Romancing the Brain

Presented By:
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Objectives

- Effectively translate to alcohol/drug clients conflict resolution, communications skills and types of healthy communication
- Use and understand the conflict mode instrument
- Relate conflict resolution styles to family of origin
- Better manage relationships and help relate these steps to resolving conflict
Location of the Limbic System

Your **Limbic System** is located approximately in the center of your brain.

- It is the oldest system of your brain – the reptilian brain.
- In pre-historic times, it was the largest mass area of your brain.
- Part of the brain that most people use most often in conflict.
- It is where addiction resides – the reward center.
- It is effected by the words, tone of voice and expressions used.
Conflict Resolution in Recovery

BUT!!

LIMBIC

DON'T YOU EVER!

Absolutes

should

No

you better!

If you ever...

Ever

Never

Fight

Always

Could

How???
The mother/father picks up the 7-year-old child at the close of the school or work day. The child immediately begins asking the parent to go to McDonald’s or for pizza or anything else that a 7-year-old might do. The parent scolds the child by saying: “That is not going to happen. I don’t have money (or time). We’ve already gone there this week, etc.” The child acts out, wanting his/her way. The parent escalates by saying: “I am the parent, and this is the way we are going to do it!”
How is This Scene Familiar?

• Is this scene familiar to you?

• Maybe in other families that you know?

• How do you think the child feels…?
  – Listened to?
  – Respected?
  – Like he/she has Options?
  – Nurtured
  – Capable
  – Loved

• What is the child learning?

• How will this scenario develop year after year…early teens… teens…and beyond?
The parent and child are at home. The child receives a snack of crackers and milk as the parent prepares dinner. The child spills milk on the floor. The parent sees this and becomes angry, pointing his/her finger, and saying something like:

“How many times have I told you not to put your milk so close to you! Look what you have done! You are always making messes, and I just cleaned this floor!”
How is This Scene Familiar?

What does this tell you?

What do you want to do when a person points a figure at you?

What does your brain say to you when someone points a finger at you?

What is the child learning?
Other Examples & Solutions

- “Don’t you ever do that to me again!”
- “You never remember our anniversary!”
- “I like your skirt – but…..those pants!”
  - (Getting our Big BUT in the way!)
- “Where is your report?”
- “You’d better….get that done…do that…”
- “If you ever…..”
- “Don’t you know better than that?”
- “I don’t even have time to…..”
How Did Your Brain React?

• How does the brain react in these scenarios?

• Did the sense of “fight or flight” trigger in your brain?

• How would you typically react in your every day life?
The cortex located in the front part of the brain.

- It functions are decision-making, problem solving, creativity and discovery.
- It can be trained to be mindful.
- It reacts positively to options.
- It is like your internal computer.
- It helps you to sort, process and store information.
Conflict Resolution in Recovery

Let Us Find Another…

Cortex

Will you

I believe…

Let’s Discover!

I wonder

Thank you

Stand Still

Is it possible

Please

Back-up the Train

Let Us Find Another…

YES!

Often

Consider

I would like

A Component of NAADAC’s Life-Long Learning Series
The Cortex - Discovery

- We learn impulse control
- Maturity and imagination develops
- Decision making – judgment – reasoning
- Creativity and discovery
- Problem solving
- Romance develops into maturity and commitment
One helpful skill to learn is the ability to *stand still in the moment*.

In standing still in the moment, you learn to stop or slow down your thoughts and conflict process by asking yourself 3 questions:

- Is what I am going to say (words and phrases) and the way I am going to say it (tone, inflection and gestures) going to build the relationship up?
- Is it going to keep the relationship level?
- Is it going to tear the relationship down?
Emotional Bank Account

- Everyone maintains an emotional bank account.
- We think we have reserves.
- We lose reserves when we tear others down or lose control, resulting in the other person leaving – in some manner.
- This takes on the response from the other as low tolerance over little things.
- Do you or someone you know seem to be in this place?
- In what other ways do you see this happening around you or to you?
Expressing anger in an unhealthy manner causes the person doing it:

