

Mind Map (Part 1)

Unmanageability

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One Step Rehab

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1. What is Unmanageability?

The concept of unmanageability is used by 12 step programmes such as Alcoholics Anonymous to describe how we start to lose control of our lives as our addictive behavior progresses. Medical bodies also recognize the same thing. For example, ASAM's 2011 definition of addiction describes addiction as characterised by "*impairment in behavioural control*". Unmanageability is when we can't seem to keep on top of things and key areas of our lives become extremely problematic due to our addiction. There are biological, psychological, social and behavioural manifestations of unmanageability:

- Major and minor health problems
- Can't seem to meet the demands life places on us
- Relationships that are out of control or non-existent
- All sorts of other social and interpersonal issues, such as legal problems, or employment/business problems

Unmanageability is essentially the *costs and consequences* of our drug/alcohol use or acting out. What price have we paid, sometimes literally, for our pursuit of addictive highs? In this module we will explore four areas of life that commonly become unmanageable during active addiction.

1. Our health
2. Meeting our major obligations
3. Relationships
4. Social & interpersonal issues

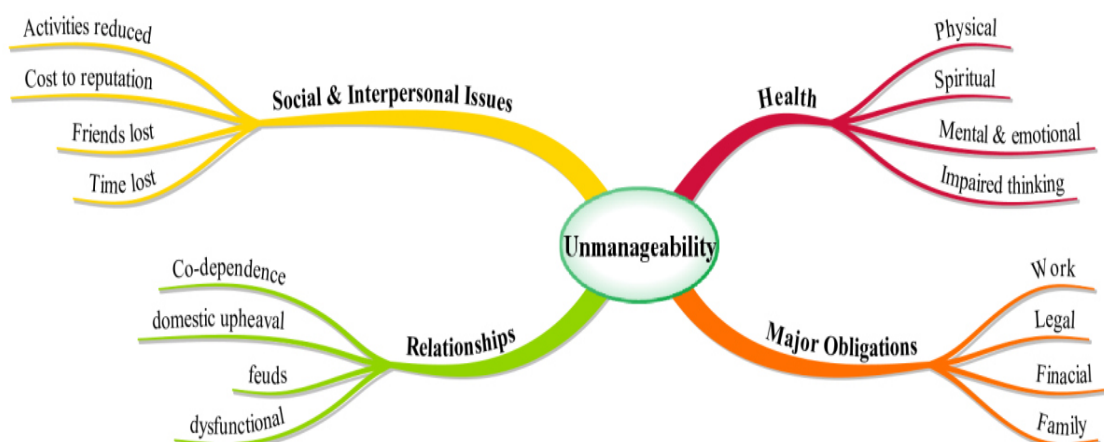
We will explore these issues using a tool called mind mapping (see next section).

2. How to do a Mind Map

In this module we will utilize an educational tool called *mind mapping*. Mind mapping was pioneered by an educationalist called Tony Buzan, but was developed for use in addiction treatment by our team. Mind maps are a really effective way of doing the written work that involves deep emotional remembering.

Mind mapping involves writing (or drawing) about a subject in the same way that our brain actually works (going outwards in many different directions). When drawing a mind map we draw a central node, or starting point, and place the name of the subject or topic that we want to talk about there. Then we draw branches off this central node, to describe all of the sub-topics that are related to the main topic. We can then draw sub-branches off those branches. Our experience is that this method is faster than the writing process, but you can write longhand if you find it easier.

Fig. 1 An example of a mind map



3. Health

Having good health is about more than just being free from disease. Many of us exposed ourselves to blood borne viruses, STD's and other risks when we were actively addicted. However we should also take note of our mental, emotional and spiritual health as well. Please read the following sub-sections and complete a mind map afterwards.

Physical health

All aspects of our health deteriorate during active addiction. We may have physical problems like accidents whilst drunk or, as we get older, more permanent effects to our health. We may receive doctors' warnings for all sorts of conditions.

- For alcohol users common health problems are pancreatitis, liver problems, gout, neuritis and poor mobility.
- For injecting drug users it might be abscesses, or blood-borne viruses (BBV's)
- For sex addicts it might be sexually transmitted diseases (STD's). We may have been hospitalized or had to seek medical attention at least once.
- Your overeating has left you overweight and at risk of diabetes, heart disease and other ailments.

