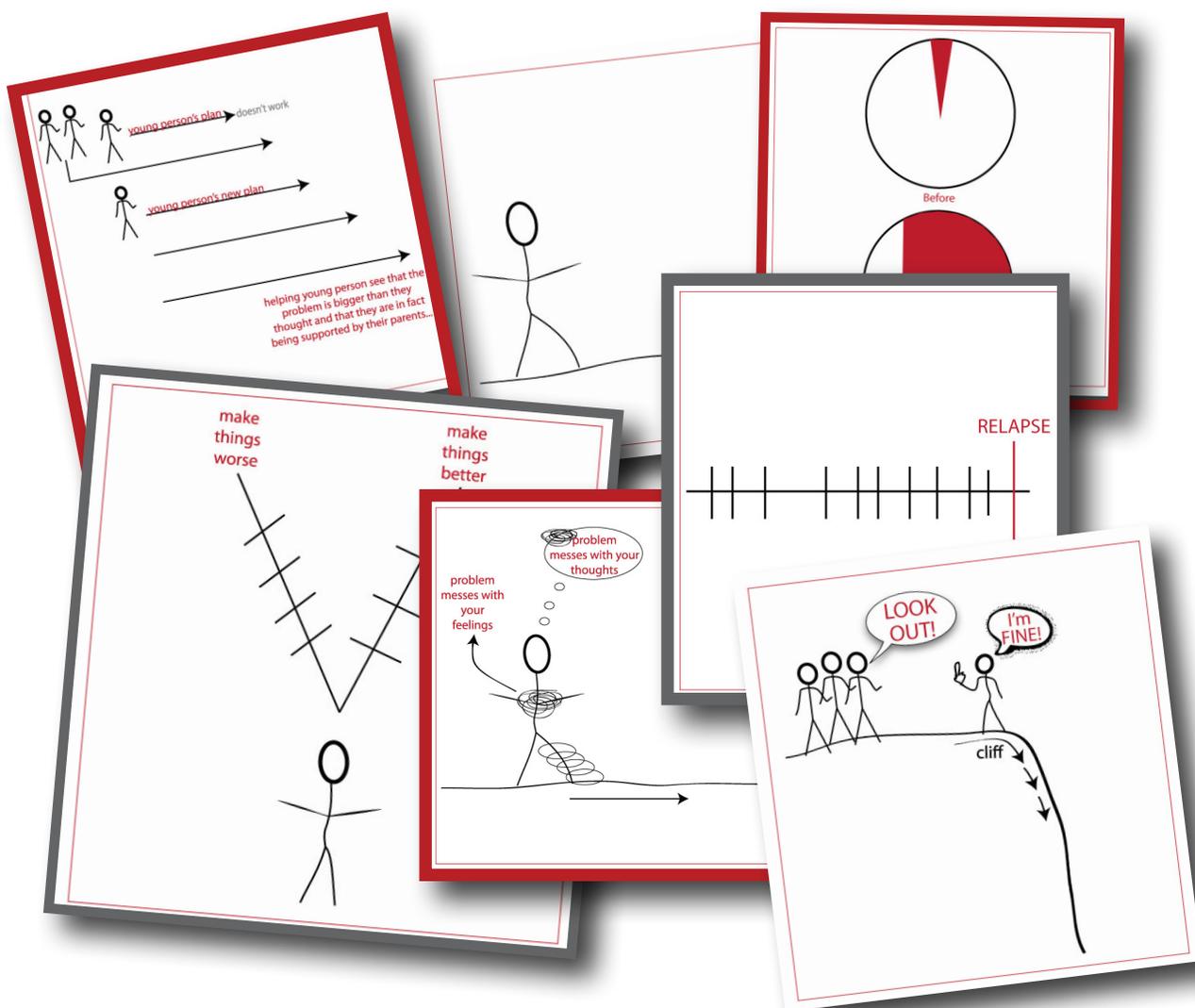


PASSING ON (L)EARNED KNOWLEDGES:

Relational Responses to Substance Misuse and Problem Gambling



Insider (L)Earned Knowledge About The Tactics and Strategies of Addiction

How the person gets attacked / seduced / influenced by the problem:

- Totalized thinking: All or nothing/never/always
- Negative predictions about their future: gambling inserting itself into their future - panic about it not being there. "I will never gamble again" or "Enough time has passed that I can control it"
- Attacking their hope for change early on: "I always fuck up/I am never going to change"
- Minimizing risks / overestimating their strengths / competencies
- 'Yeah butts': always a reason why it's not going to work
- "I am unique different": that's nice for you but it won't work for me
- Interrupting their ability to see the problem's influence/grip/power - what gets called denial by others

I am never going to change.

