

This visual model animates addiction as a **relationship** not a behavior.



Here, I am offering this visual model as a **simple, visual way to reframe your understanding** of addiction so you can start **reconsidering** it from a **different perspective**. To think that recovering from addiction means just stopping a behavior, does not scratch the surface of its complexity and emotional captivity. If you find yourself caught in addiction or you are a friend or loved one of someone who is, take a fresh look at the **complexity of the emotional vortex**, put into simple terms. This might help you **step back** from the chaos to see what is really going on. Then the healthy choices can begin.

Whether the addiction be drugs, alcohol, spending, video games, gambling, relationships, adrenaline, sex, acceptance, work, money, anger, power, texting/social media, etc. the vortex is the same. **Addiction is an intimate relationship** that holds people captive at the **emotional level by fulfilling deep emotional needs** and instilling a **perpetual influence of isolation**. **IT promises to provide fantasy when reality hurts**.

An addiction can become the most influential and intimate relationship a person can have. In our weaker, more vulnerable moments **IT** seems to know us best of all, and becomes something our fearful, isolated, powerless, overwhelmed and painful selves rely on more and more. Unfortunately **when real emotional needs get met, the romance has begun**. We get invested in making room for **IT** in our lives, **anticipating, planning for and protecting IT**.

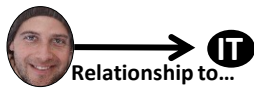
Addictions are Emotional, Not Logical.

We have some kind of **Relationship to... everyone and everything**, especially to **ourselves**. We relate and experience life physically, intellectually and spiritually, but more often than we would like to admit, we relate to things **emotionally**.

As animated below, **IT** refers to the thing on which one has learned to depend as the **#1 solution** to manage **emotional** experiences. Virtually anything we do can become an **addictive relationship** when we see it as our **#1 go-to solution**. We begin to eliminate other solutions one by one and our **emotional dependency** grows until **IT** becomes **dominant**.

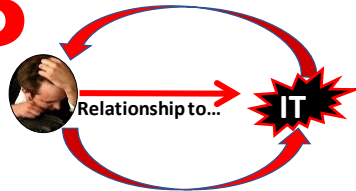
When a SPIN becomes a Vortex

B



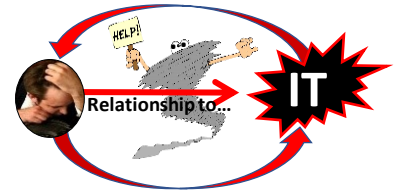
1 Relationship to... IT

We have a relationship which fulfills our **emotional** needs.



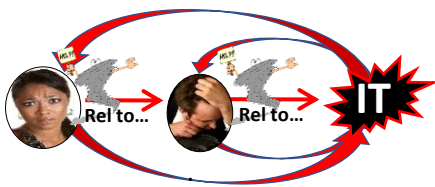
2 Now #1 Solution

We can find ourselves spending more time, attention and energy revolving around this **relationship**.



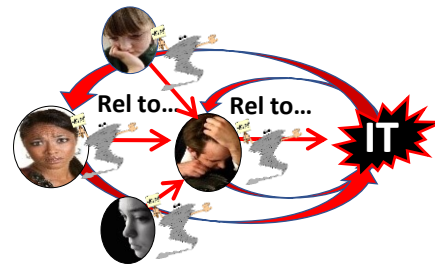
3 Vortex is formed

From a fear spin mindset our relationship intensifies, and **dependency on IT** grows.



4 Others are pulled in

Partner seeks connection and must **compete** with this **intimate relationship** and the chaos that comes with it.



5 #1 solution becomes #1 problem

Others invest their hearts, time, energy and attention to connect with their loved one but experience powerlessness, rejection and defeat.

As a loved one, one hopes to control situations so the behavior cannot occur. Stopping the other person's behavior alone will not break the emotional power the addictive relationship has on them. Once again I remind you that the person addicted **invests** in the **relationship** at an **intimate emotional level**, and **FEARS losing IT**.

Being the partner on the outside is a painful place to live because one feels isolated, alone and powerless to connect. As long as the partner is still invested in competing with the addiction, therefore caught up in the vortex, their choices are few. They can continue to endure the pain of competing against the more intimate experience of the addiction, join in with the addiction, to avoid being excluded in the partnership or freeze in place, in powerlessness, not knowing what to do next.

For the addict and the loved one alike, the only way to break free from the vortex is to experience a deep and very real awareness that the vortex is present and dominating. Experiencing **healthy intolerance** for the chaos, powerlessness, pain and being sick and tired of being sick and tired, are all indications of **readiness** to look at life differently. None of these feelings are pleasant but for the **psyche**, the true **core self** and the process of **healing**, they are signs of a **pivotal shift** that can leverage **change**. This kind of **exhaustion** can be **permission** giving, and a **valuable** time to reach out, out of the vortex, to **ask for help**.