Mental & emotional health

Excessive stress, anger, anxiety and fear are all common symptoms of active addiction. The 'big book' of Alcoholics Anonymous describes how we are crippled by a "hundred different forms of fear" during active addiction; fear of success, fear of failure, fear of socializing, fear of isolation and more.

- Your work colleagues (or family) can't bear you anymore because of the unmanageable levels of stress, resentment and anger you display.

- You are terrified of leaving the house because when you're hungover you can't handle open spaces or busy streets, trains or buses.

Impaired thinking

Cognitive psychologists list different ways in which we distort our thinking (see the [module on CBT](#)). Many of these thinking styles appear to be psychological manifestations of addiction. They may well have been present before we started drinking or doing drugs.

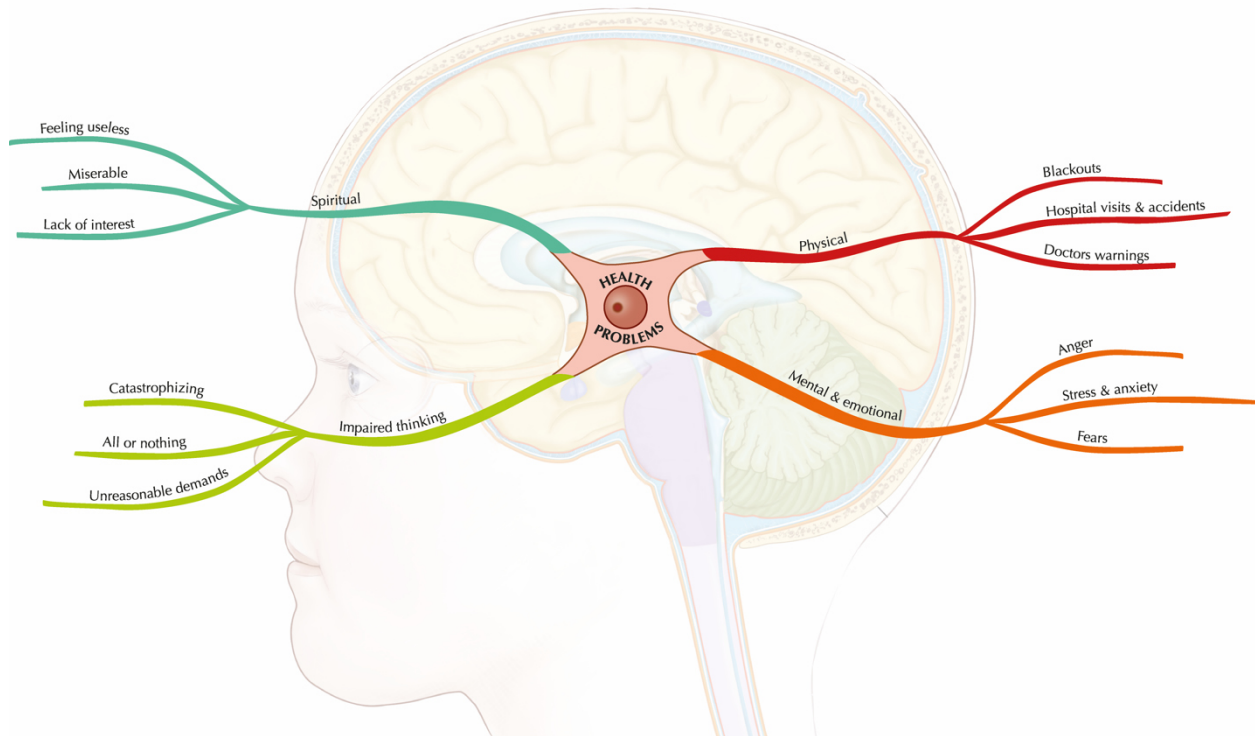
- *Catastrophizing* – Your computer crashes and you decide that the modern world is rubbish and a nightmare with all its complications. You wind up in a serious rage about it and end up drinking on it!
- *All or nothing* – You miss the bus for a job interview and decide if you can't be perfect you might as well forget the whole thing, so you decide to wipe the whole day out by drinking instead.