How the problem interrupts relationships:

- Conflating agreement with support – "if you believed in me you would be ok with me going to the concert / Las Vegas." "I've been working so hard at rebuilding trust and you not trusting me makes me want to use / gamble."
- Messes with their ability to regulate emotions
- Encourages them to lie / steal / cheat/manipulate in order to maintain a relationship with the problem
- Blinding people to the tricks of the problem (encouraging them to think they have it all figured out)
- Encouraging isolation: pushing people and supports away

I can't let them down, they were there for me, I owe them, I started them using.

- People trying to help you are fuckers/become the enemy
 - Obscuring / Downplaying/Minimizing the impact their use has had on others
 - Blame: If you didn't do this then /I wouldn't be using/I used / gambled because of what you did/ what he/she did to me
 - Facebook/Social Media / free gambling apps
 - Old using friends: drugs take advantage of friendships and connections with others.
- Risky male partners – At Risk for returning to substances based on their connections with a partner that uses casually or otherwise
- POT! – not a gateway...rather a substance that gets positioned as 'not a big deal' and therefore young people pay less attention to the risks of engaging with that substance



(L)Earned Insider Knowledge About How to Find Freedom from Addiction

- Having a period of abstinence
- Gratitude
- Finding a spiritual connection or "higher power" - attending ceremony, meeting, prayer, temple, church, meditation, etc
- Finding at least one non-using/supportive friend
- Regularly attending N/A, G/A and/or A/A step meetings
- Developing and maintaining self care practices
- Loving Oneself / Acceptance
- Listening to supports even if disagree
- Giving Back to others / Offering Support
- Being cautious about starting new relationships
- Striving for open mindedness/ honesty with yourself and others
- Being able to see the risks/ plan around risks/including others in helping you see the risks
- Staying away from risky people/locations / gamblers
- V.S.E: Voluntary Self Exclusion
- Paying attention to social media - deleting risky people from facebook/snap chat/ instagram/kik/twitter/ tinder or deleting account altogether
- Seeing professional supports regularly
- The more time away from the problem the more clearly you are able to see it
- Humour
- Family/Caregiver Involvement/Actions
- The importance of group

Documenting **Family** Insider Knowledge: Family Responses to Addiction (siblings, children, partner, parent, etc)

Shame:

- Silence/Isolation – not sharing experiences with family, friends, and colleagues
- Feeds on the stigma of gambling
- Feeds on the lack of understanding about this problem
- Feeds on the hierarchy of drugs ; the more risky the substance, the more shame and fear that people won't understand or that people will judge them or their child

Guilt & Blame (attacks them, shifts their gaze toward partner &/or youth):

- Our fault
- You (child) failed
- If I had done something different, sooner, earlier...
- If your father hadn't left us, you wouldn't be using
- You got wrapped up the wrong crowd
- You are just like your father
- I'd be a terrible mother if I kicked her out

Partners / parents not wanting the struggling person in the home and the resulting presence of guilt.

Fear for the struggling person's safety:

- Escalating fear encourages parents to not draw lines or set boundaries
- Fear of death, violence, sex trade, exploitation, overdose, judgement from community, suicide, self harm, running away, joining a gang, crime, and jail

I know how your mother can be.

It's better that I know she is safe.

Perfect Parenting / Partnering

- Other parents would have done a better job with their kids
- Other partners would have been treated this way

Family disagreement/conflict

- Parents not on the same page, the problem can thrive (eg tricky separation)
 - Parents undermining each other's effort to draw lines
 - Exhaustion
 - Blaming how the other parent is parenting
 - Secrecy – One parent covering up for the young person and withholding information about the extent of the young person's use

Essentialist ideas

- I am a mother and I care more than your father because it's instinctual
- I can't help it, I'm wired that way

Discomfort with Chaos

- It was easier to just give in
- I couldn't deal with the yelling/badgering/whining/crying/fighting/screaming/name calling/ threats of self harm or violence
- If I give in, it will all stop

Worry about young person's future: school, work, future prospects

- Encourages parents to do things for their young person like drive to interviews or write resumes, apply to college for them

Shared / Common Solutions:

Timing Matters

- Investigate with families to identify their experience of the problem and how it has been impacting their young person, their relationship with their young person and their relationship to each other
- Talk about the possibilities of the steps they have tried and what they might be willing to do differently

The Importance of 'No'

- Setting limits, being clear about expectations and having consequences matter.

