

Module # 8

Self-Sabotage And Self-Defeating Behaviors

By

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Introduction

In this module we're going to take a look at self-defeating behaviors and self sabotage. We will take a look at the definition of self sabotage, find out why we do it, and give a list of examples of self sabotaging behaviors.

When these self-defeating behavior's are recognized, it becomes possible to stop the process in its infancy and minimize the chances of having it escalate into a disaster. The ultimate disaster would be a lapse or relapse.

When we examine self-defeating and self sabotaging behaviors, it should become pretty evident that we really *are* really talking about the behavior that is observed and acted on by those who are chemically dependent.

As I researched information for this section of the program, I found the parallels and similarities astounding.

It's not too far of a stretch of imagination to say that instead of being addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, we could just as easily say we're addicted to self- sabotage and self-defeating behaviors. OK enough with a warm-up let's get to work.

Onward,



Self Sabotage And Self-Defeating Behaviors

For people in recovery, thinking about using alcohol or drugs, or actually returning to their use is the ultimate in self-sabotage and self-defeating behavior. I mean, talk about shooting yourself in the foot, what good could possibly come out of a return to the use of drugs and alcohol?

As we go through this module I cannot imagine anybody in recovery not having several 'Aha moments' or 'light bulbs going off over your head'. OK, let's get to it.

A pretty good working definition of self sabotaging behavior is this:

Self sabotaging thoughts, behaviors, and feelings create a block in the road to success even when there is no rational or logical explanation as to why you cannot achieve your goals.

An interesting thing about self sabotage is that it is not a lack of knowledge, effort or even desire that keeps you from achieving your goals and out comes.

But rather, it is the committee in our head, or our own inner self-dialogue that confuses the issue.

Let's take a look at some of the characteristics in attitudes of self sabotaging behavior. Daniel G. Amen, in his book, *Don't Shoot Yourself In The Foot* came up with the following characteristics and contrasts.

Sabotaging Behavior	Successful Behavior

Lack of personal responsibility	Taking personal responsibility
Lack of Awareness	Taking initiative to be informed
Poor communication skills	Positive communications with others
Negativity	Setting and working towards goals
Poor choice making	Making good living choices

If I took that table above, and labeled the left side 'engaging in addictive use', and the right side in 'engaging in recovery', it would fit like a glove. The deeper I get into this, the more realize that engaging in your addiction is the ultimate in self-destructive behavior.

So, self-sabotage can lead you to, and position you in the middle of, "relapse mode". For us, that is the ultimate danger. Self-defeating behavior can make you frustrated, bring up that feeling of being trapped again, and be very discouraging. Don't get me wrong, everybody makes a poor decision or does not get the results they want all the time. But this idea of self sabotaging and self-defeating behavior is really problematic when it becomes insidious and a pattern rather than an exception.

What Do Researchers Say?

Great question, I'm glad we asked. In writing material for The Recovery Club I promised jargon free and easy to understand information. I think it is important for you to know that material presented did not just come off the top of my head, there is foundation for it.

Rather than quote sentence by sentence from research papers, I will give you a composite of what was likely to have caused self-defeating behaviors and where they come from. We talked before very briefly about modeling being a very effective means of learning, and that unfortunately, many of us were raised in less than fully functional families.

People with self-defeating and self sabotaging behaviors often have some of these five characteristics in common:

1. - They may come from family systems where behavior was inconsistent.
2. - Often there is a history of abandonment or detachment

disorder.

3. - Many have a history of not getting their developmental needs met, or knowing how ask.

4. - Come from families with a 'no talk', or 'don't let and see you sweat rule.'

5. - They may have incidents of abuse in the past, or present.

One concept that was put forth that we'll provide for your consideration is this: because our needs were not met as children by our care givers, we have a great deal of low self worth and shame. Shame is a belief that we are defective inside, at the core.

It is only normal to have our needs recognized and met. Unfortunately, that is not happening. What we learn are various ways to get attention.

1. Some to try to be as pleasing, hard working, and worthy as possible... they turn into the overachievers.

OR

2. For others, acting and out in a negative sense is a way to get attention. Unfortunately, this is not the best way to get your internal needs met.

OK, let's try to string this all together and hopefully, it will make some sense. The dialogue in your head might run like this. Here we go...

"I've never been able to get my emotional needs met; as a kid I raising my hand saying Mommy, Daddy, look at me, look at me. I was ignored, or worse belittled, or told I could do better. I tried harder and harder but it was never good enough. This creates the emotion of shame which becomes deeply internalized into the core of my being. I am not worthy, I am never good enough, but ironically I keep trying harder and harder. Now here is where the self sabotage and self-defeating behavior comes in. I am right on the brink of success, finally proving to the people around me, and maybe even myself that I am worthy, capable and good. But because of all that shame that I grew up

with, I 'know inside' I am not good, so I mess things up just when successes in sight."

