

The Sand Paper

Fall 2015



EAP Roots Run Deep In Helping Addicted Workers, Their Families and Employers

By Gretchen M Stein, Ph.D., CEAP

The field of Employee Assistance began in the early 1940's. Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) grew out of the study of occupational alcoholism, the need for safe and productive workplaces, and the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) movement. Workers who had found sobriety through AA meetings and living the twelve step program, would return to their workplaces and practice the principles taught in the 12 steps. It is the 12th step itself that encourages people in recovery "to carry the message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all affairs." The last step in the 12 step recovery process is to help others.

This is where employee assistance programs started. A worker who was addicted to alcohol and who found sobriety for him or herself would return to work and then help other addicts to find the help they needed to live clean and sober lives. The first EAP counselors in a workplace were simply co-workers wanting to help others. They were good people with great intentions and life experience.

Jump ahead 50-years to today, EAPs are now staffed with highly educated and professional credentialed counselors and consultants. The mission of helping workers with their life challenges is still the focus, but the types of problems EAPs address have greatly expanded. Today, all types of addictive compulsive behaviors are addressed by EAPs including alcoholism, opiate addiction, marijuana addiction and the abuse of and addiction to many other chemicals. Sexual addiction, compulsive spending, gambling, internet or video game compulsion are also addressed.

Beyond addictive behavior, EAPs help with a wide variety of concerns that keep workers from focusing on their work tasks including relationship conflict, parent-child difficulties, work stress, financial problems, grief and loss of a loved one, to name just a few.

This issue of the Sand Paper goes back to the roots of EAP and discusses alcohol addiction. A challenge that has plagued humankind going back to the first fermented grape juice. In this issue you will find help for yourself, your family members or your co-workers. EAP has gone through many changes over the years, as has our understanding of addiction and the neuroscience addiction. What has not changed is the help that is available within your EAP to take the first step to finding a clean and sober life. If you are concerned for yourself, a family member or a co-worker, please contact use for confidential help to a better life.

What's Inside

Mindfulness and
Addiction.....2

Anonymous: A Letter from
a Recovering
Alcoholic.....3

Signs and Symptoms of
Substance
Abuse.....4

Dear Sandy.....5

About the EAP.....6



SAND CREEK GROUP, LTD.
RESOURCES WITHOUT BARRIERS

D O R Employee
Assistance
Program

Mindfulness and Addiction

By Molly Beckstrom, MA, CEAP

My client, a well-dressed woman in her late 50's with tears sliding down her face, sat in my office. She had completed treatment for substance abuse a month ago and had hoped that would be the end of her struggle with alcohol. It wasn't. Every morning, she got up and promised herself she wouldn't drink "just for today". Every evening she fought a pitched battle in her mind as her cravings got stronger and stronger as the night wore on. Some nights, she won and didn't drink, but some nights she lost her fight. She had several slips since she left treatment and was feeling increasingly anxious that she would never be able to be successful in her recovery. She wanted skills and techniques to help her better manage her triggers and subsequent slips.

As we talked, I learned that although my client loved cooking, her cravings started to kick in as she began preparing the evening meal. The nights my client did drink were nights when she found herself automatically reaching for the wine glasses and bottle as she began making dinner – almost as if her mind went on autopilot and she didn't realize what she was doing.

The situation suggested we needed to decrease her autopilot and increase her attention, or mindfulness, to successfully reduce the impact of her cravings. Mindfulness, defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn in his book *Full Catastrophe Living*, is "Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally."

As my client struggled with cravings, her thoughts became increasingly negative. She felt worthless and hopeless. By using some basic mindfulness skills such as becoming aware of how her body feels when she feels hopeless, she began to notice how her thoughts impacted her emotional state. She was surprised that as she became more aware of her emotional state, her cravings reduced. In particular, using the mindfulness technique FLOAT as described by Williams and Kraft in *The Mindfulness Workbook for Addiction*, allowed her to rise above her cravings and observe what was going on for her without reacting or judging. The FLOAT technique teaches how to take that moment before responding to evaluate the situation.

After practicing the FLOAT technique for several weeks, my client had successfully reduced the severity of cravings and had significantly reduced (but not eliminated) the slips. Using Williams and Kraft's words: Here's an easy way to remember FLOAT:

F stands for Find your silent place. Even in the midst of crisis or conflict, there's a quiet place where you can go in your mind. Going to this silent place allows you to breathe and regroup.