Preparing for 'No'

- Predict how the person will respond to the 'no' and explore how they will respond to fear, worry, guilt, chaos, etc.

Treatment Matching and Resource Awareness

- Offering the parents information about what supports are available for parents such as plea bed, treatment programs, shelters, etc and how to access them

- In collaboration with other supports and knowing how the public or private system can support both the young person and the parents

Explore what is getting in the way along the way

- Name and explore the tactics of the problem
- Eg: if fear: explore what it is about, explore times when they stood up to fear or offer other insider's experience and invite them to reflect on it/see what fits

Family work with all members throughout exploration

- Seeing different family members and then collaborating

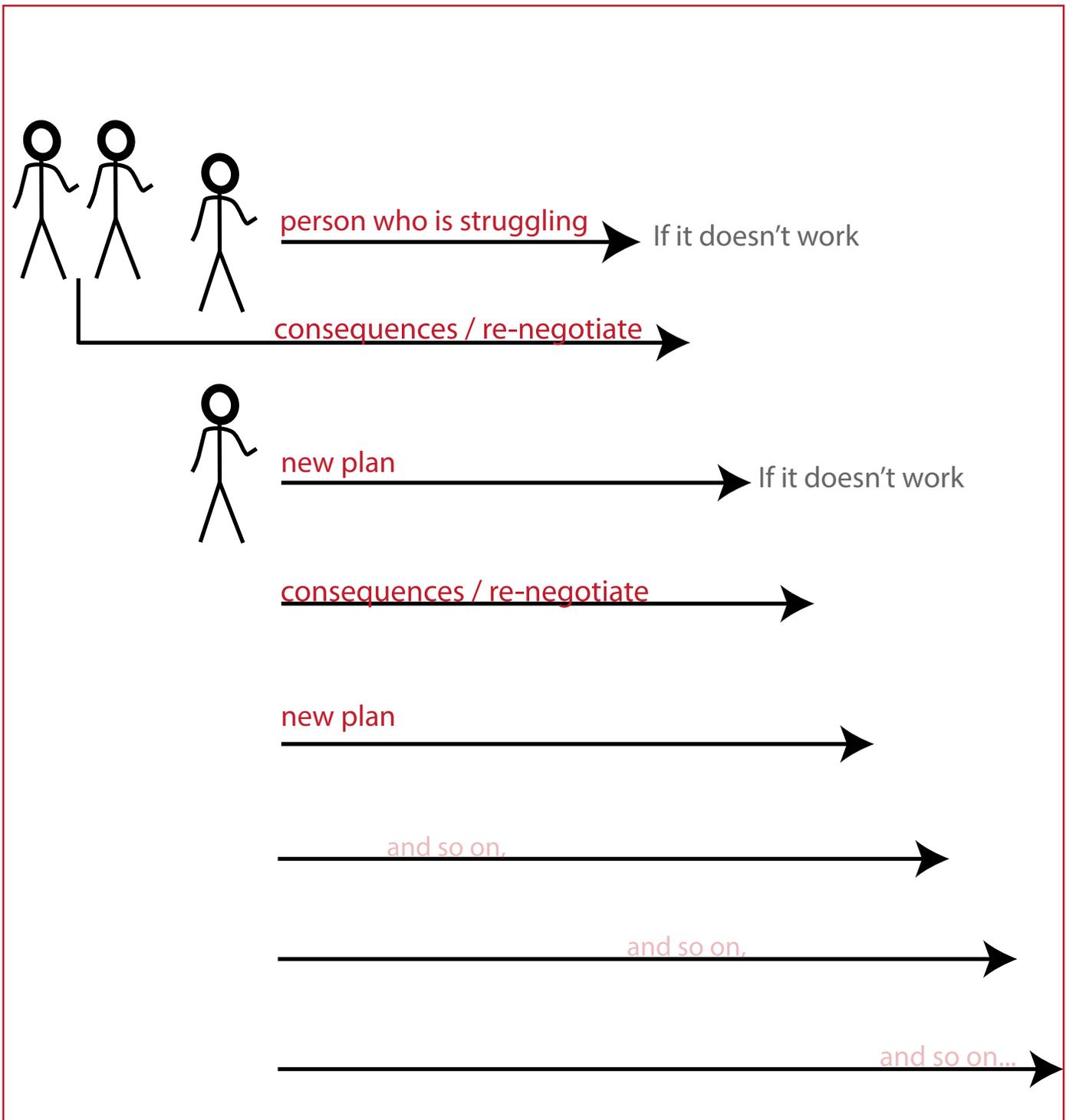
The 'why' is not important

- Deconstruct cause and offer notions of influence (relational)

At times, family members can get captured by hopelessness.