Spiritual health

Active addiction could be described as a spiritual malaise, or existential crisis. We often don't know who we are or where we are going. We are often plagued by feelings of uselessness or lack of meaning. Sometimes we can lose the will to get up in the morning, and can go through extended periods of feeling miserable and worthless.

- You seem to have a lack of interest in anything. You no longer enjoy things you used to.
- You feel hopeless about the future and find it difficult to summon the energy for normal day- to-day tasks.

HEALTH PROBLEMS



Exercise 1

Mind Map (or write about) the following:

1. Your physical health problems due to your addiction
2. Your mental and emotional ill health exhibited during and/or after active addiction
3. Your impaired thinking as it developed through your addiction
4. Your spiritual malaise or existential crisis ("who am I"?) which has been present before, during or after your active addiction.

4. Major Obligations

All of us have obligations. The point is not how great or small they are, but that we are unable to manage them as effectively as we could if we weren't trapped in active addiction.

Work

Being unmanageable in our ability to fulfil major obligations takes many forms but is often characterized by lost time and a marked decrease in efficiency leaving us tired and lacking in energy. Even behavioural addictions like sex and gambling can leave us tired and lacking in energy, or needing to leave work early to get our 'fix'. This seriously affects our ability to complete our studies or perform the functions of our business.

- You sit in the pub on extended lunch break.
- You don't turn up for work due to a hangover.
- Ambitions which used to drive and motivate you take second place to your most important need, which is to get high.
- Your turning up drunk to the board meeting means that although you are a major shareholder you are asked to step down as a director by your partners.

Financial problems

There are many financial *consequences* to addiction such as being demoted or losing your job due to inefficiency. Also think how much money has been spent on your addiction or due to addiction-related healthcare.

- You have moved through 5 jobs in as many years because you are late so often due to drinking you can't hold down a job

- You spend all your money on drinking/using/gambling etc.
- You have had to pay for several hospital visits due to accidents while drunk

Legal problems

Try calculating the amount of money you've spent on legal expenses such as fines and legal representation, or perhaps on how having convictions has curtailed your career or opportunities. If you have never had legal problems list the things that could have caused you legal problems.

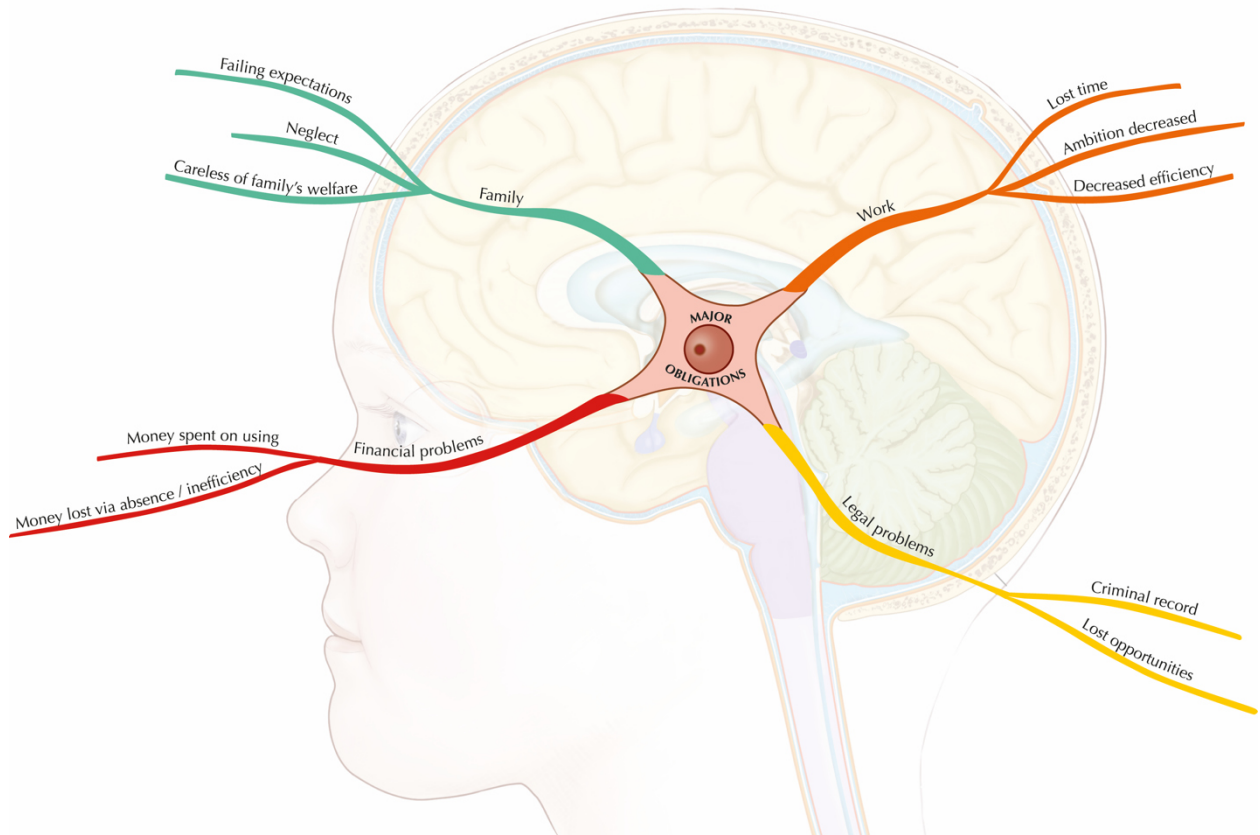
- You write off your car whilst drunk and you now have a DUI conviction
- Your conviction for possession of cocaine means you cannot travel on business to certain countries.
- You have narrowly escaped being arrested several times.