L stands for Let go of judgment. As we have already learned, holding on to judgment about yourself or others has a way of holding you back from being in the present moment. Letting go of judgment is an ongoing skill that will take you a long way toward your goal of long-term recovery from addictive behavior.

O stands for Observe your thoughts. We would like you to observe your thoughts and notice that they are not permanent. Thoughts come and go. Having this knowledge can be incredibly empowering.

A stands for Awareness of your environment. With this step, you will become more aware of what's going on around you.

T stands for Thankful for the experience. In every experience there's a lesson to be learned. What if you decided to appreciate the experience instead of being angry about it? Being thankful is another piece of the puzzle needed to develop your new ability to cope with life's challenges.

If you'd like help looking at your behaviors that are on autopilot, call Sand Creek EAP. We can connect you with a clinician in your area for support and short term counseling.



"By using some basic mindfulness skills such as becoming aware of how her body feels when she feels hopeless, she began to notice how her thoughts impacted her emotional state..."

Anonymous: A Letter from a Recovering Alcoholic

Dear Sand Creek Staff,

I've been sober now for a little over a year. You all were very pivotal to my success. Words cannot describe my gratitude to each of you for your support, guidance and kind words.

One of the things that seems to happen when a person becomes newly sober is the recognition of just how far away we'd gone: From ourselves and from life in general. My alcoholism was a sneaky thing and it eventually began destroying the very essence of who I was. I didn't recognize this at the time. I was selfish, controlling and manipulative. When I left the house each day I put myself on auto-pilot and presented to the world and those around me a false sense of who I really was. As you can imagine this was quite exhausting, and it only ended up feeding my cycle of addiction.

I hid my addiction quite well from coworkers. We are masters at hiding our true selves and most of the time we start believing our own lies as reality. This is what your counselors call, *Denial*. I hid my addiction from those close to me too. Nobody ever knew that in my own mind I was planning my next foray into being able to drink.

I've been drunk on planes, on trains, in foreign countries, on both the east and west coast and almost all the states in between. I've been drunk sailing on lakes and boating on rivers. In college and even after my daughter's birth I found a reason after she was born to go to the bar, if even for an hour or two as my wife lay in a hospital bed with our new child only blocks away. It seemed rational, necessary even. This was my life, my insanity. It was my "Normal".

I tried to stop before, and would be able to put some days together, sometimes even weeks and if I was lucky a few months but I'd always end up talking myself back into oblivion. This went on for a very long time. I'm talking over 20 years.

Last September, "Life happened" and my terrible choices finally caught up to me. I was arrested for driving drunk (.199 BAC) and put in jail. Being

handcuffed and put in the back of a police car has a way of forcing a person to make an honest accounting of their decisions. This was the beginning of the end of what's been an incredible journey of self discovery.

It's not been an easy task. We drink, or use drugs usually because we're not yet willing to address deeper issues or hurts inside ourselves. *We all have something*. For me it was years of past abuse and trauma of which I now realize I was running from. When I finally surrendered to the reality of my past, and all its ugly and unfortunate conditions, I finally put myself on a path of healing.

Being honest is a key component to staying sober – with ourselves and those around us. Humility and surrender have also taken residence in my life. Letting go of expectations is also very important. A wise person told me recently that, "Expectations are really just pre-meditated resentments."

So thank you to your staff for their support, guidance and resources. I never once felt judged and the grace and mercy shown by each of you involved is something that I'll forever cherish in my new life and way of living. May you continue in the spirit that resides in all you do.



Signs and Symptoms of Substance Abuse



The following are some of the more common signs and symptoms of substance abuse. It is important to keep in mind that if a person has any of these symptoms, it does not necessarily mean that he or she is using drugs/alcohol. They could be due to a mental or physical health problem. They might also be due to adolescent development (in the case of teens). Whatever the cause, they may warrant attention, especially if they persist or occur in a cluster.

The key is change – it is important to watch for any significant changes in the person’s physical appearance, personality, attitude or behavior.

