

MODULE 4

Trauma and Addiction

Session IV

Trauma and Addiction

Meeting A

Materials

MH session 20/ Handout

Goal – Group members will be able to recognize their addictive/compulsive behaviors as coping mechanisms.

Goal – Group members will make the connection between their addictive/compulsive behaviors and their trauma.

Leader

P. 136-7

Q. #1

Record responses on flip chart or chalkboard. If not mentioned, talk about "positive" addictions/behaviors, e.g. religion, perfectionism, avoiding intimacy, sex, etc.

Q. #2

Explain how addictive/compulsive behaviors serve as a means of coping with the pain of trauma before asking Q. #3.

Q. # 3

Explain the "double edge" of addiction, e.g. addictions offer escape, relief, a sense of being in control, a way to protect oneself, or of just feeling better. However, addictions can also destroy one's body, numb one's feelings, break up relationships, lead people to behavior that tears down self-esteem, and kill you.

Meeting B

Materials

MH – P. 138, Q. #4

P. 139

Body awareness exercise

TOPIC 20 Trauma and Addictive or Compulsive Behavior

SESSION RATIONALE

Frequently, compulsive behaviors, emotional distress, and trauma recovery are seen as separate issues and women receive treatment from separate systems for each of these problems. An integrated approach to recovery and skill development demands that survivors be helped to see addictions as dysfunctional coping mechanisms tied directly to past, current, and future trauma.

GOAL 1: Group members will begin to see connections between their own compulsive behaviors and their histories of sexual and physical abuse.

GOAL 2: Group members will begin to see how their excessive dependence on drugs, alcohol, food, sex, and so on may be a form of self-abuse.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you have behaviors that could be considered compulsive or addictive? What are they?
2. When did you first engage in these compulsive or addictive behaviors? What purpose have these behaviors served?
3. What kind of relationship do you have with your compulsion? Adversarial? Friendly? Loving?
4. How has your addiction or compulsion been a form of self-abuse? What has it cost you?

EXERCISE

Leaders will ask members to follow them in a quiet, relaxing exercise. The exercise should be one that members can use in their private lives as a soothing gesture or as a means to center oneself against compulsive habits.

LEADERS' NOTES

QUESTION 1 *What is a compulsion? Define*

Do you have behaviors that could be considered compulsive or addictive? What are they?

TYPICAL RESPONSES		
	Hypersexuality	Cutting myself
	Overeating	Exercising
	Hoarding	Lying
	Shopping	Stealing
	Masturbating	Praying
	Cleaning	Playing video games
	List making	Hand washing
	Drinking or drugging	Hair pulling
	Gambling	Checking and recheck- ing the appliances
	Smoking	

You may need to begin by defining compulsive behaviors. A compulsion is not merely a habit; it is a behavior that seems out of one's control—a behavior so powerful it seems to rule one's life. A woman may engage in more than one compulsive behavior at a time and even women who have used drugs and alcohol may recognize that they also engage in other compulsive behaviors. It is useful for members to see that all compulsions serve similar purposes and have similar characteristics.

QUESTION 2

When did you first engage in these compulsive or addictive behaviors? What purpose have these behaviors served?

TYPICAL RESPONSES My father taught me to keep everything . . . he wouldn't allow me to waste anything or else I suffered the consequences; that's how I started hoarding.
I scratch myself so I can feel alive.

I thought that as long as I was skinny no one would see me as a sex object.

When I cleaned my room at home, I felt in control. My father injected me with heroin while he was abusing me; that was the beginning of my addiction.

I started shopping in high school because it made me feel clean and pretty again.

When I cried as a baby, my parents gave me alcohol to quiet me.

Watching the TV was a way to escape.

I shop to keep busy so I won't have to think.

Whenever I felt bad about myself I would gorge on sweets and then force myself to throw up.

You may want to use this discussion to allow women to retell their trauma stories. Some women may be able to make creative connections between their trauma experiences and their addictions. You will want to steer women away from connections that seem too facile or superficial.

QUESTION 3

What kind of relationship do you have with your compulsion? Adversarial? Friendly? Loving?

TYPICAL RESPONSES When everyone else let me down, I could turn to my drugs and beer.
Cleaning felt like the only thing I had control of in my life. Now I know that wasn't true.
I never felt lonely when I was shopping.
Drugs were the only friend that never let me down.
The gambling became a trap I couldn't escape.
I felt good when I was eating but my problems were still there when I was done.
The drug let me down; it gave me false hope.

I felt secure when I had a lot of things.
I felt the exercising would save me.
I hated the cigarettes even though I craved them.
I felt like I was married to cocaine.

Women may be surprised to realize just how important their compulsions have been to their survival. In many cases these behaviors have become more than just a way to block out pain; they can be a way to feel normal or even become a woman's best companion.

QUESTION 4

How has your addiction or compulsion been a form of self-abuse? What has it cost you?

TYPICAL RESPONSES Using drugs cost me my kids . . . CPS took them away from me.
I'm HIV positive from having so many sex partners.
I lost my home.
I went to jail for possession of cocaine.
I lost my self-respect.
I've spent so much money on shopping I have nothing to show for myself.
My boyfriend dumped me because I was using.
My family won't let me come in the house.
I actually dropped out of school because I was too busy cleaning.
I gained so much weight that I couldn't even go out anymore.
My family lost respect for me.
My self-esteem went way down.
I can't have friends over because of the clutter.
I lost my car due to a gambling debt.
I have never really had a serious relationship.
I got lung cancer from smoking.

I'm ashamed to wear a bathing suit because of the cuts on my body.

As women recall what they have lost, they may begin to feel emotions that have been suppressed for years. Some will feel great sadness. Others will feel enraged at perpetrators, at circumstances, or at themselves. You should allow women to feel their feelings and then direct the conversation toward how one can move beyond the pain toward genuine recovery.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. How do family and friends respond to your compulsive behavior?
2. Did you ever try to stop the behavior? How did you feel?

EXERCISE

Ask members to focus on their bodies and to assess how they feel in their chairs. Then begin to guide group members verbally through a body awareness exercise by asking the following questions:

- Can you feel the weight of your thighs and hips against the chair?
- Are your feet flat and relaxed against the floor or tucked under your chair? Is there a different sensation in each position?
- Do you feel the weight of your arms as they hang down by the side of your body or when they are resting in your lap?
- Do your shoulders feel relaxed? Imagine the weight of your arms relaxing your shoulders.
- Now, focus on your head, does it feel heavy? Does it float effortlessly on your spine? Imagine your spine like a flower growing, reaching toward the sun and your head like the bud of the flower blooming and responding.
- Now, focus your attention deeper within yourself. With eyes lowered or closed, take time to listen and to tune in to your body. Focus on your breathing. We are always breathing and it changes depending on our activity. How does your breathing feel now? Breathe in until the count of three then breathe out to the count of three. Inhale then exhale. How does your breathing feel to you? Is it short or long, jagged or smooth, shallow or deep, easy or hard? Does your breath feel nourishing?

