



Serene Scene

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LONG BEACH[®]

SERENE CENTER

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I WILL DO IT MY WAY Addiction and Defiance

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Addiction creates a multitude of symptoms, some of which are used to diagnose the disease, and others which vary from individual to individual. It is relatively simple to identify symptoms such as tolerance, withdrawal, and physiological malities such as sclerosis or jaundice. It is not as simple to identify psychological and sociological symptoms; and it is very difficult to identify these more elusive symptoms early in the recovery process.

Defiance is a part of many addict's recovery process: especially early on in the process.

The American Heritage Dictionary Fourth Edition defines defiance as;

1. The act or an example of defying; bold resistance to an opposing force or authority.
2. Intentionally contemptuous behavior or attitude; readiness to contend or resist.



I WILL DO IT MY WAY Addiction and Defiance

Andrew Martin, MBA, CADC II

Defiance at Your Service

For the addict, the attitude of defiance can permeate many parts of their life in recovery. The role that defiance plays in the addict's life serves them in many ways: and mostly in counterproductive ways to their goal of being in recovery.

Perhaps the most deceptive role defiance plays in recovery is to fool the addict into thinking they are acting to take control of their lives. In the process of recovery, it can be extremely difficult to deflate the addict's ego to a point where a humble approach to life becomes the norm. Because the addict ego is so powerful, it is often necessary for the addict to think they are behaving on behalf of their own wellness despite what people in their support system are advising. If the addict chooses a defiant approach to the advice given by their support system, it can give the addict the false impression that they are taking charge of their life and acting responsibly. In many instances, the reality is that they are still functioning inside a distorted viewpoint and are taking action to support addict thinking and behavior: the antithesis of what they are intending to do when they act in a defiant way.

Defiance is relatively easy to identify for an outsider observing the addict, however it is far more difficult for the addict to recognize in himself or herself. Often, even if the defiant attitude is pointed out, the addict will not acknowledge the behavior as defiant, they will likely call it taking care of himself or herself instead.

It is this deceptive and misleading characteristic of defiance that inflates the ego of the addict: he or she is convinced that taking action according to his or her own rules will be better than following the suggestion or direction of another person. This is particularly prevalent when the addict is interacting with an authority figure such as a parent, spouse, doctor or clinician. In the struggle to quickly regain some control of the addict's life, he or she will push aside the wisdom of others in favor of his or her own often-distorted view of what should happen.

The fundamental complication that the addict's defiance adds to the challenge of recovery is that all of the drama, angst, frustration, anxiety, friction, worry, fear, and anger caused by the defiant behavior serve only as a distraction from the spiritual component of recovery. The spiritual experience is a process by which the addict discovers in himself or herself that they no longer need to be in control and impress all the time, and that being themselves is enough to command love from those around them and from himself or herself as well. It follows that, as long as defiance is a part of the addict's routine life coping skills, the addict will not discover the spiritual experience as it will be trumped by the addict's sense of self-importance and willfulness.



To this point in this article defiance has been presented in the context of a thought process and behavior that the addict is somewhat oblivious to. However, there is another form of defiance that is more insidious.

I WILL DO IT MY WAY Addiction and Defiance

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I am Going to do it Anyway

Defiant self-reliance occurs when the addict recognizes the healthy actions they should take, yet they choose not to follow those actions because someone in their support system has made the suggestion. In essence, the addict is acting in a less healthy way simply because someone with authority has suggested a more healthy way. If one were to put this type of behavior into words it would sound like this, "I know I should be doing something different, but I am not going to because you told me how to, so I am going to do it in my own different way."

Sometimes the addict may state their opinions outright, and other times the addict may internalize. When he or she states their defiant position it is easy to identify that he or she will continue to act out until he or she learns that such acting out will be detrimental. Sometimes talking through the defiant self-reliant thought process can have an impact and help encourage change in the addict. However, when the addict passively integrates the defiant self-reliance into his or her thinking and behavioral process, he or she will act in unhealthy ways without giving notice of intention to do so. This form of defiant self-reliance is extremely difficult to understand for most people who do not have experience with it.

Regardless of the form of defiant self-reliance; this type of juvenile, rebellious, and defiant thought process only leads the addict back into old behaviors and away from recovery behaviors. The addict is aware that they are behaving in this way as well, he or she just cannot come to allow themselves to be humble enough to accept any suggestion or instruction that they feel will demoralize their ego. The insidious part of defiant self-reliance is that accepting other's suggestions or instructions can be most liberating, and is likely the most defiant thing he or she can do because it is the very antithesis of his or her inclination.

Dealing With It

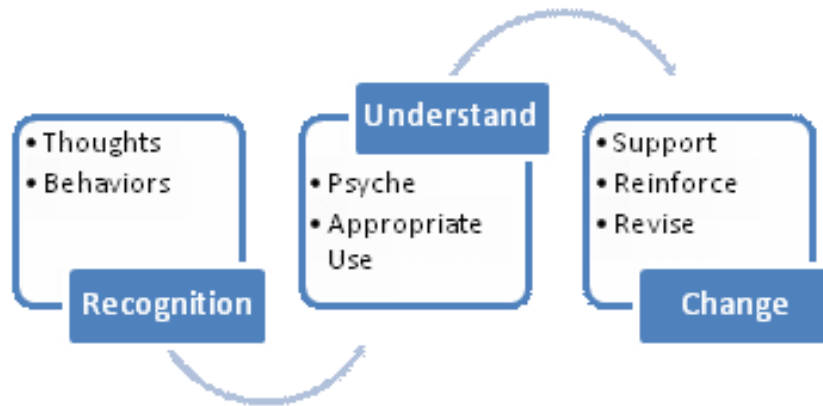
Defiance must be dealt with by the addict in order for him or her to progress into a spiritual experience that will lead to personal change in thought process and behavior. The first step to moving toward a more healthy attitude of acceptance is for the addict to acknowledge the role that defiance is playing in his or her decision making. Once the addict recognizes the unhealthy role defiance is playing, he or she must learn how to recognize the defiant behavior as it happens, and then create the skill of linking the defiant behavior to the defiant thought process. This is difficult work and is usually processed with the assistance of a clinician.

Once the addict has a thorough understanding of the defiant mechanism in their psyche, he or she must embrace its existence and learn how to use it only when appropriate. In doing so, the addict is able to retain a valuable the useful part of themselves, and only apply it when it is beneficial to his or her goal of a long-term fulfilling lifestyle of recovery.

It is important to note that the addict will be changing one of his or his most reliable coping skills for dealing with life. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to replace the void in coping mechanisms with the support of trusted others. The addict will not initially know how to make decisions without the use of defiance; and even if willing, he or she may fall back on old behaviors out of fear and insecurity. It is clear that the support system around the addict must be understanding, supportive, open and honest with the addict as the changes process takes place. Over time, the addict's cognitive process and behaviors will change to a more healthy form. **SS**

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SERENE CENTER WORKSHOP SERIES

Next Exit



A group education workshop series for all those wishing to understand the complex aspects of chemical dependency, substance abuse, impulse control and the treatment of addictive disorders. The alcoholic/addict, sponsors, family members, clinicians and other interested parties should attend. These are open workshops and there is no cost for participation.



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