As I said before, if the shoe fits wear it. Maybe not all people in addiction recovery have been through a little life scenario as I've described it. But man, as I was writing that it had a definite ring of familiarity within me and from stories of people in recovery that I've heard.

You Might Have Self Defeating Behaviors If:

1. Honesty it difficult for you and you exaggerate the truth
2. You continue to engage in unhealthy habits such as smoking, drug or alcohol use, or over indulgence in destructive behavior.
3. Right on the brink of success 'something happens' that screws it all up
4. You set goals, but never achieve them
5. You feel superior or inferior to everybody else
6. You're always making excuses
7. You have a lot of self doubt
8. You have unrealistic expectations
9. You worry too much and have a great deal of anxiety
10. Feelings of rage, anger, shame, or resentment can be overwhelming and paralyze you into inaction
11. I heard this one all the time, 'You're not living up to your potential.'
12. You're a big procrastinator
13. Your view of the world is something like 'we are all born to suffer and die.'

14. You do things that jeopardize your emotional, physical and financial stability
15. You stay 'stuck' in situations and feel there is no way out
16. You have a lot of "poor me" attitudes, nobody understands me
17. You often belittle yourself and those around you
18. You stay stuck in abusive relationships

OK, that's enough of that, kind of reminded be of that comedian... 'You might be a Redneck if...'

I wanted to give you a flavor of the attitudes and mindsets that can generate a posture of self-sabotage and self defeat. I wasn't my intention to drive your self-esteem into the ground.

Let's move into the solution...

8 Tips To Help Stop Self-Sabotage

1. What is your payoff?

I am a big believer in the idea that every action we take is done for reason. What is it that you really get from self-defeating behaviors and attitudes? Is it negative attention? A 'reason' to go back to using? Ask yourself "What is REALLY going on here?"

2. Avoid situations that trigger extreme emotional reactions.

This is one of the items we spoke about in the section on triggers and cues. Extreme emotional reactions can provoke a relapse. If you can't avoid this situation, at least try to get a realistic perspective on it. Ask yourself "How important is it really?"

3. Take a look at your past.

Just don't get stuck there. Try to identify where your belief system came from. Once you have identified where those defeating attitudes came from, *let go of them*. It is OK to acknowledge the past, but not to use it as an excuse to continue your behavior into the present.

4. Challenge staying in the victim role.

Again, in recognizing the past we're not denying that bad things may happen to you. Try reclaiming your personal power by reframing your experiences as a source of strength. Not everyone has gone through what you have and survived. The process of growth in recovery is about regaining self empowerment.

5. Stop blaming people.

Being the victim and blaming others, results in one particular sneaky, self destructive attitude. That is the attitude of not needing to change. Recovery is all about change, but, if everything is always somebody else's fault, why do I need to change? In the victim role, it is 'poor me, look what they have done to me' I couldn't stop it from happening, so I will be a perpetual victim and take no action.

6. First thought wrong.

Man, do I hate this one. My sponsor used to tell me this all the time. People who have a habit of self sabotaging have got to come to accept that they are never upset for the reasons that first come to mind. First thought wrong. We need to look at the underlying issues, again, ask the question 'What's really going on here?' Sometimes we will take those negative thoughts and try to make them come true by doing something really destructive. We create a self-fulfilling prophesy

7. We need to change the thoughts we have about ourselves.

Stop the negative self talk. Start thoroughly and rigorously questioning where your beliefs and perceptions are coming from. Don't judge yourself as you're doing this, become willing to let go of those negative thoughts. Stop defending your 'right' to be wrong.

8. Are you done suffering yet?

Just as this question is a key motivator to move from using drugs and alcohol into recovery, it is a prime motivator to start changing our self-defeating attitudes and actions. Nothing changes if nothing changes. How much longer are you willing to keep stepping on your own feet, tripping and falling down? Maybe, just maybe, **it's time to stop the pain.**

When we were discussing working with emotions and feelings in the previous module, we introduced the concept of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. We learned that the key to affecting emotional change is to challenge our beliefs about a particular action or situation. The same principle applies when we start to try to change self-defeating and self sabotaging behaviors.

Looking at the other way around, it might be possible to see that our belief system can be the motivator of our actions. What we mean by this is we act more on our beliefs, then on logical solutions and practical approaches. In fact, you may have tried logic and being reasonable, yet still things somehow get messed up. You continue to make poor and sometimes dangerous decisions and unhealthy choices time after time again.

Your belief system may be thought of as being responsible for what you look for in intimate relationships, the type of lifestyle you lead, and the work you do. If you have internalized messages of shame, being defective, and having low self-esteem, these can influence your actions and out comes.

We keep trying to fill "The hole in the soul" but it never quite works.