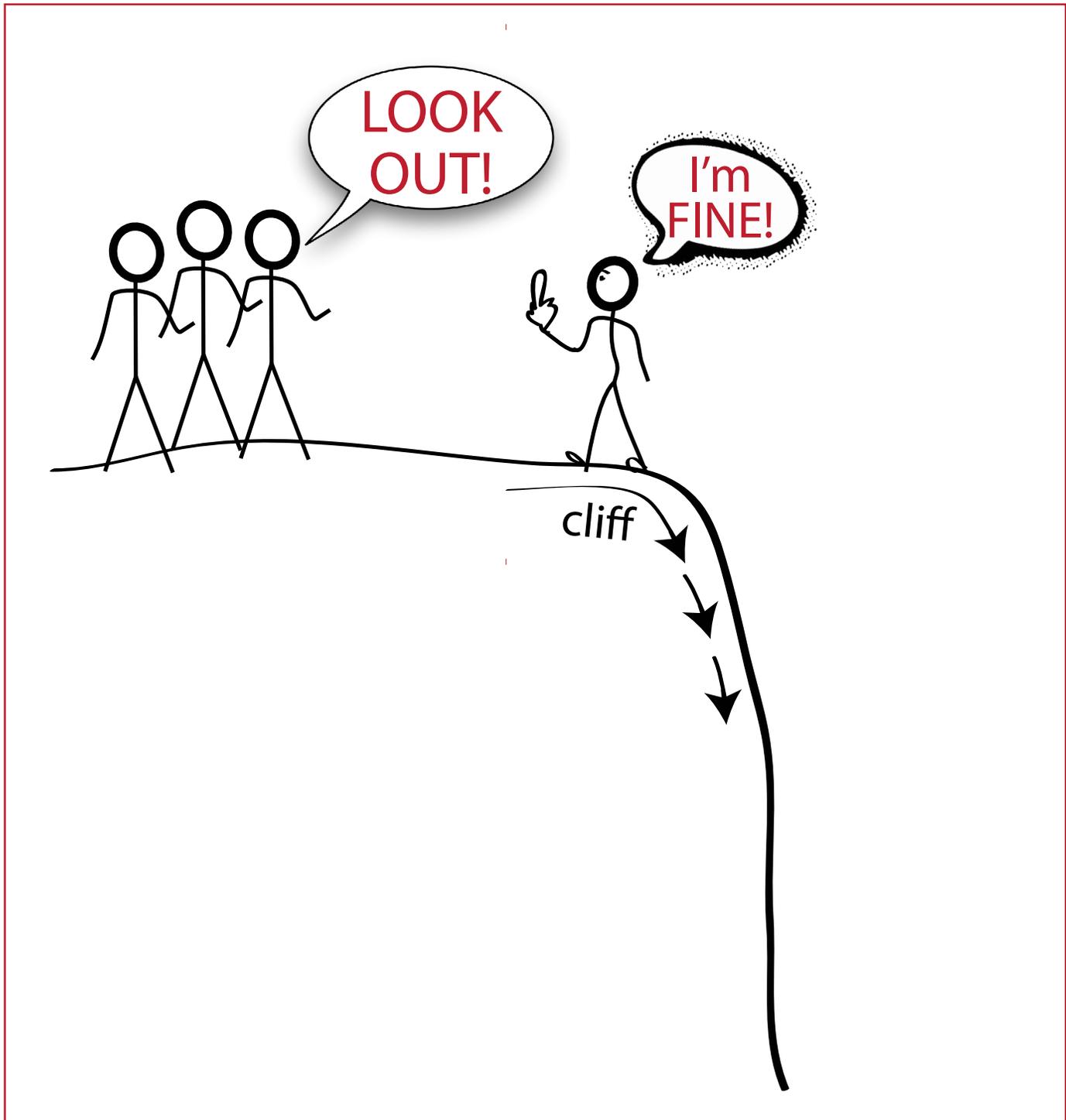
Remember that what you say and do does have influence.

