



Defense Mechanisms of the Addictive Personality

Addicts have an “accounting system” that justifies why they don’t have a problem. The alcohol/addict will spend the counseling hour telling you why they don’t have an addiction, while the person who struggles with it less is more open to the idea that they could have an addiction. Stephanie Brown, researcher in alcoholism says that alcoholics believe two things strongly—

- a) “I am really not an alcoholic” and
- b) “I can really control my drinking.”

The alcoholic/addict holds up a picture of what they would be like if they were a “true alcoholic.”

Denying – There is not problem. The problem lies outside the person’s conscious awareness.

General: “I don’t have a problem.”

Alcoholic: “I am not an alcoholic. I don’t know what you are talking about.”

Addict: “I don’t take narcotics.” [when they are on replacement therapy]

Lying - We lie, distort the truth, leave out important details.

General: “I don’t really have that much of a problem.”

Alcoholic: “I have never blacked out.” [when they have] “I haven’t gotten drunk ever.” [when they have] “I only had two.” [when they had three or four] “I don’t really drink.” [when they drink wine with dinner] When confronted about the apparent contradiction, they say that they are being overly picky and precise.]

Addict: "I don't take narcotics." [when they are on replacement therapy]

Manipulation - We argue, tease, mock, become silent, cry, etc. when confronted about the problem.

General: "This is ridiculous." "You really think I have a problem." "Well, I just better watch myself around you." [mockingly]

Alcoholic: "If you did a better job of organizing stuff, then maybe I wouldn't have to drink."

Accusing - Attacking the person and pointing out their problems.

General: "Well, you have problems too." "You lie as well."

Alcoholic: "You drink yourself." "You are just overly sensitive because your mother drank." "You think everyone is an alcoholic."

Threatening - Using threats to make the person stop talking about the problem.

General: "You better knock it off." "I don't have to live with you."

Alcoholic: "If you want someone else that doesn't drink, go for it." "You better stop trying to control me."

Sexaholic: "If you don't put out, I am going to look somewhere else."

Drug addict: Uses physical and emotional abuse to stop the conversation.

Judging - If you did this or that right, things wouldn't be so bad.

General: "You are controlling." "You are co-dependent."

Alcoholic: "You are being critical."

Sexaholic: "Your view of sex is pretty distorted."

Projecting - You have problems too. You always manipulate to get what you want.

Alcoholic: "I think my wife is the one with the problem."

Sexaholic: "I think my spouse is the one having an affair." "My spouse isn't understanding." "My wife is such a prude."

Gambling: "My wife has spent more money than I have."

Blaming - Making others responsible for one's drinking/using

General: "I need ___ because it is so stressful." "You make me ____."

Alcoholic: "I drink because I have such a stressful family."

Sexaholic: "If we had more sexual relations, I wouldn't have the lust problem that I have."

Gambling: "We have so much debt, I need to find a way to earn money quickly."

The treatment for Blaming: Take responsibility for our actions. Admit that it is my fault.

Humor - We make light of the situation and turn it into a joke.

General: [laughing] "You really think I have a problem don't you?"

Alcoholic: [laughing] "Yep, I am a drunk." [sarcastically] "I suppose you think I am going to steal the kid's lunch money for booze."

Sexaholic: [laughing] "I am just a guy with a strong sex drive."

The treatment for Humor: Practice being in touch with the pain of the addiction.

Intellectualizing - Using logic (false logic, that is) to convince oneself and others that there isn't a problem. The use of an "accounting system" to demonstrate that they haven't done things that would make them an addict.

General: "Look at all the things I can do." "I just need to control myself a little more."

Alcoholic: "If I were an alcoholic, I would be so responsible at work." "So no one can ever get drunk without being an alcoholic."

Sexaholic: "A lot of people are having more sex than we have." "mental health professionals say that masturbation is normal."

Gambling: "The state makes money off of the gambling profession." "Casinos are everywhere." "There can't be that many people have that much of a problem with it."