The following visual recognizes the **impact** of the **vortex** and what **needs to shift** to get **balance** back. Look for signs of A and B in your thoughts, emotions, perceptions and actions. Remember as humans we are hardwired in our DNA to Respond (A mindset) and to React (B mindset). **Expressing your intention to step out of the vortex and back to A is the start of the healing and recovery process.** Recovery can be challenging but you have already survived the chaos of the vortex which is one of the most difficult and painful experiences we can have as humans. Reach out for help from others.

Internal Shifts Back to Balance

****It is helpful if you read this visual right to left (B to A).**

Addiction



Vortex



SPIRIT



1 SPIN

Return to your grounded and expand energies offer creativity, logic, insight and calm certainty at your core.

Remember spin energy is chaotic, reactive and contracts inward as you struggle to feel safe.

BALANCE



2 IMBALANCE

When you reconnect with your innate **Response-abilities** you can respond and resolve issues from calm, grounded energy.

React-abilities of Fear mindset Fight, FLIGHT, Freeze make your energies chaotic and off balance.

#1 Problem



3 #1 Solution

Relating to... IT as the **#1 problem** is vital in coming back to reality and seeing how much its influence has taken you away from your true self.

Relates to... IT as the **#1 and only solution** to manage life. All other solutions have been eliminated along the way.

Distinguish between 2 energies -Addiction and True Self



4 Enmeshed Energies of Addiction and True Self

Remembering that there are **two distinct energies** and intentions will help you stay tuned to which energy is present at any given time.

Impossible to **distinguish between** coming from **true self** and living under the influence of the **addiction energy** and identity.

Reconnection



5 Disconnection

Reconnecting to others you trust is often the first step in **reconnecting to your self**, your true choices, purpose, dreams and hopes.

Disconnection from self, others, choices and purpose results in deep grief, loss, isolation, fear and despair. **Addiction thrives in isolation.**

Healthy Fear



6 Toxic Fear

Recognizing your **Healthy Fear** helps you identify what you need to keep yourself safe, growing, healing, learning and expanding.

Toxic Fear works against you, making you feel small and worthless, creating more powerlessness and dependency.

Inspiration mindset



7 Survival mindset

Expanded, open and grounded energies help you connect to your **core**, to your **world** and to a **higher meaning and purpose**.

Contracted self, energy, vision, capacity and resources limits your ability to see beyond your immediate circumstance.

Healing



8 Hurting

Remember, recovery from addiction and the chaos that comes with it is a healing process. **Healing is innate, possible and natural.**

Pain dominates reality. It is fed by fear, powerless, shame and defeat. The addiction dominates your thoughts, feelings & actions.

Self-certainty

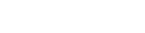


9 Self-doubt

Shifting out of the vortex empowers your true self, so you can reconnect to your meaning, values, identity, purpose and confidence.

Insecurity dominates creating negative cascade of self-blame, confusion, fear, guilt, isolation. **From self-doubt life looks undoable.**

Ownership



10 Denial

Own your mistakes without being self-critical. Own your successes without being boastful. Own the wisdom within your story.

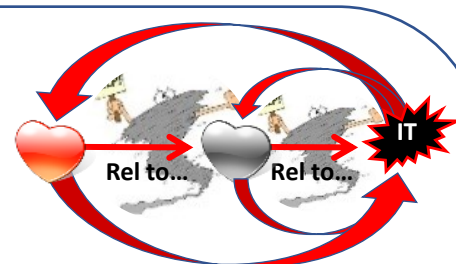
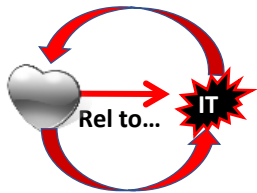
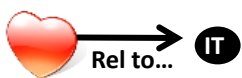
Blind spots won't let you see what is really going on. You have limited vision therefore you cannot resolve or make changes.

Key Points To Remember About the Vortex

- **Emotional** relationship, not **intellectual**
- In the **survival mode's reactive emotional state** you can't access your **common sense**.
- Addiction creates a **new normal** (imbalance, in a spin).
- Addictions are **mood altering** (change your emotional experience ex. chocolate, cigarettes, gambling, video games) but others are also **mind altering** (impacting your cognitive capacity ex. heroine, cocaine, meth)
- **Behavior** is what you **do**, **emotional need** is **why** you do it.
- As a human you are **more emotional** than you would like to think.
- **Fantasy escape** can be enticing when you are not feeling fulfilled and/or powerful in reality.
- **Identity** is who you truly are at your **core**, **behavior** is what you sometimes **do**. This is important to remember when rebuilding your **sense of self in recovery**. Own your life, your successes and failures, your dreams and hopes and fears. They all belong to your story and your story holds wisdom.