A Visual Aid to Working with Families



The benefits of having a plan provides the family members some relief as they can respond to what is happening versus reacting to it. This bigger picture plan invites the person struggling to co-create the plan and with an emphasis on what will happen if they are unable to follow through on the plan. It provides clarity and transparency between the person struggling and the family members about what the possible next steps will be. It nudges the person struggling towards a greater awareness of the scale

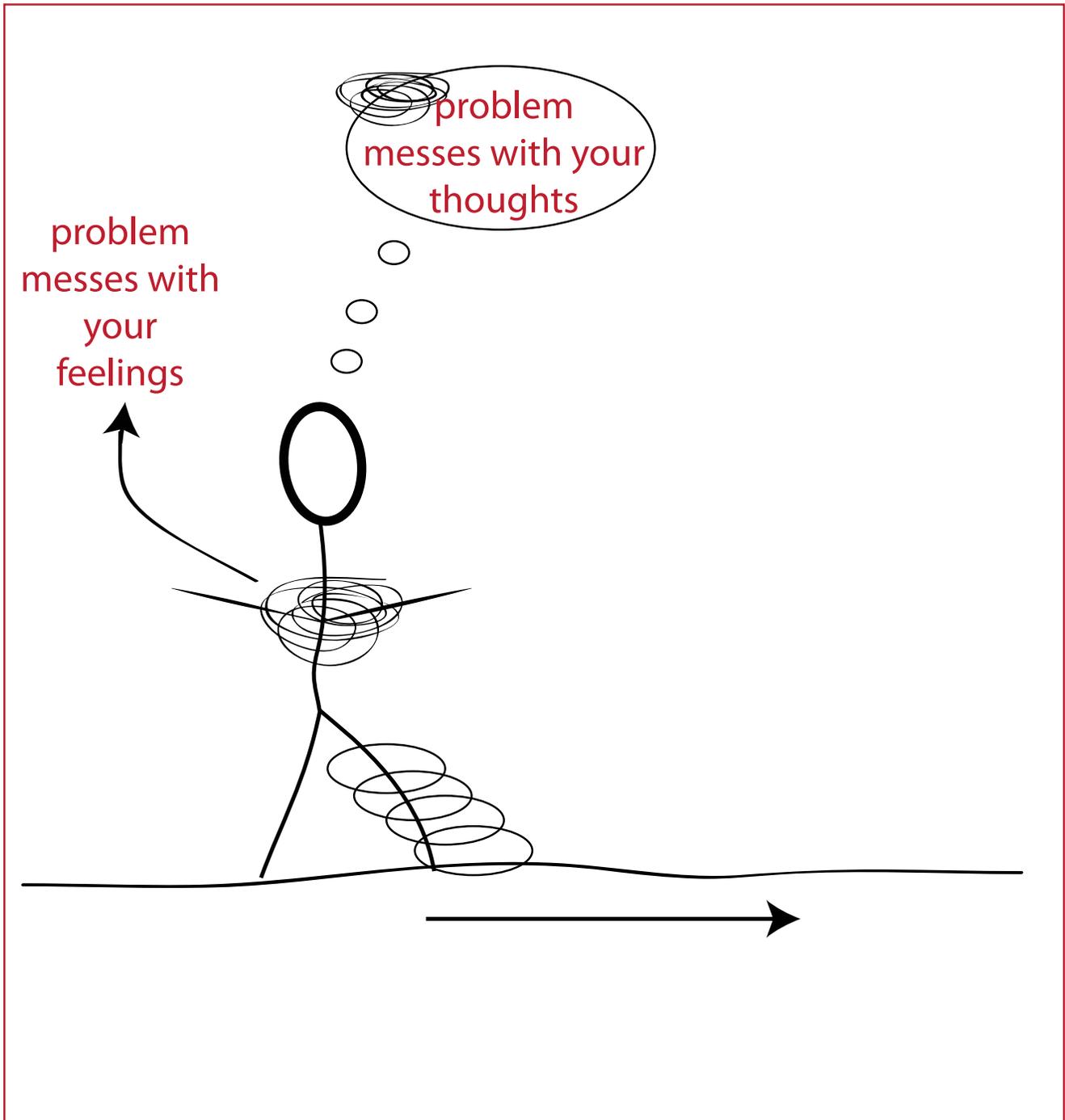
Look Out!