- to have increased blood pressure
- to have increased heart rate
- to increase the adrenaline level
- to cause a rush to the brain

Example…”going limbic”

- What was my body experiencing?
- Recovery and a rush of endorphins from anger – Do they match?
- Anger rushes are destructive to both (all) persons on the receiving end of the anger
The parent begins the interaction by getting down to eye level with child and asking, in a calm and kind voice, “How was your day today?” When the child starts to fuss over what he/she wants, the parent reaches out and gives a positive touch. This helps to calm the child, and it connects the child to the parent.

As the parent, offer several suggestions. For example: “We went to McDonald’s earlier this week, so I cannot afford (or do not want) to go there again tonight. These are the choices, and please pick the one you like best. We can go home and have leftovers, we can go home and make a grilled cheese sandwich with salad or we can go home and have chicken and salad. Which do you want, honey?”
Let’s go back to the episode with the spilled milk.

Instead of yelling or berating the child for the spilled milk, the parent responds by saying, “Honey, I see you spilled your milk. I’m going to go to the kitchen and get something to clean it up. I’ll be right back.” The parent brings back a damp cloth and a dry cloth. The parent shows the child how to clean up the spilled milk with the damp cloth, and gives it to the child to do. While watching the child, the parent points out any extra film on the floor that needs to be wiped up. The parent then demonstrates for the child how to dry the floor with the dry cloth.
Debrief…What was Different?

• Most of us learn to make haste in a crisis or (in what seems like a crisis). For example, do this, do that, don’t do this or don’t do that. Afterwards, we have to clean up the damage done by hasty words and behaviors.

• Using the cortex teaches us how to think through a situation, stop ourselves, and ask. “Is what I am going to say and the way in which I am going to say it going to build the relationship up, keep it level or tear it down?”

• Recall the example of the “cortex” parent. That parent now has an “emotional bank account” in which to grow and use, when it is necessary.
Debrief….What was Different? (cont)

• It is not any different in adult-to-adult, romantic, working or other types of relationships.

• This also sets the foundation for discussions and clear, respectful communication between parent and child.

• Other thoughts or ideas this gives you?
Being Deliberate

- Phrases like “Thank you,” “Please,” “I am sorry” and “I did not intend to …” give people more power in their lives or diminishes their power?

- Words or phrases like the following add what to a conversation?
  - I believe…
  - I wonder…
  - Let’s discover…
  - I would like…
  - Consider…
  - Often…

- Consider how this change could effect what you would expect to see in other people (for example; work colleagues, family and friends).
Phrases that “Romance” the Brain

- Is it possible…?
- Have you had an opportunity to…?
- I wonder what would happen if…?
- Help me understand…
- I’m confused, I thought…
- Is this ok with you…?
- I’m curious about…
- Please explain to me…
Phrases that “Romance” the Brain (cont)

- My pleasure to…
- Please…
- Thank you…
- May I have permission…?
- Please tell me what you mean by this.
- When you have a minute, would you please…?
Phrases that “Romance” the Brain (cont)

- I am sorry.
- Is there another way I could (say/do/explain this)?
- Let us discover/consider/believe…
- Often, this is a misunderstood (action/behavior/word)…
More “Romancing” the Brain

• Will you agree to this…?

• I would like to find a solution, together.

• Would you consider…?

• I would like to assist you…

• Your thoughts?
Training the Brain

Working with your clients to change the brain:

- Hear It
- See It
- Say It
- Write It
- Read It
- Repeat It
Ways in which to build relationships:

- Listening to the other person without judgment
- Discovering the other person’s needs or perceptions
- Being willing not to push for my own way
- Being willing not to “go limbic”
Training the Brain

• How have you handled similar situations in the past?

