andrew Susskind
None
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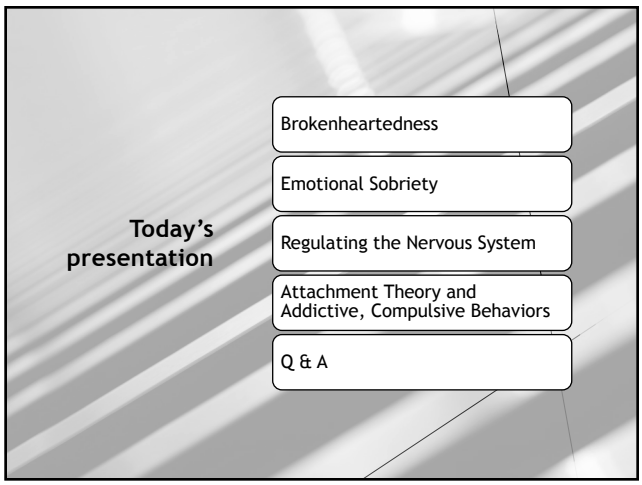
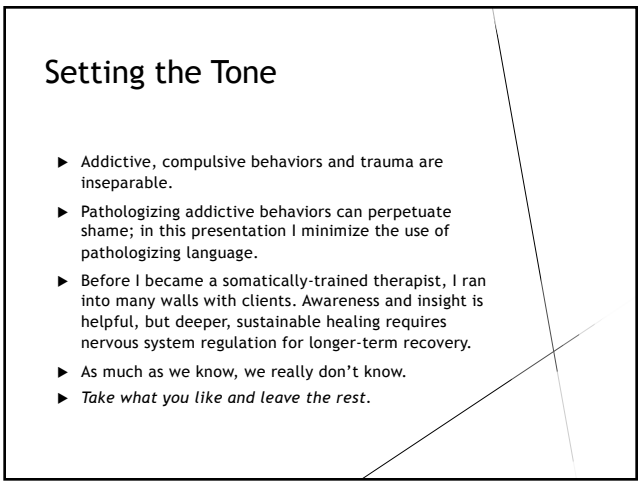

Today's presentation
Brokenheartedness
Emotional Sobriety
Regulating the Nervous System
Attachment Theory and Addictive, Compulsive Behaviors
Q & A

3


Setting the Tone
Addictive, compulsive behaviors and trauma are inseparable.
Pathologizing addictive behaviors can perpetuate shame; in this presentation I minimize the use of pathologizing language.
Before I became a somatically-trained therapist, I ran into many walls with clients. Awareness and insight is helpful, but deeper, sustainable healing requires nervous system regulation for longer-term recovery.
As much as we know, we really don't know.
Take what you like and leave the rest.

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Brokenheartedness and Unconditional Love

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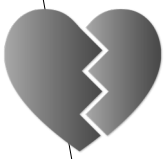
Brokenheartedness
(non-pathologizing)



- Trauma: specific or developmental
- Abuse: sexual, physical, emotional, religious
- Neglect: benign or intentional
- Abandonment: parent leaving a child
- Grief/Loss: deaths, goodbyes, break-ups

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Antidotes to Brokenheartedness
(Therapeutic Direction):

Intimacy

Meaningful Connection

Emotionally-Reliable Relationships

Attunement: Relational and Neurobiological

Giving & Receiving Love Freely

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Disconnection

How many of you hear clients in early recovery say things such as:

1. *No matter what I do, I can't seem to relax.*
2. *I'm constantly anxious—like I'm crawling out of my skin.*
3. *When I'm stressed, the first thing I think of is using (or acting out). I know it's not what I really want to do but I know it will give me temporary relief.*

8

Interviews: Emotional Sobriety

When do you feel most like yourself?

(When do you feel most connected?)