This diagram highlights how the problem obscures people from seeing risks while at the same time distorting their own strengths. "I'll be fine, that party won't be a big deal...it's been 4 months since I've used...I'm out of debt...so I'm no longer chasing my loses. It's only sports betting...I'll be ok".

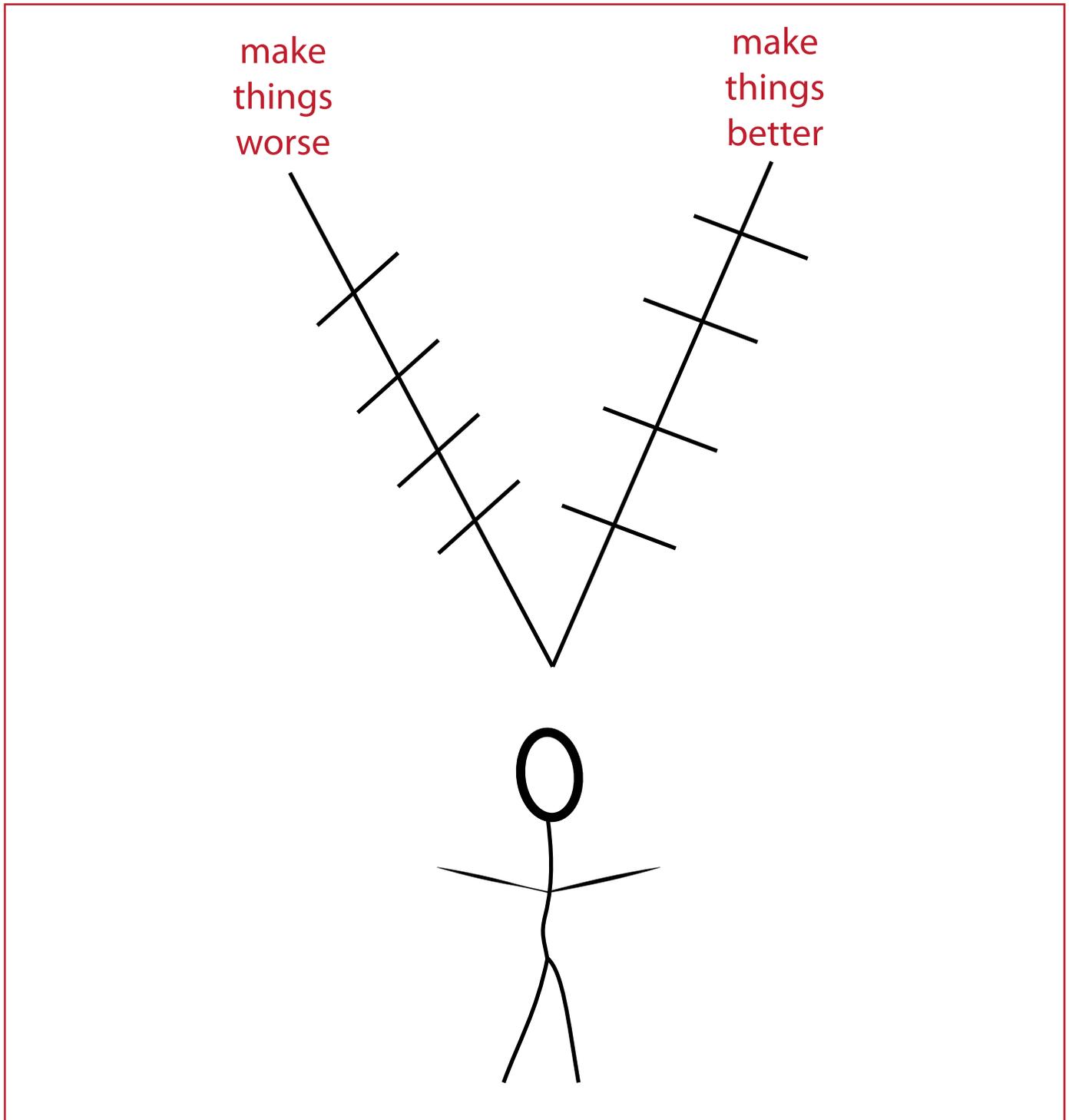
The diagram also underlines how the problem influences the person's experience of support. Friends, parents, partners, etc, are experienced as controlling, mistrusting, and criticizing rather than as folks who are in their corner offering concern and care. The person can be combative, secretive and rejecting of the support being offered. It also provides levity to a difficult conversation.

Shackled to the Road.