Family

Where have we been neglectful of our partners or children due to our acting out? We may be failing in the eyes of our partners or parents and we need to describe this and share it with other addicts as it is a common problem for people in active addiction.

- You spend time drinking rather than spending quality time with your kids.
- You are unable to meet the expectations of your family due to your addiction.
- You take your kids to bad environments because you need to score drugs.
- Your partner wants a divorce or separation.

MAJOR OBLIGATIONS



Exercise 2

Mind Map (or write about) your

1. Unmanageability at work
2. Legal problems attributable to addiction
3. Financial problems attributable to addiction
4. Failure to fulfil family obligations

5. Relationships

In the last section we looked at our inability to meet our familial obligations. However there are many more aspects to the problematic relationships we have due to our addiction.

Family feuds

Family feuds and dynamics, and our duties to the family, can be problematic for addicts in all areas. Often we have become estranged to some extent from our parents or siblings and that has been exacerbated or even caused by our addiction. We even use these resentments as a reason why we need to drink, use or act out.

- You never attained the expected level of achievement in the eyes of your family and it causes tension at family events.
- You are not there for them when there is a crisis, or you are yourself the cause of the crisis.
- You have missed or derailed several family events due to drug or alcohol use and now you are not on speaking terms and there is a big resentment around it.

Domestic upheaval

Are your domestic or intimate relationships characterised by lots of fighting or bickering and general unhappiness? Even if our relationships are more peaceful they may still be characterized by numbness or a lack of communication

- The atmosphere in your home is constantly tense and your drinking, drug use or behaviour is a constant point of contention.

- You tend to fight with your partner or kids when you have been drinking or using.

Co-dependence

People with addiction problems are usually engaged in co-dependent relationships. 'Co-dependence' is where we have a compulsive need to be looked after or, on the flip side, to be the saviour and rescue people. It is easy to see why addicts surround themselves with partners and friends who look after them and enable their addiction.

