Twelve Core Concepts of Emotional Sobriety: Clinical Considerations and Interventions

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Agenda for Today’s Training

Define emotional sobriety.
Explore the 12 core concepts of emotional sobriety.
Describe several clinical interventions to promote emotional sobriety.
Discover some new possibilities in your clinical work.
Defining Emotional Sobriety

Step 12

“Here we begin to practice all Twelve Steps of the program in our daily lives so that we and those about us may find emotional sobriety.”

I think many oldsters who have put our 'booze cure' to severe but successful tests still find they often lack emotional sobriety. Perhaps they will be the spear head for the next major development in AA, the development of much more real maturity and balance (which is to say, humility) in our relations with ourselves, with our fellows, and with God.

“A Possible Definition of Emotional Sobriety

“Emotional Sobriety is when the best in you does the thinking and talking for all of you.

This state of mind is achieved when what you do becomes the determining force in your emotional well being rather than allowing your emotional well being to be overly influenced by external events or by what others are or are not doing.”

Allen Berger, Ph.D. - 2017
“Self-responsibility begins with the recognition that I am ultimately responsible for my own existence; that no one else is here on earth to serve me, to take care of me, or fill my needs.”


We create emotional sobriety when we live optimally by taking full responsibility for our own emotional well being.
Core Concept 1: Develop an Awareness of the Gravitational Pull of Emotional Dependency
“...in a sense we create ourselves through what we are willing to take responsibility for (p. 103, 1997).

Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life.”

Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier by Bill Wilson (1958)

Suddenly, I realized what the matter was. My basic flaw had always been dependence, almost absolute dependence, on people or circumstances to supply me with prestige, security, and the like. Failing to get these things according to my perfectionist dreams and specifications, I had fought for them. And when defeat came, so did my depression.
“Our dependency makes slaves out of us, especially if this dependency is a dependency of our self-esteem. If you need encouragement, praise, pats on the back from everybody, then you make everybody your judge.”

“We are always trying to get out of our emotional jail…. Mostly we try by begging, threatening, or pleasing other people, trying to get them to do it for us.”
“Low self-esteem causes an excessive preoccupation with gaining the approval and avoiding the disapproval of others, hungering for validation and support at every turn of our existence.”

Nathaniel Branden (1981)

“If our freedom depends exclusively on another person allowing it, we lose our own sense of the part we must exercise in protecting and defining our own psychological space…”

For the most part our emotional dependency is unconscious, it operates outside of awareness.

Core Concept 2:
We need to surrender our special status which tells us that we can impose our expectations on others and on life itself.
“Expectations lead to the erosion of any relationship. The myth that the resolution of loneliness will result because we have found an intimate one-on-one relationship is a cop out. It begins a toxic process which dissipates the mutual nourishment that occurs when both people are committed to sustaining nourishing interaction and growth of their separate selves.”


Core Concept 3:
We need to be aware of and surrender our unenforceable rules.
Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier by Bill Wilson (1958)

......... if we examine every disturbance we have, great or small, we will find at the root of it some unhealthy dependence and its consequent demand. Let us, with God's help, continually surrender these hobbling demands. Then we can be set free to live and love: we may then be able to gain emotional sobriety.

“One of the truly basic problems is that our society bases the marital relationship almost completely on love and then imposes demands on it that love can never solely fulfill.

If you love me you won’t do anything without me.
If you love me you’ll do what I say.
If you love me you’ll give me what I want.
If you love me you’ll know what I want before I ask.

These kinds of practices soon make love into a kind of blackmail, I call the clutch.”

Virginia Satir, Ph.D. - Peopledmaking.
“Growing in a healthy way means liberating those evolutionary constructive forces inherent in man which urge him to realize his given potentialities.”

Karen Horney, M.D.

“As long as you fight a symptom, it will become worse. If you take responsibility for what you are doing to yourself, how you produce your symptoms, how you produce your illness, how you produce your existence, you get in touch with yourself - growth begins, integration begins (p. 178).”


Core Concept 4:
Maturation involves moving away from environmental support towards self-support.
“…maturing is the transcendence from environmental support to self-support. (p.28).”


Core Concept 5:
Refuse to live a life based on ‘shoulds.’
"Many people dedicate their lives to actualize a concept of what they should be like, rather than to actualize themselves...This is again the curse of the ideal. The curse that you should not be what you are."


"The integrity of a person is impaired because of the alienation from the self …. all these forces lead to … a diminished capacity for being sincere with oneself."

Karen Horney, M.D.
“One of the hallmarks of creative intimacy is the absence of ‘shoulds’ or ‘musts’ or other demands on ourselves or others.”

