

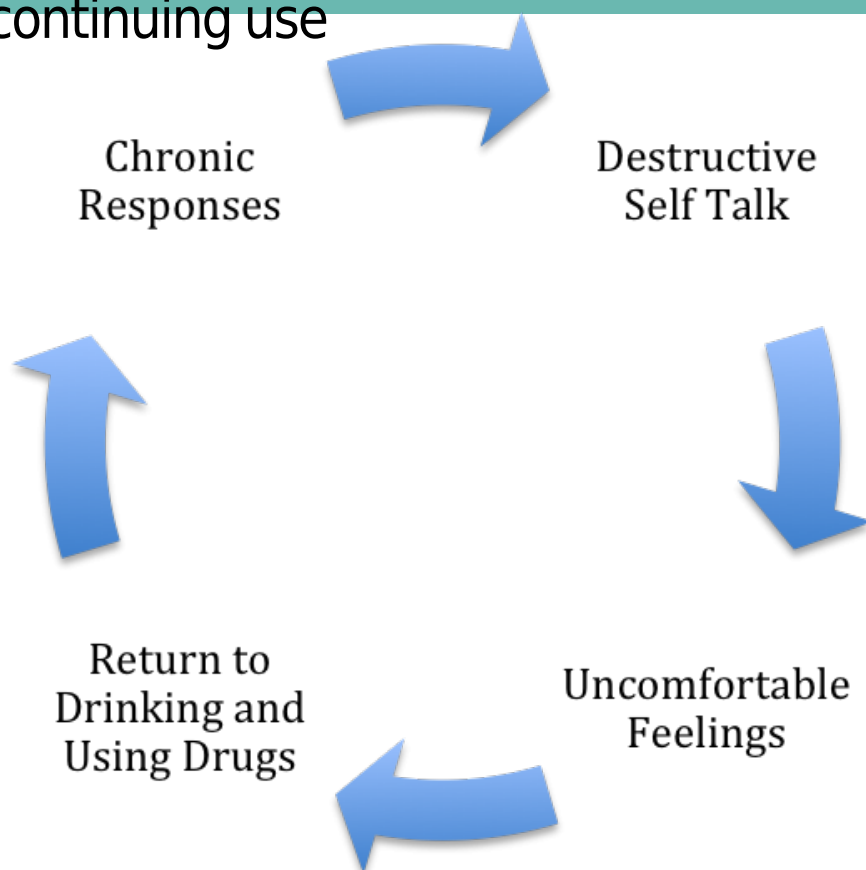


Understanding Your Deceptive Brain

Understanding your deceptive brain can help you find a recovery pathway. Personal awareness of how your brain can mislead you means identifying destructive self-talk, uncomfortable emotions, and chronic negative responses which make change difficult. To modify this internal talk and embrace recovery you need to alter the distortions. By challenging your old thinking, you can improve the way you feel and have successfully change.

Recovery starts with identifying destructive self-talk like "I have no problems" or "All my friends use like I do." Once identified and challenged, these distortions begin to diminish, uncomfortable emotions are accepted, and new non-chemical coping strategies embraced.

A pattern that leads to continuing use



Destructive self-talk and seemingly unbearable emotions promote substance use, suicidal thoughts, and isolation. As a result of the unfinished brain development in the teen years, this destructive cycle is even more difficult to change. For this reason, adolescent-specific treatment is critical.

Harmful self-talk reinforces substance use by perpetuating a cycle of uncomfortable feelings. In other words, the brain becomes 'rewired' by this self-talk and intensifies destructive emotions. The result of this vicious cycle leads to increased substance abuse.

For this reason, the fundamental goal of recovery is physical and emotional sobriety. Change is more attainable when used with empowering, healthy self-talk. This combination (sobriety and healthy self-talk) reduces the intensity of uncomfortable emotions and allows a focus on practical, useful healthy behaviors.

Strategies for Changing the Deceptive Brain

A 4 step process helps you understand your deceptive brain and identifies needed changes. Schwartz and Gladding (2012) propose the following system:

1. **Relabel:** When you are able to identify the risky thoughts and feelings you have added capability to change these thoughts.
2. **Reframe:** Harmful thoughts and impulses can change by retraining your brain.
3. **Refocus:** Concentrate on healthy behaviors. Don't 'feed' your destructive self-talk; 'starve' it by directing your attention to positive goals.
4. **Revalue:** Recognize certain thoughts are a part of your 'addicted' brain. Changing your responses gives you the power to accept that old thoughts aren't necessarily true. These 'old' thoughts can then be 'devalued' and replaced in your brain.

A substance abuser doesn't need to try to stop destructive self-talk, uncomfortable emotions, and chronic negative responses. They can relabel, reframe, refocus, and revalue these experiences. As a result, you understand your deceptive brain and diminish its power to stop recovery.

Finally, never give up! Recovery is an evolutionary process. You may start with abstinence from alcohol and other drugs, and continue by promoting your self-esteem and healthy self-talk by using this process of relabel, reframe, refocus, and revalue.

Take time to understand your deceptive brain. It can make you happier and more in control of your life.