• Examples:
  – Letting others talk over me until I explode
  – Being manipulated or manipulating others to do something they really do not want to do
  – Acquiescing from fearfulness of consequences or anger from the other person
Ways to remind myself to use deliberate words or phrase. For example:

- Watching for my own level of anger or passion

- Reminding myself if I am wanting to build, keep level or tear down the relationship

- If the issue is worth tearing it down, reminding myself of how badly I feel when limbic words and phrases are used on me

- Writing the cortex words on my hand (or sheet of paper, sticky note) and practice saying them
Let’s discuss the relationship cycle!
Five (5) Stages of Relationships

1) Honeymoon
2) Disillusion
3) Misery
4) Awakening
5) Peace/Calm
Honeymoon Stage

- Please take a Trip down Memory Lane with me
- Were you, at one time, looking for that prince or princess?
- Think back to the beginning of that time, the beginning of the relationship, what did you feel and what did you do?
  - Exciting
  - Scary
  - Fun
  - Lots of communication
  - Few feelings
  - Hopes
  - Dreams
  - Careful
  - Thoughtful
  - Sex was great
  - Cards and notes
  - Special nights out
Disillusionment Stage

- What happens after some time in the Honeymoon stage?
- **Disillusionment** sets in…
- This is sometimes referred to as the **Familiarization or Adjusting to Reality** stage.
- Your endorphins cannot keep producing at the same level as before. You become more relaxed in the relationship, as does your partner.
- You and your partner are human and your flaws are beginning to show. There’s generally enough goodwill left over from the honeymoon stage that you can overlook most flaws.
More Disillusionment

- If the flaws are more serious - such as dishonesty or deceit - the relationship can become confusing and discouraging.

- If you want the relationship to keep evolving, you need to be able to communicate effectively and resolve conflict.

- Sex has become more familiar, and maybe the fun sleepwear has changed to less enticing wear.
More Disillusionment

- **Communication** tends to go down. There is less time spent sharing and it is less positive.

- The things that attracted you to the person now detract you from them.

- **Arguments** over money, friends, priorities, sex, etc., begin to happen with less agreement on how to solve these new differences.
Misery Stage

- This is also called the **Power Struggle, Disappointment** or **Distress** stage.

- You become more aware of the differences between you and your partner. Depending on your style of communication, you find yourself avoiding, accommodating, judging, competing and fighting in the conflict. Conflict continues to grow.

- Deep resentments can begin to build in this stage. You see your partner as uncaring, self-centered or untrustworthy.
Misery Stage

People really know they are in the Misery stage when they ask themselves:

- “Why did I ever get involved with this person in the first place?”
- “What was I thinking?”
- “If only I never got involved in the first place!”
- “Will this ever change?”
- “Is there no way out?”
More Misery

- Couples remain in this stage, building resentment and frustration until they either decide to:
  - End the relationship in some manner
  - Avoid the issues and remain in the relationship
  - Seek some means to resolve the conflict in the relationship

- Misery can last for years and years. There are couples (and you might have experienced this or seen others in this stage) remaining in Misery for 10, 20 or 30 years, often citing kids, financial constraints or fear of changing the familiar as reasons for staying together.

- Many couples do not evolve from this stage and decide to end the relationship here.

- However, if a couple can resolve conflicts here, then they move on to the next stage - Awakening.
Awakening Stage

• This is also called the **Stability, Friendship or Reconciliation** stage.

• Couples who make it this far express feelings of stronger commitment, connection, trust and love.

• You know neither one of you is perfect, but this concept is no longer threatening.

• You are confident in your ability to resolve most of your issues.
Awakening Stage

- You begin to reestablish your own outside interests (unlike the Honeymoon stage, where you only had eyes for each other).

- There is some danger of boredom with your partner, so you have to work to maintain the connection you made in the Honeymoon stage.

- Most couples are comfortable and content at this stage.

- To help a couple move to this stage, it is vital that they learn how to listen and communicate with each other.
• “Listening with the heart” is a term we use to express the skill of empathy. It involves remaining “present” with the person and hearing all he or she is saying - the deep feelings being expressed, their affect and fears and concerns as they relate to the relationship - without thinking about and trying to develop words you are going to use to respond.