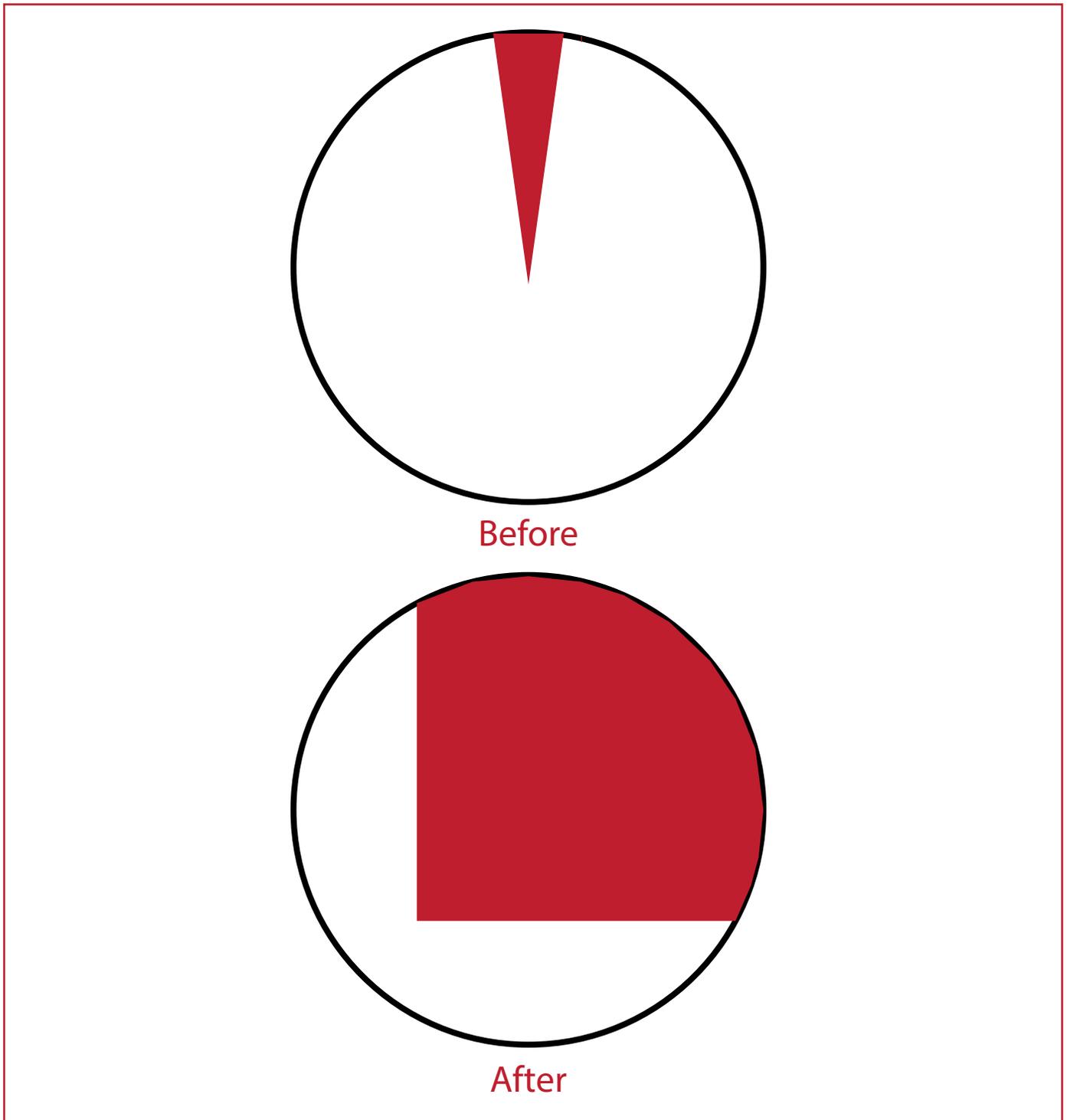
We invite people to expect and be to be prepared for their thoughts and feelings to be all over the place and influenced by the problem. Each shackle is an action that is connected to the person getting their life back such as exercise, counselling, 12-step support groups, ceremony, sober community, honesty with supportive people, etc. The importance of the rings of the shackles can't be over-stressed enough. By focusing on the 'doing' the person will be able to trust their actions not their thoughts. "If I am attending weekly group then it means I am on track." The problem will be chipping away at their resolve. "It's not that bad"...you are just self-medicating...it's really anxiety and depression..." As the person starts to feel better their clarity with their struggle starts to dissipate and therefore their desire to continue to make effort to stay on track lessens. When Social Workers ask for 'Relapse Prevention Plans' this is the image that I use to inspire the conversation and create a formal document.