Evolution of ADDICTION - An Emotional VORTEX

Early Awareness and Assessment of the Vortex Mindset



1 Relationship to... IT

We have a relationship which fulfills our emotional needs.

2 Now #1 Solution

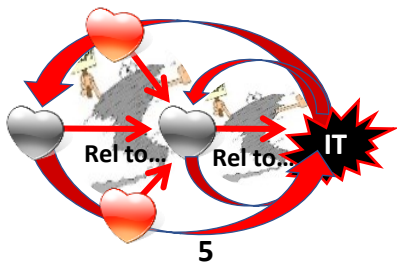
In a spin, we spend more of our time, attention and energy revolving around this relationship.

3 Vortex is formed

From this spin mindset our relationship intensifies, and dependency on IT grows.

4 Others are pulled in

Partner seeks connection and must compete with this intimate relationship and the chaos that comes with it.



#1 solution becomes #1 problem

Others invest their hearts, time, energy and attention to connect with their loved one but experience powerlessness and defeat

The Vortex...In Simple Terms

IT refers to the thing on which one has learned to depend as the #1 solution to manage emotional experiences in life. Eg. I need IT to escape my reality, to feel calm, to take the pain away, to feel powerful and confident, to get my work done, to be accepted, to feel included, to deal with work, etc. IT can be drugs, alcohol, anger, violence, video gaming, spending money, internet, texting, hoarding, sex, food, relationships, gambling, speed or high risk behavior, adrenaline, etc. Virtually anything we do can become an addictive relationship especially when we are off balance and in a spin. **IT becomes dominant**, when we see it as our **#1 go-to solution**.

Key points

- **Emotional** relationship, not **intellectual**
- In the **survival mode's reactive emotional state** we can't access our **common sense**
- Addiction creates a **new normal** (imbalance, in a spin)
- Addictions are **mood altering** (change our emotional experience eg. Chocolate) but others are also **mind altering** (impacting our cognitive capacity eg. cocaine)
- **Behavior** is what we **do**, **emotional need** is **why** we do it.
- As humans we are **more emotional** than we would like to think
- **Fantasy escape** can be enticing when we are not feeling fulfilled and/or powerful in reality
- **Identity** is who I truly am at my core, **behavior** is what I sometimes do. This is important to remember when rebuilding our sense of self in **recovery**.

Looking at the Vortex In More Detail



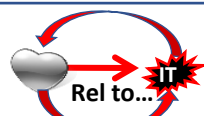
1 Relationship to... IT

We have a relationship which fulfills our emotional needs.

It is human nature to create relationships to everything in our lives.

Things that meet our emotional needs become more significant than others.

We are drawn to people, places, things and behaviors etc. that make us feel... powerful, comforted, relieved, relaxed, happy, social, courageous, less pain, less fear, less frustrated, less insecure, free, included, celebrated, free to escape, etc.



2 Now #1 Solution

More of our time, attention and energy revolves around this relationship.



What we often don't see happening is that we start eliminating other ways of meeting our emotional needs until the relationship becomes the **#1 solution**. We fear being without it.

Our emotional dependency can be created from any relationship. Those addictive relationships which can be the hardest to break are those supported by the popular culture. As a current and high profile example: The cell phone and war games play are necessary in our everyday lives, but the extent in which we partake needs to be considered closely. It is not uncommon that a typical young person may text friends in the tens of thousands times a month. It is also not uncommon that some teens are spending up to 12 hours a day playing video games, where they are celebrated as heroes, a stark contrast to how they actually feel in their lives. The emotional enticement is easy to understand, but we often can't see how extreme our dependency has become. **It is our new normal, our new emotional normal.**



3 Vortex is formed

Relationship intensifies, and dependency on IT grows.

Fueled by fear, isolation, tunnel-vision and powerlessness, chaotic energy creates a vortex around this relationship, which in turn creates more of the same. Once our fears and dependency closes in on us we believe, trust, " I have to have IT to feel normal, to cope with my day, to deal with... It's the only thing I can count on." **As our "go-to" emotional #1 solution, our dependency blinds us to its impact on us.**

The addiction vortex mindset impacts everything... we do, think, feel, perceive, say, believe, etc. We now spend more time and energy **planning** and **protecting this intimate emotional relationship**. The real life consequences of the relationship start to create an **intimate tug-of-war** inside the individual between seeing and experiencing IT as the **#1 solution** (from the emotion), and the **#1 problem** (from the intellect). When the vortex's chaos, toxic fear, self-doubt, isolation and powerlessness dominate, the addictive emotional voice wins... the relationship to IT intensifies.