Susan: *When I'm creatively expressive. When I'm writing, singing, dancing, doing artwork.*

Robert: *While taking a long walk, being out in nature.*

Alex: *Meditation is a reset button for me. A lot of times I get into a trance of suffering and then want to act out, but when I meditate, it's like I see it. I see what I'm doing and it's painfully obvious. It wakes me up.*

Colin: *When I'm consistently working my program, using the tools. When I'm not making somebody else or my job my Higher Power. When I'm with a friend who sees me and supports me and can be present with me.*

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Connection: The Opposite of Addiction

- **Connection to Self:** emotional sobriety
- **Connection to Others:** emotionally-reliable people
- **Connection to HP:** God, Higher Power, Universal Energy/Power

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Emotional Sobriety

The capacity to experience the fullness of life.

A resilient, resourceful, regulated state of well-being.

When you feel most like yourself (comfortable in your own skin).

Reduces Vulnerability to Relapse

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Emotional Sobriety: The 4 R's

Relax	Relax (physiological relaxation)
Regulate	Regulate (nervous system regulation)
Respond	Respond (respond rather than react)
Relate	Relate (connection to self, others and HP)

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Case Study

The Story of Jason

13

Emotional Sobriety

Points to Remember

- **Sobriety 1st, then Emotional Sobriety**
- **The 4 R's: A Practice**
  (Relax, Regulate, Respond, Relate)
- **Reduce Vulnerability to Relapse**
- **Emotional Sobriety is for all of us, not just those in recovery.**

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Nervous System Regulation

(Reduces Vulnerability to Relapse)

Restoring the Wisdom of the Nervous System

- Peter Levine

15

Regulating the Nervous System

(My Story)

From Talk Therapy to Somatic Therapy.

When I began my own recovery in 1994, I was highly-intellectualized and cut off from my feelings—"frozen".

Through my own healing and my training in Somatic Experiencing, I realized I had a body and a nervous system and little by little I began to thaw.

Therapeutic Direction: Moving from FROZENNESS to THAWING. From Walled off to Vulnerable—therefore, more available for deeper contact.

Peter Levine refers to somatic awareness as the felt sense—when we're able to track and identify sensations in our body.

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Trauma: *The Body Remembers*

Something bad happens.

You don't know how to deal with it.

It gets stuck inside of you.

(Kathy Kain, SE faculty)

and

The event or experience was too much to process at the time.

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Dysregulated Nervous System

- *I feel so moody most of the time.*
- *Why do I always feel so worried and stressed out?*
- *My life looks ok on the outside but on the inside I feel like a wreck.*
- ***Therapeutic Goal: Build somatic awareness to feel more like yourself more of the time. Move more efficiently from dysregulation to regulation.***

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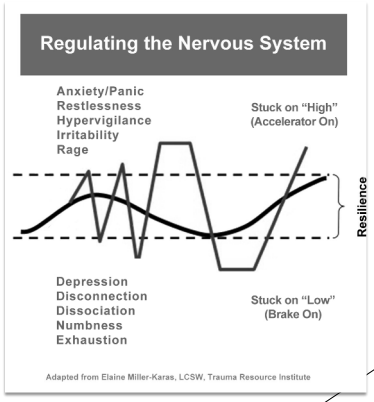

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Case Study

The Story of Debbie

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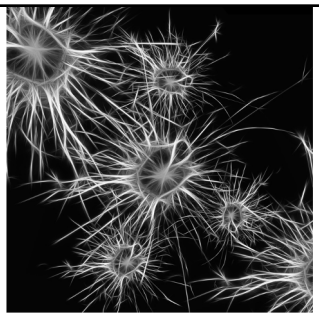

Neurons that fire together, wire together.

(Donald Hebb, 1949)

- The well-worn path = *addictive, compulsive behaviors*
- New neural pathways/neuroplasticity = *recovery & healing*

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Addictive, compulsive behaviors are misfired attempts to regulate the NS.

Addictive, compulsive behaviors are survival strategies. (rather than defects of character or psychopathology)

Addictive, compulsive behaviors are an attempt to feel better, feel less or feel more.

