



# Serene Scene

Transitional Sober Living Magazine

LONG BEACH<sup>®</sup>

**SERENE CENTER**

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# HEALTHY SELF VS ADDICTIVE SELF

Andrew Martin, MBA, CADC II



The concept of multiple selves originates in the idea that each of us behaves differently depending on the situation at hand. As an example, I behave differently in the workplace than I do in the comfort of my own home. Multiple selves can also apply to how we think about the people, places, and things around us. As an example, I think about my health differently when I am swamped with things to do than I think about my health when I am living a balanced lifestyle. Below are a sampling of the various selves we all encounter:

Selves	Description
Differentiated Selves	Home life self vs. Workplace self
Contradictory Selves	I am health vs. I am an alcoholic
Real & Ideal Selves	I exercise when I want to vs. I exercise daily
True & False Selves	I am how I behave vs. I am how I think I behave
Possible & Potential Selves	I am able vs. I can be made able

When discussing an individual afflicted with the disease of addiction, it may be helpful to recognize the multiple selves in the context of the addict self vs. the healthy self. For an addict, the behaviors and thought processes of the addict self are substantially different from those of the healthy self.

The healthy self is comprised of several basic abilities which, when combined, create our true self/authentic self as represented by this gold dot:



# HEALTHY SELF VS ADDICTIVE SELF

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For the addict in early recovery, the healthy self is weakened by life experiences. These life experiences have, over time, severely impacted the thought processes of the addict, and therefore have also impacted the behaviors of the addict. The weakening of the true self/authentic self is significant because the process of rebuilding these basic abilities is an arduous one.

What makes the process even more difficult is the power that resides in the addict self, because the addict self is comprised of primarily unhealthy thoughts and behaviors:

The influence of the false self and the pseudo self commit the addict to thinking that they are behaving in ways that are acceptable to societal norms, that are beneficial for the addict, and that they can continue to masquerade as someone else indefinitely despite the consequences of their actions.

The influence of defiant self-reliance insures that the addict will continue to take unhealthy actions despite all evidence to the contrary. The addict will ignore obvious indicators that old behavior is damaging, and will continue to carry out destructive behaviors without consideration for themselves.

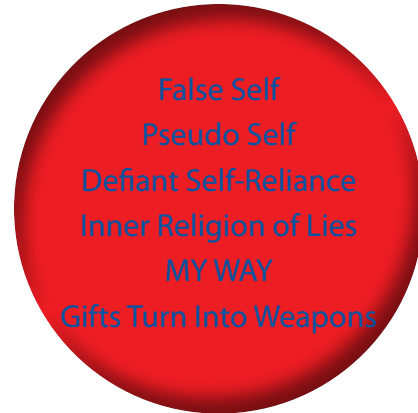
The addict will be persistent in the belief that they cannot live without their drug of choice. This belief system is as strong as any devout religious belief, regardless of the addict's inability to define what living really means to them. They will take it on faith that they cannot live without their drug of choice.

The addict will attempt to control everything in their lives. The perception of control will be false, and the addict will create a false reality wherein they are in control. The willfulness of the addict is unrelenting and will cause corrupt, coercive, and forceful actions to keep the impression that things are under control.

The natural gifts of the addict will be used to manipulate and distort reality. The addict's charm will be used to trick people into compliance. The addict's wit will be targeted at people who are not quite as quick to respond. The addict's attractiveness will be used to gain the advantage over others seeking friendship and companionship. In this way, the addict's gifts will be turned into weapons.

Many addicts view this struggle between the healthy self and the addictive self as a war of two powers.

Many will intuitively frame the relationship between the healthy self and the addictive self as a war between two extremes: the healthy self on the side of good, and the addict self on the side of evil. The reality is that the healthy self and the addict self are neither good nor evil: they simply are both a part of the addict. This is important to understand and believe because if the addict leaves his/her understanding as a war, then the most powerful side will always win. And, in early recovery, the addict self is far more powerful.



## HEALTHY SELF VS ADDICTIVE SELF

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Because the relative power of the healthy self is significantly less than the power of the addict self, it is necessary to find a way to even the balance without going to war. If the addict attempts to fight a war, the addict self will win every time as willfulness only serves to feed the addict self and weaken the healthy self.

There are several tools that can be effectively used to strengthen the healthy self. The amazing thing about these tools is that none of them are complicated, or incredibly time consuming, or even very difficult to the individual that is willing to try them for a while.

