

# **MIND MAP (PART 2)**

Powerlessness

~

**One Step Rehab**

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# 1. What is Powerlessness?

Powerlessness can be translated as an inability to control our substance use or addictive behavior on a permanent basis. Even if we can stop for a while we can't stay stopped. Eventually we will return to pathological acting out of the addiction regardless of the consequences. This is proof that we are addicted because otherwise we would stop. Powerlessness describes the tyranny of being controlled by our cravings and obsessions. It's that feeling we have when we no longer want to do the things that our addiction demands but we end up doing them anyway.

People suffering from addiction have issues with the part of the brain which controls reasoning ability (the pre-frontal cortex). Therefore any self-directed analysis of our addictive behavior is hijacked by the need for reward. Once addicted, we become powerless to control compulsive reward seeking.

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, addiction is:

*"a primary chronic disease of the brain that is characterized by "an inability to consistently abstain" (ASAM 2011).*

An inability to consistently abstain is effectively the same thing as powerlessness. We will explore Powerlessness in four areas:

- Denial of our addiction
- Inability to control our addiction
- Rituals of drinking, using or acting out
- Hitting our 'rock bottom'

In the following sections we will ask you to describe four different aspects of powerlessness as they occur in your addiction, starting with denial.

## 2. Denial

Denial is a “lack of recognition of significant problems with one’s behaviors” (ASAM 2011). We need to be in denial in order to continue on with our painful behavior! We often suffered serious consequences through our addiction but were emotionally removed from the impact of those consequences. Often we were enabled in avoiding consequences by well-meaning but misguided parents, partners and friends. There are several ways we deny our addiction.

### **Rationalizing, legitimizing and excusing**

How many relapses occur because of ‘needs’ or ‘catastrophes’ which weren’t really important or that bad. They are really just excuses to drink, use or act out.

- ‘Everybody does cocaine in this industry, you need to do it to have the edge’.
- ‘I need to keep drinking/ using because the comedown will be so bad I won’t be able to complete this work project’.
- ‘Because my grandmother’s cousin’s dog died, I need a drink to cope with the trauma’

### **Lying**

Lying to cover your tracks and get around people who would obstruct your behavior if they knew what you were doing, makes it clear that you are powerless over your addiction. In 12 step fellowships they say, “you are as sick as your secrets.”

- ‘I’m just going to the shop’ - you’re going to score drugs.
- ‘Who was that phone call from?’ ‘Oh...just someone from work’ - it was actually your dealer.
- ‘I’m going out with some friends from work’ – you’re going out to drink alone

## Minimizing

Sometimes we seek to make our problem less than it really is. We might under-report to doctors enquiring about our alcohol use, or play down the seriousness of our problem to ourselves and others. We may try to control the amount we use rather than stop. This is denial of our addiction because we have proven many times that we can't control how much or when we use.

