The Psychology of Addiction

Synopsis
In this video filmed at Albion Correctional Center in Albion, New York, Delbert Boone is speaking to a group of female inmates about the psychology of addiction - the why and how one becomes addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, and its effects on communication and interpersonal relationships.

Boone describes addiction as a democratic disease, striking individuals of all ages, race, socioeconomic level, and gender. Americans have been misinformed he believes, about what substances are addictive and dangerous. Boone gives the example of “light beers” which are suggested to consumers to be contain less alcohol, when indeed, a 12-oz. can of beer whether it is regular or “light”, contains the same amount of alcohol as 1 oz. of whiskey.

Boone identifies and discusses with the audience five characteristics of addiction: cunning, baffling, powerful, chronic, progressive and fatal. Addiction needs a host, and the individual, male or female, rich or poor, gives it life. A mind-altering drug Boone emphasizes, will always do what it is supposed to do, reduce brain functioning, regardless of the drug or the host.

Intermittently throughout the video, inmates or former inmates talk about their lives as addicts and the impact addiction has had on her. No one speaks to the pleasure, only the pain of the addiction in their lives.

Boone concludes the video by illustrating with real life, down to earth examples, how healthy psychological coping mechanisms - denial, rationalization, minimization and projection, can become twisted and interfere with good decision making and interpersonal communication.

Questions to ask before viewing
1. Which drugs do you think are hard drugs? Soft drugs?
2. What do you think is the most significant effect drug or alcohol addiction can have on an individual?
3. Which drug or drugs do you think are the most dangerous to use? Explain why.
4. Do you think that addictive behavior is same among all groups of people? Explain why.

Questions to ask after viewing
1. Name at least three characteristics of addiction and offer an example of behavior associated with the characteristic. (cunning, baffling, powerful, chronic, progressive, fatal; examples will vary. Possible examples: cunning: It makes one think he or she is in control of their behavior, when in reality, they are not. powerful: It focuses all of a person’s thoughts and activity on how to obtain the addictive substance.; chronic: It is a disease that one will have forever.; progressive: The demands of addiction on one mind and body increases; fatal: it can kill the addict at some point.)
2. What is the most one can hope to achieve in coping with an addiction? (to arrest it)
3. Which has a higher alcohol content, one ounce of whiskey or 12 ounces of beer? (They both have same amount of alcohol, one ounce.)
4. What organ do all addictive substances affect? (the brain)
5. Which of the four coping strategies mentioned in the program does the following statement reflect? “She is not as mad at me this week when I asked where she had been, as she had been last week when I asked her the same question.” (minimization)
6. Why does one’s thought processes and behavior change when one is addicted to drugs or alcohol? (They each affect the brain and one’s ability to process information and make decisions.)
7. Why is it important to understand the psychology of addiction? (It is a powerful sickness that can make people of different ages; gender, socioeconomic level and age think and behave similarly. There is little else that has the same effect on so many different kinds of people.)
8. What happens when someone becomes addicted to drugs or alcohol? (The person stops functioning effectively. His or her life revolves around the addictive substance. Relationships with friends and family members change and both can become trapped in unhealthy coping behaviors.)
9. Which of the four coping strategies mentioned in the program does the following statement reflect. “I didn’t get parole because of what I was wearing.” (rationalization)
10. Why did the presenter think that “getting high”
was controversial?
(A person of any age, gender, or socioeconomic level is vulnerable to “getting high” and becoming an addict.)

11. What is the difference between a hard and a soft drug? (There is none. Any mind-altering drug can become addictive and dangerous to the mind and body.)

12. What is the message of the women inmates who were interviewed? (Drugs had taken over and ruined their lives. The high was not worth it.)

Discussion Guide

The Psychology of Addiction

Objectives

- To identify the characteristics of addiction
- To identify and discuss four psychological survival skills
- To explain the link between the physical and behavioral effects of addiction
- To dispel some common held views about drugs and drug addiction

11. What is the difference between a hard and a soft drug? (There is none. Any mind-altering drug can become addictive and dangerous to the mind and body.)

12. What is the message of the women inmates who were interviewed? (Drugs had taken over and ruined their lives. The high was not worth it.)