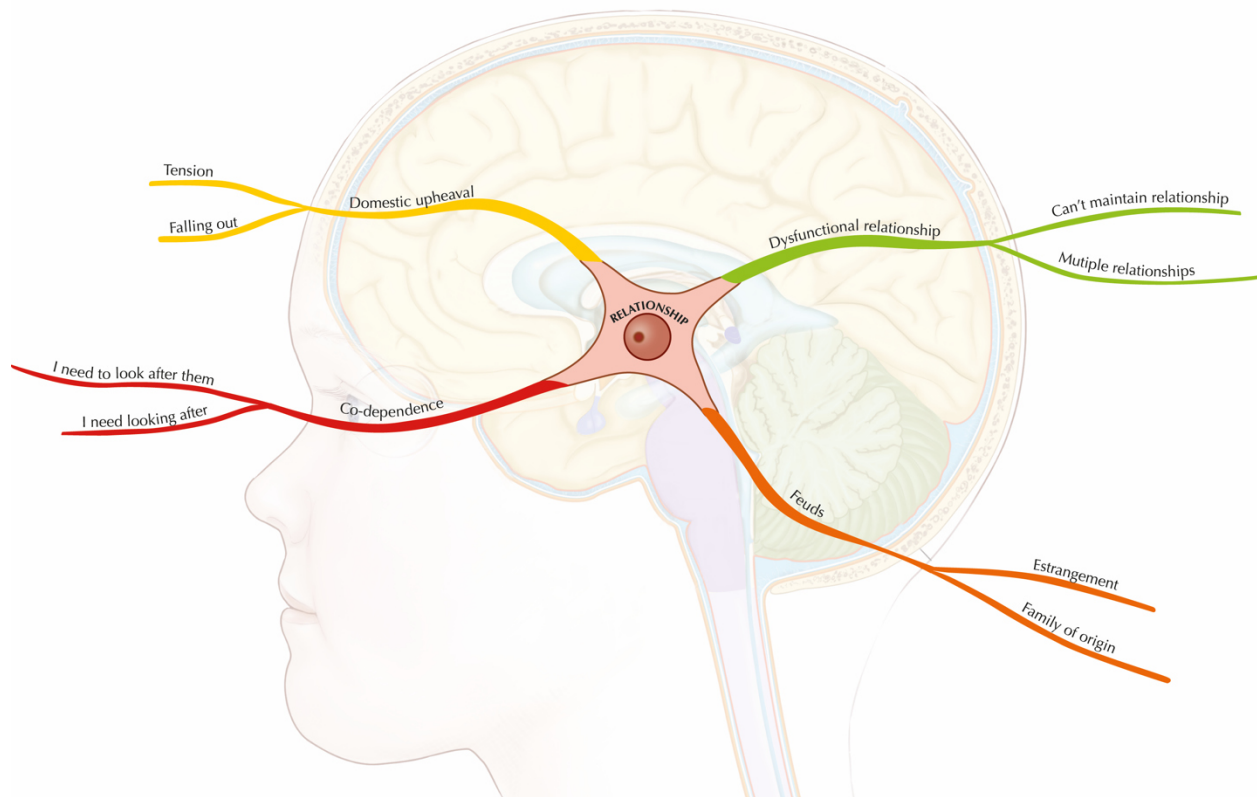
- You have an addictive need to be looked after – by anyone!
- You have an addictive need to look after others.
- You feel other peoples 'pain' and become over-involved in their problems as a way of avoiding your own.

Dysfunctional relationships

We are often in what could be described as unhealthy relationships. Alternatively we may have a pattern of being unable to hold down relationships for long and have a tendency to engage in 'whirlwind romances' that quickly burn out or become dull or dysfunctional. Often we could be described as being addicted to our romantic partners.

- You fall into love too easily and too quickly
- You have poor boundaries around saying 'no' to others demands
- Your relationships don't last for long
- You have multiple relationships

RELATIONSHIP



Exercise 3

Mind Map (or write about)

1. Your dysfunctional relationships
2. Any domestic upheaval in your life attributable to addiction
3. Family feuds exacerbated by your addictive behaviour
4. Your relationships that are characterized by unhealthy levels of dependence (you on others - or others on you).

6. Social & Interpersonal Issues

This section includes the less tangible consequences that we experience as a result of our addictive behaviour. Friends we have lost, and the costs to our time and reputation.

Time lost

We tend to waste considerable amounts of time in our addiction.

- You spend large amounts of time procuring drugs, or drinking in the bar, which has a detrimental effect on the rest of your life.
- You waste entire weekends recovering from hangovers or come-downs.

Cost to reputation

Often our reputation takes a nose dive over a period of time, and sometimes we are not honest about how others see us. We need to have the courage to admit how tarnished our reputation has become

- People used to respect you as being at the top of your field, but after several professional events where you were obviously high, and increasingly erratic behaviour, people are saying you've 'lost it'.

Social activities reduced

After a few years of spending most of our time pursuing chemical or behavioural highs, we can no longer summon the concentration to enjoy less intense activities. We may have lost any interest outside of getting drunk or high.