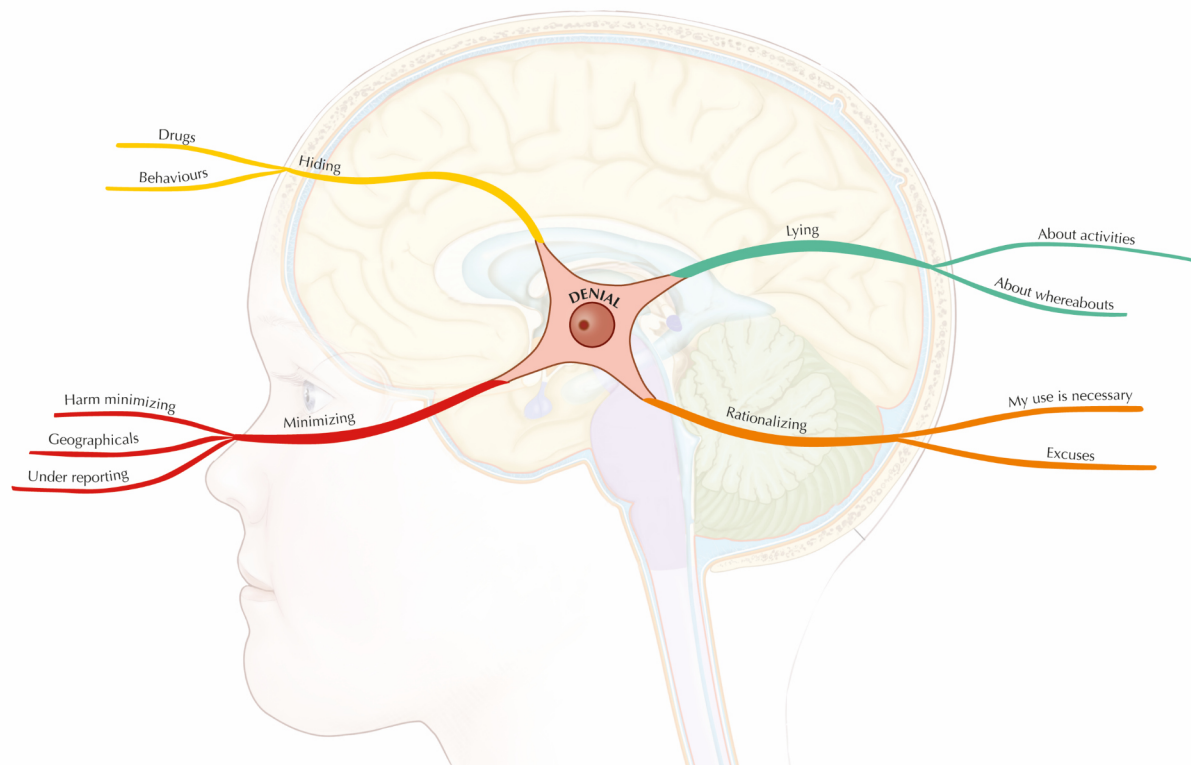
- 'Compared to the other guys down the pub I'm not that bad' - ignoring the fact that your pub is frequented mainly by chronic alcoholics.
- 'If I move out of the city I won't be able to get drugs anymore. Then it will be fine'.
- 'I'll only drink at weekends because the doctor has warned me about my liver' – ignoring the fact that you've tried this before.
- 'I'll cut down slowly' – within a week you're back at the normal level.

## Hiding

Often we need to hide our supply, especially if we are using illicit drugs. If you are ever in the position of having to hide things to protect your supply, you probably have a problem.

- You hide the bottle in the garage – then later you go out to 'work on the car!'
- You use cocaine in the toilet of a bar because of the consequences of using publicly.

## DENIAL



### Exercise 1

Create a mind map (or write longhand) to show how you:

1. Minimize your addiction
2. Legitimize your addiction
3. Hide your addiction
4. Lie about your addiction.

### 3. Inability to Control

Addiction is characterized by “an inability to consistently abstain” (ASAM 2011). Unlike other people, those suffering from addiction show a marked lack of control over their drinking, drug use or other compulsive behaviors.

#### **Drinking, using or acting out at inappropriate times and places**

An inability to control where and when we use is a sign we are powerless over our addiction. Using or acting out in inappropriate settings or at times which are inconvenient makes it clear we need to feed our habit. Even if you are able to control your use to some extent you may binge when you are able to.

- You drink just before a board meeting even though you know others will smell it.
- You are drunk when you pick your kids up from school because you couldn't wait all day without a drink.
- You drink or use during the day when you are on night shifts that evening.
- You control all week but make up for it on Friday night and are unable to attend your family's get together at the weekend because you are still drinking.

#### **Unsuccessful attempts to quit**

Frequent promises to quit, or behave better are routinely broken, and some of us may have had multiple attempts at cleaning up which all ended in failure, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but the eventual lapse came and then that quickly turned into a full-blown relapse.

- You promise your wife you will quit this time after losing your driving license and your job, but you start spending all day in the pub.

- You are admitted to hospital to detox. The withdrawal is so bad you swear you'll never drink again, but end up discharging yourself early and walking straight to a bar.

## **Protecting supply**

This behavior proves powerlessness because if you are ever in the position of having to control the flow or supply of your drug of choice to make sure it's there, you have a problem.