Dr. Jerry Greenwald (1975). Creative Intimacy: How to break the patterns that poison your relationships. Simon & Shuster: NY.

“In responding to should demands, the individual plays roles not supported by his genuine needs. He becomes both phony and phobic. He shies away from seeing his limitations, and plays roles unsupported by his potential… He constructs an imaginary ideal of how he should be and not how he actually is.”

Fritz Perls, Gestalt Therapy and Human Potential. 1975, p. 76.
“By turning his perfectionistic demands toward himself, the neurotic tears himself to pieces in order to live up to his unrealistic ideal. Though perfection is often labeled an ideal, it is actually a cheap curse which punishes and tortures both the self and others for not living up to an impossible goal.”


“The concept of perfection is such an ideal. In responding, the individual develops a phony facade to impress others what a good boy he is. Demands for perfection limit the individual’s ability function within himself, in the therapeutic situation, in marriage, as well as other social situations.”

Emotional sobriety is the result of true independence of spirit.

Core Concept 6: Emotional sobriety requires us to maintain our balance by keeping our emotional center of gravity grounded in our truth.
“Our low self-esteem creates a serious problem. It means that to an extreme extent we base our experience of ourselves on what we think others think about us.”

Virginia Satir, Ph.D.

The Shift in the Location of the Emotional Center of Gravity in Emotional Sobriety

I'm OK even if _______?
Core Concept 7: Emotional sobriety is about looking for a creative adaptation to our problems.

There’s a space between the Stimulus and our Response. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom - try to live there.

Viktor Frankl, M.D.

The Essence of Emotional Sobriety
Core Concept 8: Emotional sobriety requires us to stop playing the blame game.

“If responsibility and blame are fused in our minds, then our defenses will marshal to avoid any responsibility. However, the self-contempt of blame is quite different from the self-empowerment of responsibility. By suspending self-blame, we can look more calmly and soberly at how we may be responsible for our choices and accountable for our actions. Only then will we become wiser and stronger. Only then can we grow emotionally and spiritually.”

John Amodeo, Ph.D. Love and Betrayal (1994).
Core Concept 9: Emotional sobriety occurs when we claim our experience rather than letting our experience claim us.

“At the core of this alienation from the actual-self... is the loss of the feeling of being an active determining force in our own lives.”

Karen Horney, M.D.

Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization
Core Concept 10: Emotional sobriety requires us to cultivate nourishing attitudes towards our problems, our selves, and others.

“The therapeutic value in the disillusioning process lies in the possibility that, with the weakening of the obstructive forces, the constructive forces of the real self have a chance to grow.”

Karen Horney, M.D.

“It is not possible for me to relate to others intimately and allow (and enjoy) their full expression of themselves if I have not discovered how to do this for myself.”

Dr. Jerry Greenwald (1975). Creative Intimacy: How to break the patterns that poison your relationships. Simon & Shuster: NY.

Core Concept 11: Experiencing trouble in recovery doesn’t mean something is wrong with your program.
Trouble points to the next step in our personal development.

Core Concept 12: When you face trouble - add more self.
In order to be more personal in a relationship, you need to stop taking your partner’s behavior personally.

Walter Kempler, M.D.
Personal Communication (1985)

“When something goes wrong I try to make a picture in my mind of a circle with myself in the middle and then I ask myself what part in my problem are my thoughts playing, my fears, ...my expectations, my interpretations.....and my lack of faith to be able to grow.”

Virginia Satir, Ph.D.
“We must not allow other people’s limited perceptions to define us.”

Virginia Satir, Ph.D.

The problem is not the problem, it is how we cope with the problem that creates the problem.
Emotional Sobriety begins by helping our clients become aware of their emotional dependency and how they react to its gravitational pull.
In relationships, my lot in life changes not when I first demand change in others, but when I seriously take stock in myself.


A Suggestion from Bill W.

“If we examine every disturbance we have, great or small, we will find at the root of it some unhealthy dependency and its consequent unhealthy demand.”
### Emotional Dependency Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upsetting Event</th>
<th>Your Reaction - What you did (be specific).</th>
<th>Unreasonable Expectation: Claim or Demand or Unenforceable Rule</th>
<th>Unhealthy Dependency</th>
<th>What I need to do to stay centered.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She didn’t celebrate my 6 months sober.</td>
<td>I got upset and withdrew.</td>
<td>I want her to feel good about what I am doing regardless of what I have done to her.</td>
<td>The value of my sobriety depends on her reaction.</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sentence Completions
Exaggerating
What Is

Experimentation -
loosening up,
trying things on.
Move from talking about to enacting as soon as possible.
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