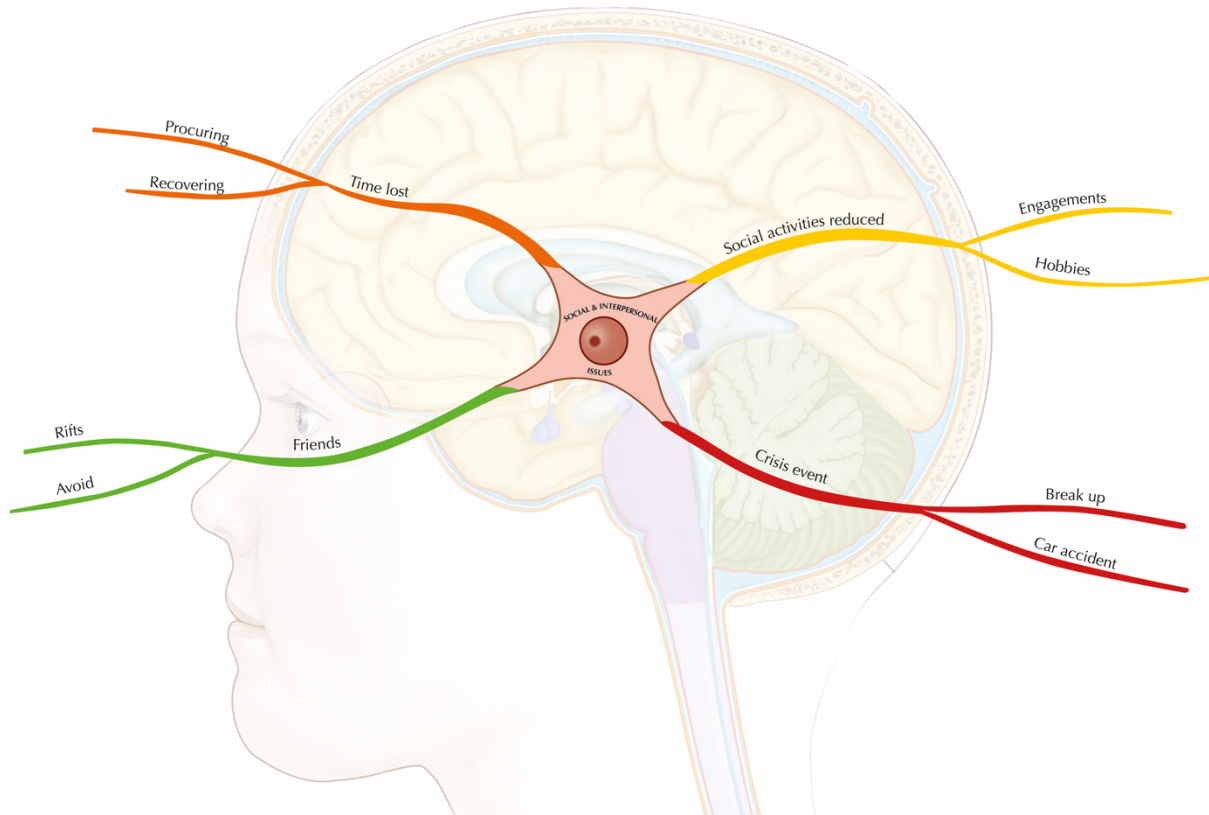
- You used to be passionate about sports or art, but can no longer maintain the commitment.
- You can't summon the concentration to read a book or newspaper, you just zone out passively in front of the TV whilst high.

Friends and associates

You may have fallen out with constructive long term friends and associates and even picked up some unsavoury contacts along the way.

- You spend endless hours waiting in apartments with other drug users for the dealer to come back. Most of these people you have little in common with but you make small talk, and when high you consider them to be quite entertaining – a false sense of camaraderie!
- You have many fair weather friends at the pub. One day whilst drunk one of them attacks you. When you sober up you realize that although you've been drinking with this person for a year you don't really know anything about him. You ask yourself why you put yourself in this situation.
- You are no longer invited to the dinner parties you used to enjoy because of your drunkenness and the fact that you go over the top when debating politics, insulting people and being really intense.

SOCIAL & INTERPERSONAL ISSUES



Exercise 4

Mind Map (or write about) the following:

1. Friendships you've lost through addiction
2. Time lost to addiction
3. How your social activities have reduced due to addiction
4. How your reputation has become damaged through your addiction