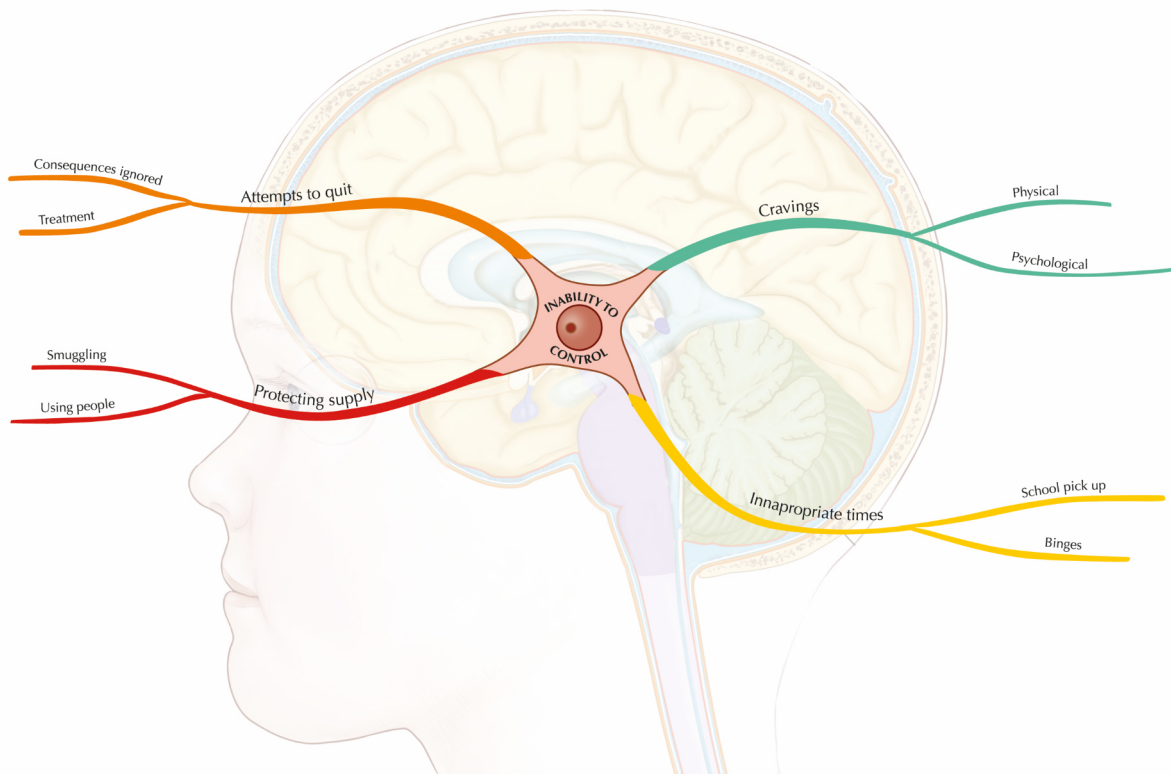
- You take a supply of alcohol or drugs with you across borders because you are terrified of going into withdrawal or being left without.
- You stay in an unhealthy relationship because you need the money you are given to support your habit.
- You visit and hustle friends and doctors.
- You become angry or aggressive when your using is intervened by family, friends, doctors, employers or law enforcement agencies.

## **Obsessional thoughts and cravings**

Another manifestation of addiction is cravings and obsession. Constant mental preoccupation throughout the day or at certain times indicates addiction. Cravings are psychological but can feel physical. (please note that cravings are not physical withdrawal symptoms – not all people suffering from addiction are physically dependent on a drug or even use physically addicting drugs!).

- You look in bins or scour the floor for drugs.
- You obsess about cocaine and sex so much it seriously interferes with your ability to complete any quality work.

## INABILITY TO CONTROL



### Exercise 2

Create a mind map (or write longhand) to show the following:

1. How you crave.
2. How you use at inappropriate times.
3. How you protect your supply.
4. How you have had unsuccessful attempts to quit.

## 4. Rituals

As described by ASAM (2011) addiction is characterized by “a pathological pursuit of reward or relief”. When we are powerless over an addiction we seem to go into a “bubble” when we are about to use or act out. It’s as though time doesn’t exist and consequences don’t matter. The only goal is to get high or numb. Rituals are an elaborate preparation for using the drug or acting out the behavior. This is often characterized by a feeling of adrenaline or euphoria similar to the drug itself.

### The Bubble

What sort of things do you do when you go into your ‘bubble’ and you are about to drink, use or act out?

- You are heading home from a social event in your car when you suddenly make a U-turn and head for the bottle shop or a dealer's house.
- You are heading for your dealer's house after a period of sobriety. You are aware of all the consequences that could occur but you don't care because you are just happy that you're going to get high.
- All the time you are drinking you know you shouldn't be doing it but they are just inconvenient thoughts intruding on the edge of your consciousness.