The Addictive Vortex Creates Disconnection

The chaos of the addiction vortex creates disconnection from self and others.

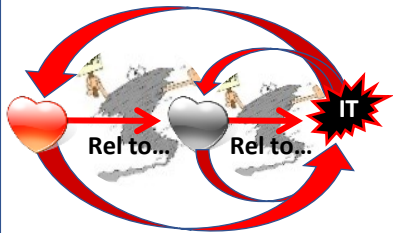
Disconnection From True Self

Although **IT** offers a temporary **escape** from pain, fear, being alone, powerlessness, etc. **IT** also **disconnects** one from their inspired self. **We cannot experience success** if we are disconnected from our **natural capacity** to problem solve, have vision, create solutions, see proportion, be inspired, negotiate, hope, set priorities, in other words, from our common sense. When we are disconnected from our true selves and capacity **nothing gets resolved**. The isolation, powerlessness, increased fear and regret that occurs in our spin mindset perpetuates self-doubt and loss of fulfillment and ambition. **TRUST IN SELF DROPS.**

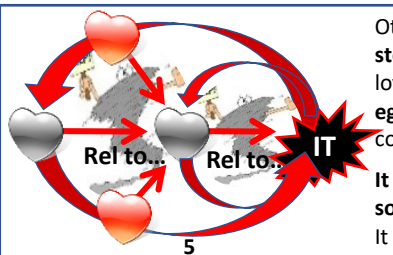
Disconnection From Those Who Love Us

When we are **disconnected** from ourselves our capacity to **connect** with others is greatly compromised. The internal battle of chaos **dominates** our energies and limits our ability to relate and respond with sensitivity to others' needs. Essentially we go into a survival mindset which is dominated by fear, powerlessness and tunnel vision. We relate to others from fight, flight or freeze reactivity. When we are faced with choosing between a harsh reality or fantasy, our emotional choice is often fantasy. Others feel the disconnection, feeling abandoned, afraid and powerless to change the chaos at the core of the vortex.

Buddy Addiction – Our innate fears of losing our #1 solution and not being connected or accepted can draw us into buddy addiction. This means connecting to another or a landscape (culture) of like-minded others, who will support us partaking in the vortex. Like when a person using drugs connects with others using drugs, their choices or behaviors will not be challenged. Buddy addiction is an intimate bond that blinds us to the stark reality of our own chaos, fear and loss.



As a loved one, one hopes to control situations so the behavior cannot occur. Stopping the other person's behavior alone will not break the emotional power the addictive relationship has on them. Once again I remind you that the person addicted invests in the relationship at an intimate emotional level, and fears losing IT. Being the partner on the outside is a painful place to live because one feels isolated, alone and powerless to connect. The partner's choice is either to endure the pain of competing against the more intimate experience of the addiction, or worse yet, join in... to avoid being excluded in the partnership. This shared experience of powerlessness shifts both individuals into a survival mode mindset where they find themselves living in, what I call, **fear**dom. Fear



Others such as the kids, friends, co-workers, extended family, are pulled into this energy and feel equally powerless to stop the escalating chaos of the vortex. The **toxic addiction vortex exploits the best of them:** their hope, compassion, loyalty, resources, etc. which instills more fear and unpredictability, where all feel as though they are **walking on eggshells, not wanting to make things worse.** Those on the outer ring desperately want things to change, to feel connected in a safe way, but instead they experience broken promises, disappointment, fear, sadness and loss. **It is common that the further one is away from the core of the vortex, the easier it is to see chaos for what it is...this #1 solution has evolved into the #1 problem.** It is natural to focus on attempting to get out of the vortex by simply changing a behavior or two. Everyone wants to believe that by just changing the behavior the vortex's hold will be broken. It is not that easy. From outside the vortex people shake their heads in disbelief that things are happening the way they are. This confusion is because they are looking at the vortex from an intellectual perspective. The vortex is driven and perpetuated at the emotional level.

#1 solution becomes #1 problem
Others invest their hearts, time, energy and attention to connect with their loved one but experience powerlessness and defeat

The loved ones invest emotionally to try to love and hope the family back to balance. But it's not enough... and it's not their fault.