Treatment for Intellectualizing: Ask, "how is my use a problem?"

Rationalizing - I don't drink/use every day, I don't have a problem.

Alcoholic: "I don't drink every day. I don't have a problem."

Sex addict: "I have sexual needs that aren't getting fulfilled."

Rx addict: "I have pain. I need the medicine."

Work addict: "I need to work the pay the bills."

Treatment for Rationalizing: Ask, "how is my use a problem?"

Silence - We are quiet and withdrawn.

General: Quiet.

Alcoholic: Quiet.

Sexaholic: Quiet.

Treatment for Silence: Create an atmosphere of safety to discuss the problem.

Compliant - Outwardly compliant, while inwardly rebellious.

General: "I will stop."

Alcoholic: "If you really want me to I will work on not drinking so much." "I really don't have a problem, but I will stop if you want me to."

Sexaholic: "I am never going to look on the internet again." "This is my last affair."

Treatment for Compliance: Be honest with yourself. Get in touch with what you really feel.

Minimizing – Agrees, but makes it a smaller problem than it really is.

Alcoholic: "I don't drink/use half of what Sam drinks." "I really don't drink that much."

Sex addict: "I really don't struggle that much with porn." "Maybe only once a month."

Rx addict: "I take less medicine than I used to." "I don't really take that much." "I am on a patch."

Work addict: "I haven't worked that much." [when they are working long hours and haven't kept track]

Cockiness - I got it made, these other folks are losers.

Alcoholic: "I have been able to stop before. I know people that are worse."

Sex addict: "I can stop." "I am not doing ____." [whatever level of behavior is worse than what they are presently]

Work addict: "I can slow down if I need to." "I don't need a group."

Treatment for Cockiness: Humility.

Justifying - If you had a wife/husband like mine, you would drink/use too.

Alcoholic: "If you knew my wife, (had my stress level, work-stress) you would drink too."

Sex addict: "I have sexual needs that are a normal and if my spouse isn't going to help meet them, then I wouldn't have to _____."

Rx addict: "I have pain." "I need the medicine." "My doctor prescribed it to me."

Work addict: "I need to work the pay the bills"

Explaining - Telling a story that is not really accurate and uses false logic to explain why they didn't do whatever they were supposed to do. No real remorse, empathy or sorrow is demonstrated.

General: "Well, you see, we were. . ."

Alcoholic: "I was drinking with some friends and I didn't want them to think I was being a teetotaler."

Sexaholic: "Well, I hadn't had sex in a week, and. . ."

Gambling: "Well, I drove by the casino. . ." "I was going to come home at 8pm, when. . ."

Treatment for Explaining: Just stop and listen.

Analyzing - We come up with excuses, explanations, and defensives that justify our use. This usually comes in the form of a monologue or filibuster that doesn't allow another person's viewpoint in.

General: "I was depressed, so I ____"

Alcoholic: "My parents were alcoholics, but I really don't act like they did."

Sexaholic: "My emotional needs aren't met when we don't have sex. I get down and find that this is better than other things I could be doing."

RX addict: "I had some extra pain. . ." "I had worked in the yard." [when in actuality, the pain is from stress and not having the narcotic.]

Defiance - Using verbal force and stubbornness

General: "You can't make me stop."

Alcoholic: "I am not going to stop drinking for you."

Sexaholic: "I am not going to follow someone else's set of morals."

Drug Addict: "I am not going to treatment." "You can't really make me."

Withdrawing - We avoid and leave physically or emotionally. Doesn't respond to questions.

General: Leaves the room.

Alcoholic: Leaves the room, home, or situation and sometimes drinks to withdraw.

Sexaholic: Leaves the room, home or situation by going porn store, internet, etc.

Workaholic: Leaves for work.

Shouting - We raise our voices to intimidate.

General: Yelling, screaming, and shouting. Getting angry.

Alcoholic: Yelling and arguing. "I am not a drunk."

Sexaholic: Arguing, shouting. Name calling.