### How?

Describe how you use. Do you follow particular patterns? Do you have dual addictions which feed each other?

- You always use cocaine first and then look for sex.
- You always drink first and then look for cocaine.
- You stock up on your drug of choice and batten down the hatches for the weekend. You turn your phone off and proceed to get high or drunk.

## When?

Do you have a tendency to use more during stress periods or after stress periods, or when things are going well?

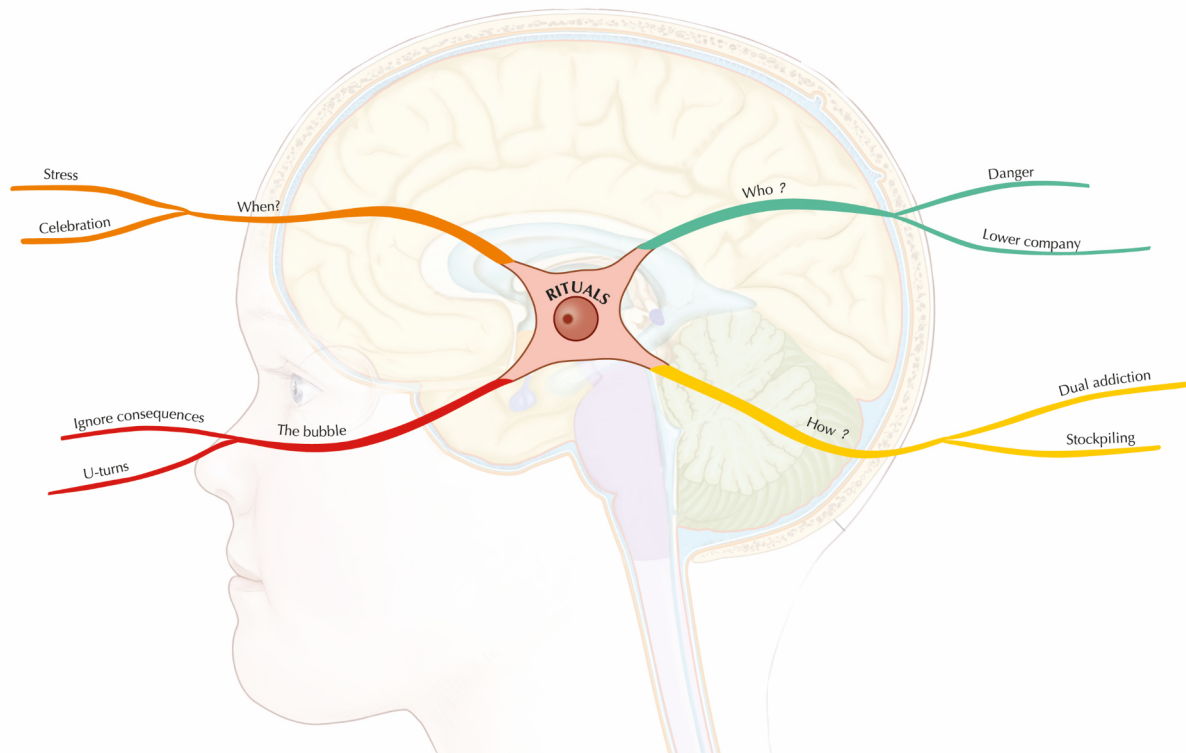
- Things are going well so you decide to get high.
- Things are stressful at work so you decide to have one drink, thinking that won't hurt but the next night you get horribly drunk.

## Who With?

Think about the people you around you when you drink or use. Note that these are often people, places and situations you would not normally consider being around.

- You spend hours in a dealer's house and there are some unpleasant characters there. You swear you won't go back but the next night you are back.
- You spend hours in a bar drinking and talking nonsense with people you wouldn't ordinarily associate with.

## RITUALS



### Exercise 3

Mind map (or write about) the following:

1. Who you use with
2. When you use
3. How you use
4. Also, describe the Bubble you go into when you drink, use or act out

## 5. Rock Bottom

In the various 12 step texts the concept of rock bottom is used to describe the place that all true addicts come to eventually. A rock bottom is a low point you thought you would never reach.

### Shame and guilt

During active addiction we often engaged in behaviors which brought us intense shame.