• In this practice of “listening with the heart,” it is also vital to learn from each other, to learn what each needs - not wants, but really needs - to be in relationship with the other. In other words, what are the “basic needs” for that person to feel safe, secure and ready to fully participate in the relationship?
Needs Clarification

• Identify the real “needs” in these specific areas
• Ask your signifcants to identify their real needs
• Listen to your significant’s with no judgment or defense
• May ask clarifying questions
• Share your own needs
• Ask each other if you can meet each other needs and if there is some adjustments that would help the relationship
• This is an “Awakening” exercise that can promote a relationship back to “Honeymoon”
Four (4) Types of Agreement

- Financial
- Physical/Spatial
- Emotional/Social
- Spiritual
Financial Agreements

• What do you need to be in financial agreement?

• Who works?

• What amount of money do you need for the household? (Don’t fool yourself: if you are a $75,000-a-year expectation person, and your partner only makes $35,000, then there will be conflict.)

• Is it one joint checking account or two separate checking accounts?

• Is there savings, money for retirement and money for vacation?

• And what about donations? Is tithing something you believe in?
• Do you keep a budget that is agreed to? Is it projected out?

• A budget will keep financial arguments down since there is agreement on what the budget will be. When considering a new purchase, go to the budget and ask “Does it fit?” It no longer becomes an argument of “you don’t want me to have this”; it becomes a discussion of the budget and whether a purchase fits.

• What about credit cards? Can you use them? How much can you use them? Have you and your partner agreed to internal limits?
Financial Philosophy

- Is the other person from a family that had enough money to live on and the philosophy was “there is always enough”

- Is the other person from a family that struggled with money and people held tight to the money they did have?

- Who taught you what you believe about money?

- What are the rules?
  - Are there rules to save or spend?
  - How much money should be saved?
  - When is it okay to spend?

- Is there a rule about a savings account?
Physical/Spatial Agreements

- What are your physical expectations for the sexual relationship, physical exercise, the manner in which you keep up yourself (body, hair, etc.)?

- What type of physical space do you need—a crowded room, a sparse room, a house in the open, a house in the woods or in the city?

- What about physical abuse? What is okay with you? What is not negotiable (such as pushing, shoving, beating, hitting, scratching, etc.)?

- What is physical safety to you and appropriate boundaries in your relationship for all the above areas?

- What about own “body bubble”? How close do you like your partner and how often? Are you a cuddlier or do you prefer to have more space?
Body Bubbles

- We all have our own personal “body bubble,” formed as we grew up, that advises us how close we want others to come to us or when we get to the place when we know someone “enough” to allow them closer.

- People who have been physically or sexually abused might have a different experience of closeness.

- It is likely take more time, trust and patience in allowing others to come closer.

- As you build a relationship with a person, it is important to learn his or her body bubble styles and respect them.
Emotional/Social Support

- Are there certain situations (times of the year, seasons) that are more difficult emotionally for your partner? This might be related to a loss (death, divorce, accident, etc).

- When does your partner feel he or she needs more support from you? In what type of situations?

- When does your partner want you just to listen, and (possibly) hold them, rub their back or just be “present” with them?

- What do you need from your partner for positive emotional support?
• Do you expect unconditional love and support?

• Do you expect understanding and a person to listen to your hurts?

• How is that played out at the end of day, on the weekend, after an argument?

• Do you go to bed on your fight, in anger?

• What do you need there in terms of resolution?
Spiritual Agreements

• Every person comes to this life with a spiritual piece

• How we relate to that spiritual side is dependent on the fabric of our background

• Not everyone identifies their spiritual side

• Yet, everyone goes about trying to fill it in some manner
Spiritual Agreement Support

• What does spirituality mean to you? How do you want to express it?

• How do you want your partner involved?

• Where is your source of strength? How do you express it?

• Do you want to do this together or separately?

• Is there reading, praying or worship that you expect?

• What are your other spiritual expectations?
Completing the “Agreements” Loop

• Once this is done, it helps to write each of these on paper.