Physical Signs

- Inability to sleep, awake at unusual times, unusual laziness.
- Loss of or increased in appetite, changes in eating habits
- Cold, sweaty palms; shaking hands.
- Red, watery eyes; pupils larger or smaller than usual
- Unusual smells on breath, body or clothes.
- Extreme hyperactivity; excessive talkativeness.
- Slowed or staggering walk; poor physical coordination.
- Needle marks on lower arm, leg or bottom of feet.
- Nausea, vomiting or excessive sweating.
- Tremors or shakes of hands, feet or head.
- Deterioration of hygiene or physical health

Behavioral Signs

- Change in overall attitude/personality with no other identifiable cause.
- Drop in grades at school or performance at work; skips school or is late for school.
- Change in activities or hobbies.
- Chronic dishonesty.
- Sudden oversensitivity, temper tantrums, or resentful behavior.
- Difficulty in paying attention; forgetfulness.
- General lack of motivation, energy, self-esteem, “I don’t care” attitude.
- Change in habits at home; loss of interest in family and family activities.
- Paranoia
- Silliness or giddiness.
- Moodiness, irritability, or nervousness.
- Excessive need for privacy; unreachable.
- Secretive or suspicious behavior.

If you or a loved one suspects someone you know might be presenting with some of these symptoms, it’s usually best to reach out to a licensed professional to gain guidance on how to proceed. Please call Sand Creek EAP and ask to be connected to one of our counselors and they can offer information on next steps.

Dear Sandy,

I have a coworker whom I suspect might be under the influence while at work. The first time I really didn't think anything of it, but when a couple of my friends (who also work in the same department) mentioned the same thing, I've become sufficiently worried enough to reach out but also don't want to get him in any either. What should I do?

Signed,
Concerned Co-worker

Dear Concerned,

Employees who abuse drugs or alcohol, whether at work or on their own time, can pose significant issues for both the employer and employees. The problems can impact productivity, overall safety and increased medical and workers' compensation premiums.

Here are some traditional methods to address a situation of this caliber and are almost always addressed through formal Human Resources channels:

1. **Check Your Company Policy:** This is crucial. Most employers already have written drug and alcohol policies, and some even have formal testing guidelines. A general policy statement isn't enough to permit testing. If your policy doesn't include testing for reasonable suspicion, you may want to consult with HR or management to address implementing one.
2. **Communicate:** This is the hard part because nobody wants to be a "tattle tail" but if more than one person has observed erratic/odd behavior, then it's incumbent on someone to take the initiative to share that with a supervisor and/or an HR employee so they can explore the situation further. These suspicions are oftentimes observed by coworkers or clients long before they're brought to the attention of a supervisor, so please know that this is a common occurrence. This will allow management to observe behavior because it's now on their radar.
3. **Document:** Employers are going to document any erratic behavior or performance issues as well as keep track of any statements by coworkers who might witness strange behaviors.
4. **Allow Others to Act on Results:** Whether it's drug testing (based on your employer's policy), corrective action or even termination. These steps are best left to management and human resources. They are the ones that will devise a strategy to address the employee's situation and craft an overall action plan that is in the best interest of the employee as well as the employer.

Thank you for your concern,
Sandy



Send your inquiries for Sandy
to info@sandcreekeap.com.

We may not be able to
publish all inquiries, but all
will be responded to via
email. Thank you.

Sand Creek Group, Ltd
610 North Main Street
Suite 200
Stillwater, MN 55082

Phone
888.243.5744

Fax
651.430.9753

Email
info@sandcreekeap.com

Responsive.

Resourceful.

Results.

We're on the Web!
www.sandcreekeap.com

About Our Organization

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers free, confidential assessment, short-term counseling, referral, and follow up. Professional counselors are experienced in helping people identify and find solutions to personal issues such as:

- Relationships
- Parent/Child Issues
- Substance Abuse
- Gambling
- Loss and Grief
- Financial Concerns
- Depression
- Job Stress
- Childcare or Eldercare
- And Other Life Concerns

Sand Creek EAP is your program. It's completely confidential, provided at no cost to you, and available to both you and your household family members. When you need help with personal concerns, we're the place to turn.

SAND CREEK GROUP, LTD
610 NORTH MAIN STREET
SUITE 200
STILLWATER, MN 55082

Mailing Address:



SAND CREEK GROUP, LTD.
RESOURCES WITHOUT BARRIERS