- You get drunk at your daughter's wedding and insult the groom's family.
- You wake up with someone you don't know.

### Breaking of personal boundaries

Repeated violation of our own morals proves we are powerless over our addiction, and eventually this should bring a flood of remorse as we enter an awareness of what we've done (the contemplation stage of change).

- You are arrested for threatening behavior whilst drunk. When sober you are normally mild-mannered.
- You start out by saying you will never carry drugs on you because your career would be finished if you were caught in possession. You end up smuggling drugs into a country with the death penalty because you can't go without during your business trip.
- You are caught stealing alcohol.

### Emotional or nervous breakdown

The distinguishing feature of a rock bottom is that it brings you to your knees psychologically and emotionally.

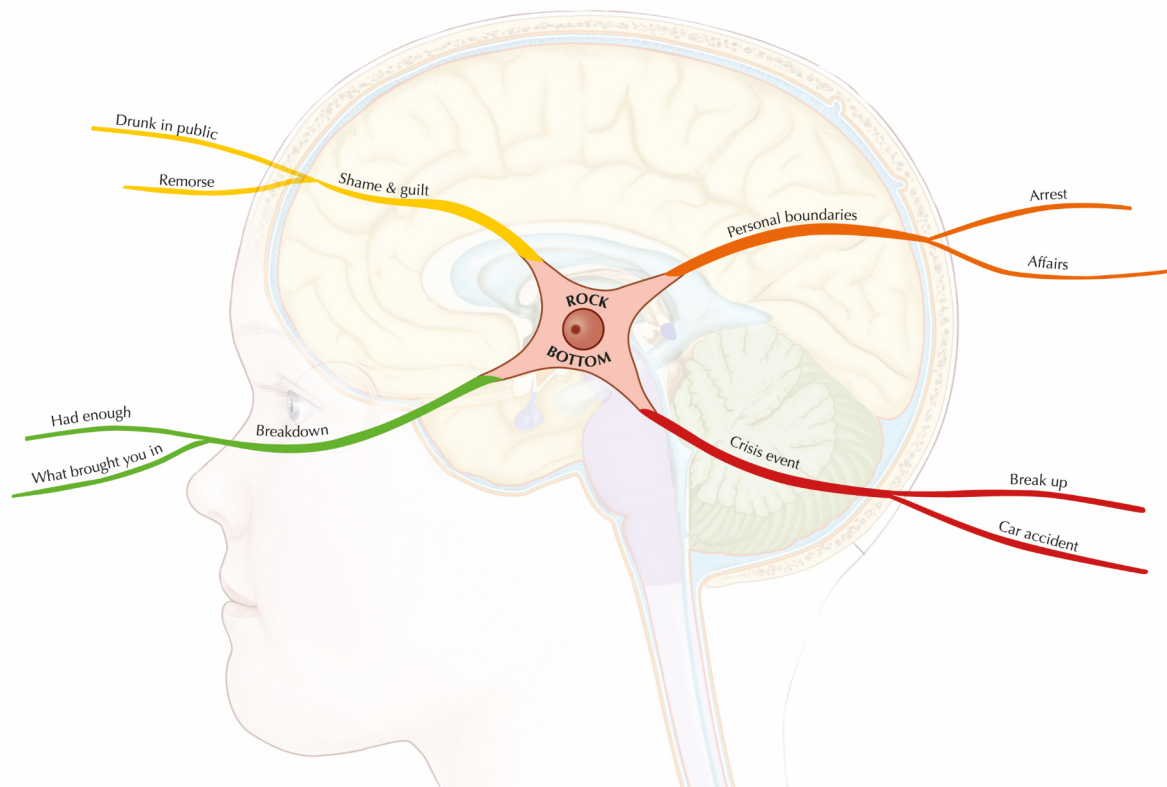
- You wake up after a particularly grueling binge and your nerves are shattered. You can't face anybody and decide it's time to quit and get into treatment.
- Try describing what brought you into treatment.

## **Crises**

Are there any events which precipitated a crisis which you can directly attribute to your addictive behavior?

- A car accident
- An arrest
- A relationship breakdown

## ROCK BOTTOM



### Exercise 4

Mind Map (or write about) the following:

1. The shame and guilt of your using
2. The breaking of your own boundaries or values
3. Any emotional or nervous breakdowns you've had
4. Any crisis events caused by your addiction