

Understanding a Key Issue in Emotional Sobriety: Our Emotional Center of Gravity

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Emotional sobriety has recently come into focus as critical to establish a solid and stable foundation for recovery, and for very good reasons. In fact I consider it to be the missing link in treatment. We are finding that many people who seemed to be doing well in their recovery ended up relapsing because they didn't know how to deal with disappointment, rejection, fear, boredom, resentment, emotional pain or anxiety. In fact there is a deadly myth that sobriety will be the answer to all of our problems. The reality is that once we put the plug in the jug the real work begins. Getting clean and sober gets us out of a bad place but as Earnie Larsen warned us, getting out of a bad place is not the same as getting into a better place. Emotional sobriety is the key to getting into a better place.

Emotional sobriety is attained when ***what we do*** determines our emotional well being rather than allowing our emotional well being to be overly influenced by others. To realize this state of mind we need to learn how to soothe ourselves and keep our emotional center of gravity well balanced over both of our feet. Our physical center of gravity provides an analogy that will help make sense out of this concept.

When our weight is equally balanced over both of our feet and our feet are spaced a shoulder width apart, then gravity passes through the center of our physical being and connects us to the center of the earth. In this stance we can quickly move in any direction and best respond to the demands of any situations we encounter. When we are in a balanced athletic stance we can realize our full potential as an athlete. This has implications emotionally as well.

When our emotional center of gravity is firmly balanced over our own two feet, then just like when we are physically balanced, we are emotionally grounded and balanced and can realize our potential as a human being.

When we are emotionally centered we are emotionally resilient and can respond well to whatever condition or disturbing situation that confronts us. But similar to what happens when we are not physically grounded, when we reality does not conform to our expectations or when we do not get the validation or approval from others, we are knocked off balance.

Emotional sobriety cannot be attained as long as we are emotionally dependent. Our level of emotional dependency is proportionate to our level of maturity. Maturity occurs when we transcend environmental support and support ourselves.

Unfortunately most of us have anchored our emotional center of gravity in the opinion of others or in expectations about how things should be. These unenforceable rules are quite problematic because they makes us dependent on our environment and those in it to feel OK. So how do we end up so out of balance, making people, places and things so darn important. Not surprisingly the problem starts quite early in life.

There's a moment very early in life that we make a decision that determines the direction or trajectory of our development. We can either grow according to show we are or not. So instead of committing our energies in actualizing who we truly are we dedicate our energies to actualizing a concept of who we think we should be. We mistakenly concluded that being the self that we truly are wouldn't be enough to ensure that we be loved, belong, and be accepted - to be OK. So we imagined a self that we should be in order to ensure our well being. We then set forth to actualize this idealized image which generated a tyranny of shoulds. When this happened out emotional center of gravity was relocated to the center of the false self rather than being grounded in our real self.

To ensure our emotional security we became control freaks. We molded ourselves into an idealized self in order to control others, to get others to think about us and feel about us the way we wanted them to. Of course this solution is never a total solution so when this didn't work we turned to alcohol and other drugs to give us freedom from our existential pain. These are the causes and conditions that set us up to become an addict in the first place.

Therefore it does not come as a surprise that once we put the plug in the jug or get clean from drugs other than alcohol that we are confronted with the painful realization that we have not grown up, emotionally or spiritually. We have no idea on how to keep our emotional center of gravity over our own two feet. Well, that is what emotional sobriety is all about. Keeping our center of gravity over our own two feet.

One way of keeping balance is to not let other peoples limited perceptions define us. When we are grounded then we don't let someone else opinion defiance us, what we know about ourselves defines us. So keep this in mind next time you are struggling with what someone else thinks or opines about you. For more tips on holding on to yourself read *12 Smart Things to do When the Booze and Drugs are Gone* and my *12 More Stupid Things that Mess Up Recovery*.