The first tactical tool used to strengthen the healthy self is simply to ask people for help. This sounds simple, but it can be a tremendous effort for an addict in early recovery to overcome the self-conscious shame based persona and ego that has dominated the addict for a very long time. However, it may be useful to know, that the simple act of asking someone for reasonable help, and then receiving that help, is perhaps one of the most humane and spiritual things that we do as human beings. Asking and receiving help, or being asked and then delivering help, gives us pleasure and purpose.

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The second tactical tool used to strengthen the healthy self is to remain abstinent from all mood altering addictive substances. This may seem obvious, however the simple truth is that many addicts in early recovery turn to dissimilar drugs and medications in order to relieve symptoms of post acute withdrawal, anxiety, depression, and other common ailments. Many of the medications sought are addictive substances, and while they may not be the primary drug of choice for the addict, the drugs still activate the chronically malfunctioning reward/pleasure center in the nucleus accumbens within the mid brain. Any externally induced activation of the reward/pleasure center will cause the instant imbalance of neurotransmitters in the brain, and the body will immediately go into craving mode. While in craving mode, cognitive work and behavioral modification work are not effective. Therefore, it is critical that mood altering addictive substances, whether licit or illicit, should not be taken unless absolutely necessary to abate more severe craving.

The third tactical tool used is 4-second willpower. It takes humans about two seconds to encounter a stimulus of any sort (e.g. people, places, things, behaviors, feelings) and then come to several conclusions about how that stimulus will affect us. Then, it takes about two more seconds for humans to use our experience, rational thought, and abstract thought to make a decision about how to take action if necessary. This is a very important trait to understand for those in early recovery. It essentially means that the healthy self has four seconds to think about a situation and then begin healthy action, or the addict self will take over. Another way to view this phenomenon is to understand that the willpower the healthy self has is much weaker than that of the addict self; however, in the first four seconds it does not matter and the healthy self can take steps to launch into action before the addict self does. Through using 4-second willpower, the recovering addict can drastically influence the choices made on a daily basis.

The final tactical tool used to strengthen the healthy self is to form strong alliances. Alliances with other

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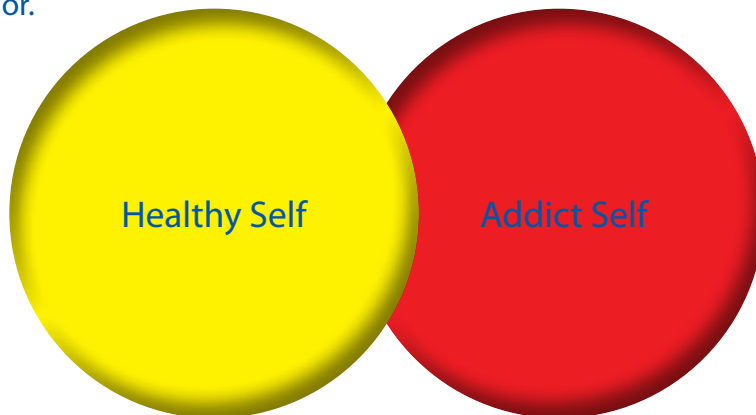
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people that understand addiction, the sometimes-irrational thought and behavior brought on by addiction, and the occasional defiance, mood swings, selfishness, and laziness occurring because of the disease of addiction. People in alliances help the recovering addict to check his/her thinking with individuals that are caring and watchful of the influence of the addict self. Also, the alliance is a place of fellowship and safety for the recovering addict: a place where everyone can be open, honest and candid about what they are thinking and feeling, and therefore the alliance is also therapeutic.



Early in this article the concept of disarming the war between the healthy self and the addict self was presented. It is clear that creating a war against two factions that reside inside of one body does not make much sense. If the battle takes place within the same body, then any damage to one side will, obviously, also equally damage the other side. So a new concept in how to address the challenge of the power struggle between the healthy self and the addictive self is necessary. The most effective strategy is to negotiate. Negotiation between the healthy self and the addict self can take place for an eternity and neither side has to win.

In order to effectively negotiate, the recovering addict must accept that BOTH the healthy self and the addict self are an integral part of him/her, and that neither should be pushed away, hidden, propped up on a pedestal, or displayed with reckless abandon. By accepting one's selves, the recovering addict will be inviting mutual understanding, and as a result, the internal fighting will stop. A peaceful negotiation can then take place between the healthy self and the addict. The healthy self will begin to gain strength due to the efforts outlined earlier in this article, and the addict self will simply remain idle because it will not be fed by willfulness or unhealthy behavior.



Over time, the healthy self will grow powerful; eventually the healthy self's power will overcome that of the addictive self. Gradually the real self, the true self, and the able self will return. However, the addict self will always be present and cannot be ignored. The negotiation with the addict self must continue throughout the lifetime of the recovering addict.