• Put them in a dual frame - and in the bedroom - so that when an issue or argument begins to rise, it can be agreed to revisit these agreements and to remind each other to put their needs first, not their wants.

• When a couple makes these types of agreements, after really listening to each other, a peace and calm is achieved.
Completing the “Agreements” Loop (cont)

• There is a sense that they know how to resolve conflict, they know what is expected and they know how they can meet these, specifically, in each of those areas.

• It does not mean that there won’t be future disagreements or that everything will be peaceful and calm.

• The difference is that there is agreement to work and live in peace, understanding and mutual support for each other.
What do we really need – not want….?

- Financial
- Physical/Spatial
- Emotional/Social
- Spiritual
Peace & Calm Stage

- Other names for this stage are Commitment, Acceptance, Transformation or Real Love.

- It is estimated that less than 5% of couples make it to this stage.

- You are with your partner because you have chosen him/her, faults and all, not because you need him or her.

- You and your partner are a team and look out for each other’s best interests.

- At this stage, your relationship becomes a true partnership.
The other hope is that couples are able to return to the times and attitudes of Honeymoon stage.

Once the step of Awakening occurs, I ask couples to go back to that Honeymoon time, buy something from Victoria’s Secret for each other and go to some of the places they used to go or write love notes, or play that special music or make that special dinner … Romance each other again!

Play and have fun! Laugh and have excitement to see or be with each other again!
Healthy Conflict:

- Engenders natural feelings
- Identifies needs and feelings
- Energizes us to meet the needs of ourselves and others
- Increases our skills for dealing with our environment
- Decreases the number of conflicts
- Creates naturally inhibited behaviors
- Solution Focused
Unhealthy conflict:

- Creates learned responses
- Masks real needs and feelings
- Squanders energy on false solutions, blame and shame
- Increases the problems we have with our environment
- Increases the number of conflicts
- Is addictive
- Creates a false sense of power and authority
- Results in impatience, urgency and reticence
- Problem Focused
What It Takes to Have a Healthy Relationship

Building a Healthy Life

- Being with someone – no matter what.
- We are inter – dependent on each other – interconnected. We need each other.
- Must be entered in – heart and soul. Don’t worry about the outcome.
- All you want is their highest good.
This type of relationship means:

- You are willing to do what is right to rescue the relationship.

- It is what you do with what has happened – NOT what happened.

- Doing all this means taking risks. The biggest risk is not basing the relationship on ME.

- It requires the ability to forgive.
This type of relationship **CANNOT** be based on:

- A cause
- A goal
- A Crisis
- Financial Gain
- Workplace
- Recreation
What It Takes to Have a Healthy Relationship

This Type of Relationship **CANNOT** be Based on:

- School
- Hobbies
- Family Gatherings
- Lust
- Your child’s Activities
A HEALTHY Relationship DOES NOT Intend to:

- Manipulate
- Keep Score
- Control
- “You owe Me” Attitude
Costs of a HEALTHY Relationship

- Risk
- Time
- Money
- Energy
- Reputation

- Heart
- Dreams
- YOUR Agenda
- YOUR Customs
- YOUR Taste/Style
It Can be Broken by the Following Behaviors

- Lying
- Stealing
- Sexual Devian
- Abuse of ANY Type
- Outside Sexual Relationships
What It Takes to Have a Healthy Relationship

• If you find an inability to forgive someone, it tells you that you had not entered into the relationship as a covenant.

  **TIPS**

• The issue is NOT what they can give. It is what you give!
Consistently Training the Brain

Ways to remind myself to use deliberate words or phrases. For example:

- Watching for my own level of anger or passion
- Reminding myself if I am wanting to build, keep level or tear down the relationship
- If the issue is worth tearing it down, reminding myself of how badly I feel when limbic words and phrases are used on me
- Writing the cortex words on my hand (or sheet of paper, sticky note) and practice saying them
- Words and phrases I will insert instead….
Please feel free to ask questions!

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