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# Recovery Today

ADDICTION, RECOVERY AND SOBRIETY

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**Long Live  
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**FIVE CORE  
CONCEPTS OF  
EMOTIONAL  
SOBRIETY**

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**INTERVIEW**

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"METAL MULISHA" MOTOCROSS TEAM.

★ ★ **FOR MY FELLOW METH ADDICTS: WHAT RECOVERS?** ★ ★



# Five Core Concepts of Emotional Sobriety

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Bill Wilson identified emotional sobriety as the product of working the Twelve Steps. In his discussion of Step Twelve in **Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions** he wrote, “Here we begin to practice all Twelve Steps of the program in our daily lives so we and those about us may find **emotional sobriety** (106).”

The bad news is that emotional sobriety has been overlooked even though Bill hoped it would become the next major development in the AA program. The good news is that it is finally receiving the attention it deserves as a critical component of optimal recovery.

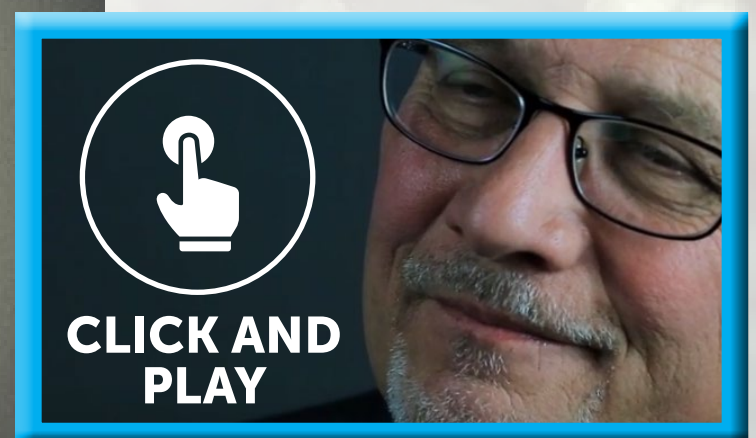
I’ve defined emotional sobriety in the following way: *Emotional sobriety is when the best of you does the thinking and speaking for all of you. This state of mind is achieved when what you do becomes the determining force in how you feel rather than letting your feelings be overly influenced by what others are or are not doing.*

Let’s explore the five core concepts of emotional sobriety. These are:

1. Emotional dependency obstructs emotional sobriety.
2. Maturation is the transcendence of environmental support to self-support.



**Emotional sobriety is about being the determining force in our own emotional well being.**





3. Live in the space between the stimulus and response.
4. Hold on to your emotional center of gravity.
5. Claim your experience rather than let your experience claim you.

### Emotional Dependency

In response to a letter from a California member of Alcoholics Anonymous who was asking for help with his depression, Bill shared what he learned about what caused and eventually

cured his own personal depression. Bill realized that he became depressed because of his “*almost absolute dependence*” on people or circumstances for his prestige, security, and validation.

This means that Bill’s feelings were determined by what happened around him, not within him. This absolute dependency or what I like to call emotional dependency made it impossible for Bill to become the determining force in his own life.

*Emotional sobriety is about being the determining force in our own emotional well being.*

### Emotional Maturation

Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt Therapy, described *maturation as the transcendence of environmental support to self-support*.

This is at the heart of the matter. Emotional sobriety is about growing up and learning to take care of ourselves rather than depending on other people to



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do for us what we aren't doing for ourselves. It means that we become an active participant in our own lives.

*Emotional sobriety is achieved when we learn to support ourselves and take care of ourselves rather than manipulate others to support us or take care of us.*

### **Live in the Space Between the Stimulus and Response**

Viktor Frankl, a brilliant psychiatrist and author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, noted that our job is to try and live in the space between the stimulus and response. In that space lies our growth because in that space lies the power to choose. Exercising choices creates emotional freedom.

*The space between the stimulus and response is where emotional sobriety lives. We live in that space when we restrain ourselves from reacting from pain or anger, and instead let the best of us do the thinking and speaking for all of us.*

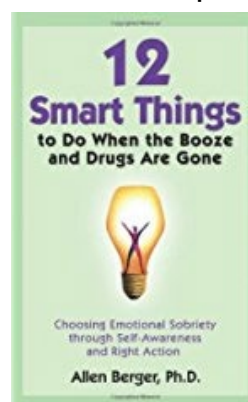


### **Emotional Center of Gravity**

Our emotional center of gravity is like our physical center of gravity. When our physical center of gravity is equally distributed over both of our feet then we are well balanced and cannot be easily knocked off of our feet. But when our physical center of gravity is not managed well we can be easily knocked off balance. Our emotional center of gravity acts similarly. When we are well balanced and we keep ourselves grounded and connected to our true essence then we are unshakeable.

But when we give our emotional center of gravity to another person or we expect life to conform to our expectations we can be easily knocked off balance.

*Emotional sobriety is about keeping our emotional center of gravity grounded in our actual self rather than allowing someone's limited perceptions of who we are define us.*



### **Claiming Our Experience**

When we are emotional dependent we let our experiences claim us. Emotional sobriety is when we learn to claim our experience rather than let our experience claim us or define us. Another way of thinking about this is to understand that our well being is determined by the kind of relationship we have to the experience we are having rather.

*Emotional sobriety is discovered when we realize that the problem we are having is not the problem. The problem is created by how we are coping with the problem.*

### **Summary**

I hope this short article gives you a sense of these five core concepts of emotional sobriety. I like to define recovery is the discovery of new possibilities. Emotional sobriety opens up the door to discovering new possibilities. I hope you will choose to open that door. Your emotional well being depends on it.

Dr. Berger is a talented psychotherapist and popular recovery author who has written extensively about the experience of recovery, the important topic of emotional sobriety, integrating modern psychotherapy and the 12 Steps, and the psychological forces operating in the Twelve Steps. His most recent Hazelden book is a sequel to the popular 12 Stupid Things that Mess Up Recovery and is titled 12 More Stupid Things that Mess Up Recovery.

You can learn more about Dr. Berger and his work at [www.abphd.com](http://www.abphd.com)



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Profile Here)



**40 YEARS** of experiencing helping people  
**1000+ HELPED** since 1971  
**5 BOOKS** published in my field

Who I am has been shaped by many different forces and experiences. Below you will find some of the defining moments from my personal life and from my professional life. I hope that understanding the kinds of challenges I have faced in my life helps you get to know me better. These experiences have all played an important part in making me the person and psychotherapist I am today.

My personal and professional life has moments both wonderful and tragic:

- My father's death when I was eleven.
- My alcoholism and drug addiction before, during, and after my service in Vietnam.
- My journey into recovery since 1971.

- My professional journey, mentored by some of the best therapists and addictions specialists in the world.
- My deep gratitude to my Narcotics Anonymous sponsor, to my family and friends, and to the many outstanding professionals who mentored me and worked with me.
- Over forty years of experience as a psychotherapist.

