



# Serene Scene

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## TOO STUBBORN

Andrew Martin, MBA, CADC II, SAP



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Maybe you know someone who is too stubborn for their own good? Someone, who despite the advice and recommendations of all those who love him/her, are so reluctant to change that they continue in self-destructive behavior. An individual who argues nearly every point, apparently for nothing more than the sake of argument. A person who is a self-described intellect, who has the ability to speak quickly and act as if they are an authority on things whether they are an expert or not. Someone who appears proud of their stubborn behavior, and does not make noticeable efforts to change their behavior unless a crisis is born from their actions. There are many addicts, recovering addicts, and family members of addicts that generally fit this description.

There is an inherent challenge with this type of stubborn behavior: it is learned over an extended time and becomes an essential part of the individual's identity, as a tool for protection, and as an instrument of self-affirmation. A stubborn person does not change their behavior, so they will always feel safer than if they did change their behavior to something they have never experienced before. The unknown is frightening and causes anxiety and stress, and to the stubborn person, the anxiety of change is perceived as greater than the anxiety of staying in the current life circumstance. Eventually, life circumstance can become a crisis, and then the stubborn person will change because the stress of change is less than the stress of the crisis. However, as soon as the crisis is abated, the stubborn individual loses the motivation for change once again.

The stubborn person's identity is also reinforced through their stubborn behavior. Each time they engage in an argument or confrontation, they will not give up until they perceive themselves as the winner. This type of self-affirmation provides them with a sense of empowerment and superiority which they lack in all other areas of their being. In this way, the stubborn individual is able to justify their stubborn nature because it is a primary generator of self-worth.

When an addict is a stubborn person they have a much harder time finding recovery. The type of stubborn behaviors described here are not isolated to interactions with other people. This type of stubbornness is deeply ingrained in the psychology of the addict.

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Addiction is treated with attention to the physiology, psychology and sociology (which includes spirituality) of the addict. The physiological component of addiction is clear science, and usually the stubborn addict is accepting of the scientific proof fairly quickly. However, the psychology and sociology of the addict are very difficult to treat; add the stubborn behaviors and change is incredibly difficult to achieve. The psychology of the addict is already impaired, cognitive distortions and reduced capacity to problem solve and apply abstract thought, are symptoms of addiction that last several years into recovery. One of the primary tools used in the treatment of acceptance of the recovering addict, they are able to redefine their perceptions of life circumstances such that they are more aware of reality. However, a stubborn person will inherently argue that life circumstances are exactly what they think they are, and that it is the other people around them that do not understand what reality is. Because the frustration is so high when dealing with such a stubborn individual, it is often the result that others give up and let the stubborn person have their way: this, in turn, reinforces the stubborn addict's idea that they are right and everyone else is wrong. Oddly, even when the stubborn addict agrees that their perception of reality is skewed, they will often argue the point anyway because they simply do not know any other way to behave.

It is common for the stubborn addict, who has been engaged in treatment with a clinician for some time, to have an increasing number of moments in which their stubborn behavior pauses and some growth and change occurs. This type of progress takes a very long time because each time some growth and change occurs, the natural reaction of the stubborn addict is to put himself/herself back into their protective comfort zone wherein they become stubborn and argumentative again. Treatment can be very slow going, and only when the clinician is well versed on how to approach this type of patient will progress proceed.

As mentioned earlier, it is often the circumstance that a family member, or multiple family members, also possesses the gift of stubborn behavior. When the addict and the family member are both stubborn, there is a perfect recipe for little constructive change. Both parties will argue with one another until one party eventually feels as if they have won, or until one party or both parties simply give up in frustration. There can be no progress in this relationship. Both parties must undergo treatment to reduce the incredible power of their stubborn behaviors. Often the non-addict, who is stubborn as well, will insist that the problem lies with the addict



and therefor no effort needs to be given to the treatment of himself/herself. This belief system is absolutely false; treatment must be engaged by both parties in order to produce a better quality of life for each.

Stubborn behavior can be categorized as a self-centered behavior. As discussed earlier, the rewards of a stubborn demeanor include a sense of safety and self-affirmation. It is also true that the sense of safety and self-affirmation is at the expense of others around the stubborn person. This type of narcissistic trait is often a part of addiction and family systems with addiction. The trait of addiction is so strong that, with treatment, many individuals will recognize their stubborn behavior as unhealthy and identify it when they are acting out. However, they will choose not to change it because they are so stubborn. It does not seem logical for the stubborn person to stay stuck in an unhealthy behavior which is why this form of stubborn behavior is linked to distorted thinking processes.

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As with so many psychological dysfunctions, excessive stubborn attitudes and behaviors inhibit the individual from creating a better quality of life. With intervention and treatment, it is possible to slowly improve the addict's and the family members' ability to engage in conversation without stubborn behaviors.

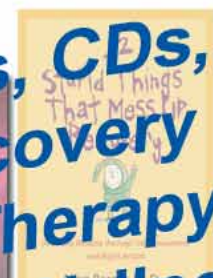
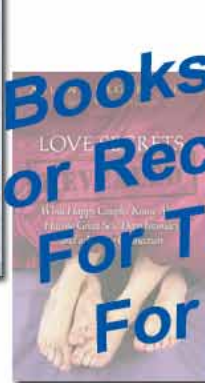
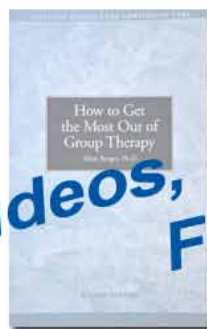
If you are in a life circumstance that required you to interact with a stubborn person, it may be helpful to remember that their stubborn behavior is not a personal attack. It is simply the result of their inability to behave in any other way. Do not engage with them in their stubborn methods. Instead dismiss yourself from the conversation using a simple phrase that is not confrontational. Al-Anon suggest the phrase, "you may be right." If you are not happy with this advice it may be that you have a bit of stubborn in yourself. If that is the case, and you feel it is necessary to engage in the arguments in order to show the other party that you are right: well, "you may be right."

See how well that works! **SS**

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