

# Addiction and Power: Why Understanding This Connection is Vital to Addiction Recovery

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You're going through a recovery program with great success, and you are fully committed to staying on track during your addiction recovery. One day, though, you wake up with a headache that just won't go away, you spill your coffee down the front of your shirt in a rush out the door, and you end up being a few minutes late for work. Feelings of anxiety and stress start to creep in, and it just seems to be one of those days. Even though it might be a matter of the small things adding up, those pangs of powerlessness and loss of control begin to hit—the very things that can impede your recovery and potentially cause a downward spiral into relapse. But by understanding more about the connection between addiction and power, you can learn to diffuse those feelings when they arise, and keep your steady commitment to a successful recovery.

## **Having power is trusting yourself.**

When you are addicted to a substance, that substance has control over you. It informs your decisions, rendering you powerless to make healthier ones for yourself. While natural rewards release dopamine and still make us “feel good,” drugs, alcohol, and other substances can release up to ten times the amount of those same “feel good” chemicals—and they do it reliably, every time. That is, until your tolerance increases. You need more of your chosen substance to produce the same effect, which is your brain building tolerance. That gap grows and grows until you're no longer in control of yourself, unable to say no to that inevitable high, without concern for the low. Because you have felt this way for so long, trusting yourself to take personal power back can be tough—but it is something you must do.

It seems completely natural to think, then, that controlling your emotions means only letting in the good ones. You are, after all, “controlling” what you feel, right? While this may seem ideal, pushing aside those difficult emotions is not you being in control of them—it is you *ignoring* them. And ignoring something doesn't make it go away. Similarly, when you acknowledge those same tough emotions—guilt, shame, anger, fear—in a courageous manner, whether it be through one of the many types of therapy at Alta Mira or in that very moment, you are asserting your personal power over your emotions. And, when you trust yourself enough to own the power you have over your thoughts, emotions, and actions, it is an act of self-love, which is another vital piece of recovery.

## **Power over your internal reactions, not control over external actions.**

There could be a day when you wake up and have a bunch of things go wrong right in a row—just like we saw earlier. These are events that you cannot always control: sometimes you will have a headache for seemingly no reason, and sometimes your coffee might tip on you if your car door won't open properly. What you can control, though, is how you *react* to what happens, and this is much more important. You have complete power over yourself, and you have the amazing ability to say and do things of your own volition. While it will be tough to acknowledge and actually *feel* those negative things, this is actually you saying “I have power over my emotions.”

Say one of those days does happen to you—a day where everything goes wrong. You may feel like your recovery is teetering, you may feel overwhelmed, you may feel doubtful. When this happens, take a breath. (No really; breathing deeply and intentionally is proven to reduce our response to stressful situations.) Recognize that you can't do anything to change the events or situations that have taken place, but you have the power in that moment to decide how you will react to those same events and situations. This doesn't mean you cannot feel stressed, or sad, or frustrated, but it does mean you don't act on those emotions. Calmly and intentionally honoring the way you feel in those difficult moments will strengthen you, and you can begin to build the bond of trust you need to have with yourself.

## **Power doesn't mean perfection.**

Having power over something can be scary. *What if something bad happens? What if I make a wrong decision?* Yes, these questions are normal and natural—but remember: you can't control the world around you. Bad things will happen. You will make poor decisions in your life, simply because you are human. And, through it all, you will *still* have the complete power to control the way you handle all of these situations, because ultimately, you love and trust yourself with that power. The more you become comfortable with that same power, the more confidence you will have in your recovery and in your future—and that's exactly what we want for you.