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Nervous System Regulation

Points to Remember:

- Reduces Vulnerability to Relapse
- Psycho-education alone regulates the Nervous System
- Therapy/12 step: provides nervous system regulation
- Moving from dysregulation to regulation is a practice and a lifelong challenge

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Co-Regulation & Connection

12 step meetings and retreats, individual and group therapy, pets and emotionally-dependable relationships all regulate us.

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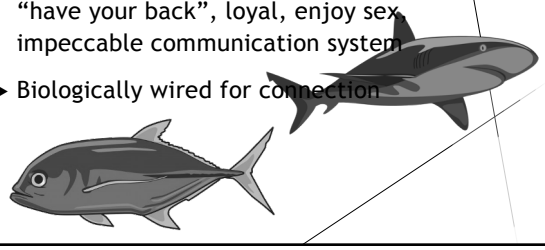
Swimming with the Dolphins: Finding Your People (Chellie Campbell)

- Emotionally-reliable, fun, playful, "have your back", loyal, enjoy sex, impeccable communication system
- Biologically wired for connection



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Secure Attachment

It's not about helping our clients build secure attachments.

It's about helping our clients reduce the barriers they have built against secure attachment.

We are most defended against our greatest needs.

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Love regulates the nervous system.

Love regulates the nervous system.

The Opposite of Addiction is not Sobriety.

The Opposite of Addiction is Connection.

- Johann Hari

The opposite of addiction isn't sobriety.

The opposite of addiction is connection.

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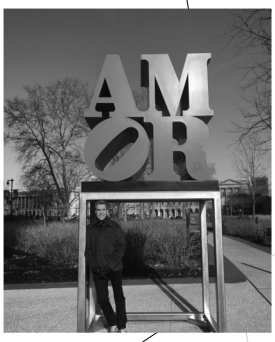

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Contact

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***It's Not About the Sex**: Moving from Isolation to Intimacy after Sexual Addiction* (Central Recovery Press, 2019)

***From Now On**: Seven Keys to Purposeful Recovery (America's Press, 2014)*

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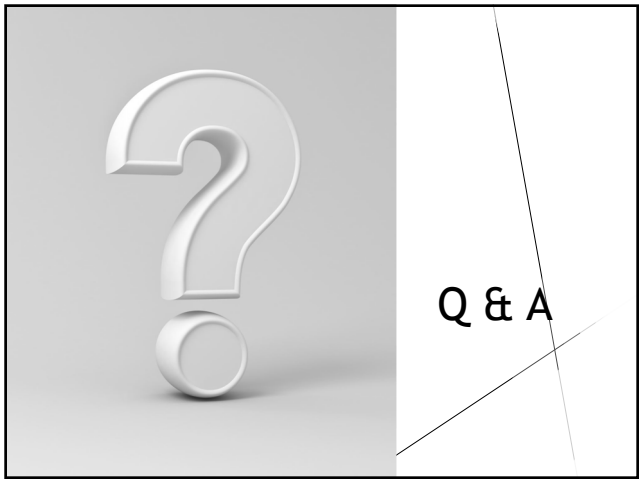

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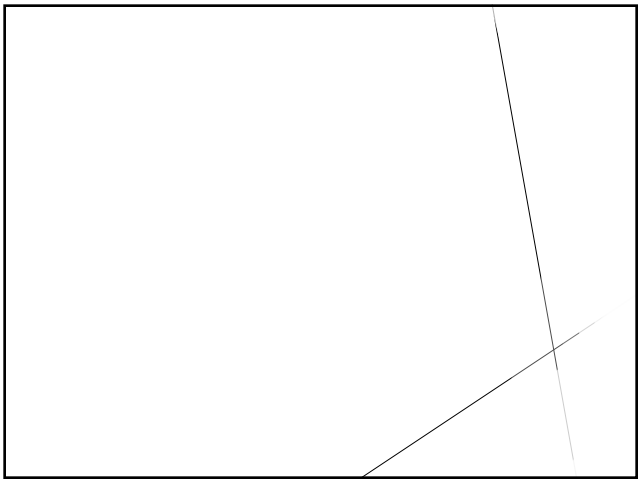

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