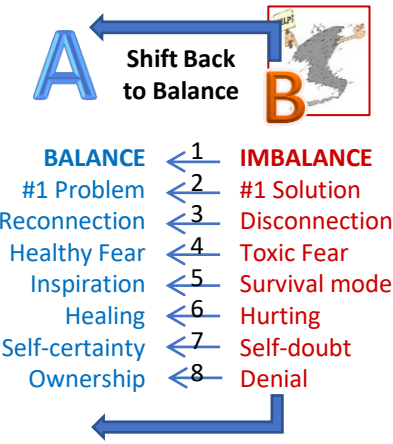


The tunnel vision formed by defeat, fear, isolation and powerlessness intensifies our need to invest more of our time, attention and energies to the vortex in a desperate hope of making a difference. We must all realize that our strategies thus far have not been effective. **To counteract the impact and influence of the vortex we must step back and see this scenario for what it is... a vortex being fueled by fear and robbing us of our lives..** To break the grip the vortex has on us we must break the isolation and ask for help. **It is common that family members are the first to initiate connecting to recovery resources such as doctor, counsellor or a support group. Their exhaustion and defeat is a sign of healthy intolerance and becomes a natural incentive to do things differently.** Each person can then focus on stopping their individual spins and begin to distance emotionally from the vortex so that common sense, support, information, and a recovery framework can lead them back to balance.

One of the most difficult things to sort out for those on the outer ring, is how to support their loved one without supporting the addiction. It is impossible to imagine seeing a way through this dilemma while still under the influence of the vortex's fear, guilt, obligation, self-doubt and threat of loss. But from an emotional distance, and with new clarity, one can learn to see the distinction and make choices necessary to move forward in healthy ways.

Counteracting the Impact of the Addictive Vortex

No matter what role you are playing in the vortex, you have experienced loss. The greatest loss of all is the loss of self. Your focus has been away from your true self so you may not appreciate to what degree you have been impacted physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Below is a visual that compares **A – Balanced mindset** and **B – Imbalanced mindset**, life in a spin. **B's list** may help you identify some of the ways you have been effected by being captive in the vortex. The **A list** animates what we need to do to **counteract the impact of the addictive vortex.** Whether you are a **family member** or the **addict**, the road back to finding self is the same...as described by the 8 points below. Whether **IT** is a **substance** you put in your body or a **behavior** you did, or whether **IT** is **mood altering** (impacting your emotional experience) or **mind altering** (impacting your intellectual capacity), **the road back to self starts with shifting back to A – balance, your natural and authentic self.** Recovery resources such as listed above provide new insight, support and resources in coming back to self. Each of the following 8 points correspond to the 8 points on the visual animating the shift back to A.



- 1 Shifting from IMBALANCE back to BALANCE starts with realizing you are caught in a vortex.** The visual of the vortex can help you recognize when it is present, subtle or severe (what it looks like, sounds like and feels like.)
- 2 Shift from seeing your Relationship to IT as #1 Solution to seeing it as #1 Problem.** Experiencing the intimate internal tug-of-war between seeing IT as a problem and solution is a sign that your true self is still present and fighting for balance and recovery. This is a window of opportunity to tilt the inner struggle toward connection and healing.
- 3 Reconnect with yourself and with others outside of the vortex who support you in making healthy changes.** Connection is essential to our being, so make connections that support your recovery needs. Recovery framework of support groups and counselling can help you maintain the clarity and consistency you will need to keep your balance especially when others are still spinning in their lives.
- 4 Shift from toxic fear, which makes you feel powerless, to healthy fear that identifies your needs and gives you momentum for healthy change.** Fear is natural. Take the time to assess if your fear is healthy or toxic.
- 5 The inspiration mindset is your most powerful natural resource.** When you are inspired you break out of the tunnel vision instilled by the vortex. You can create possibilities, motivated by vision, meaning and purpose. Engage in activities which inspire you (creativity, art, humor, fun, music, nature, etc.) and connect with people who inspire you, and seek to inspire others. Start with something small, something that is doable, to ensure success in small bits.
- 6 Embrace this as a healing process.** Your body, psyche and emotions want to heal. Your hurting will help you identify what you need to heal. If it hurts to be alone, you probably need connection. Be patient with yourself.
- 7 Trusting your ability to work through pain and fear is foundational to replace your self-doubt with self-certainty.** You will learn that you can rely on yourself rather than your addiction to manage your emotional experiences. Emotions are not monsters. They are messages that tell you how you are experiencing something, and give you an opportunity to have a voice and make a choice about what you want to do about it.
- 8 Shifting out of denial creates opportunity to deal with reality. Ownership means owning your life again.** Ownership connects you with your successes so you can celebrate them, and to your failures, so you can learn from them. This journey leads to understanding yourself, forgiving yourself and moving forward in your life.