Highlighting Agency.



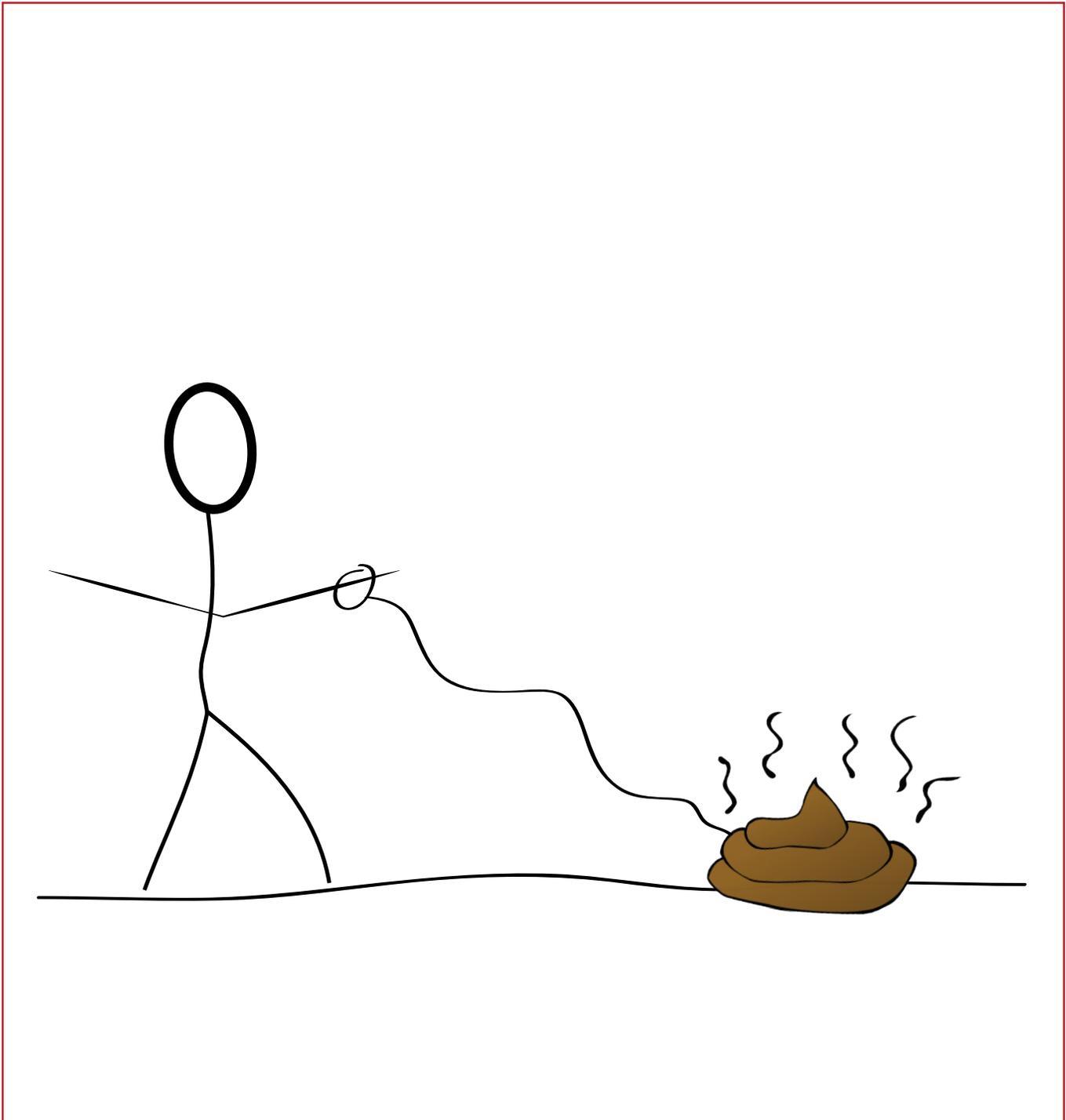
The bifurcated diagram intentionally simplifies the exploration of their actions, choices, thoughts, and relationships that either walk them towards the life they want or back towards the problem. It can include small steps such as making the bed to other influences such as spending time with certain friends, ex-partners, etc.

Degree of Responsibility.



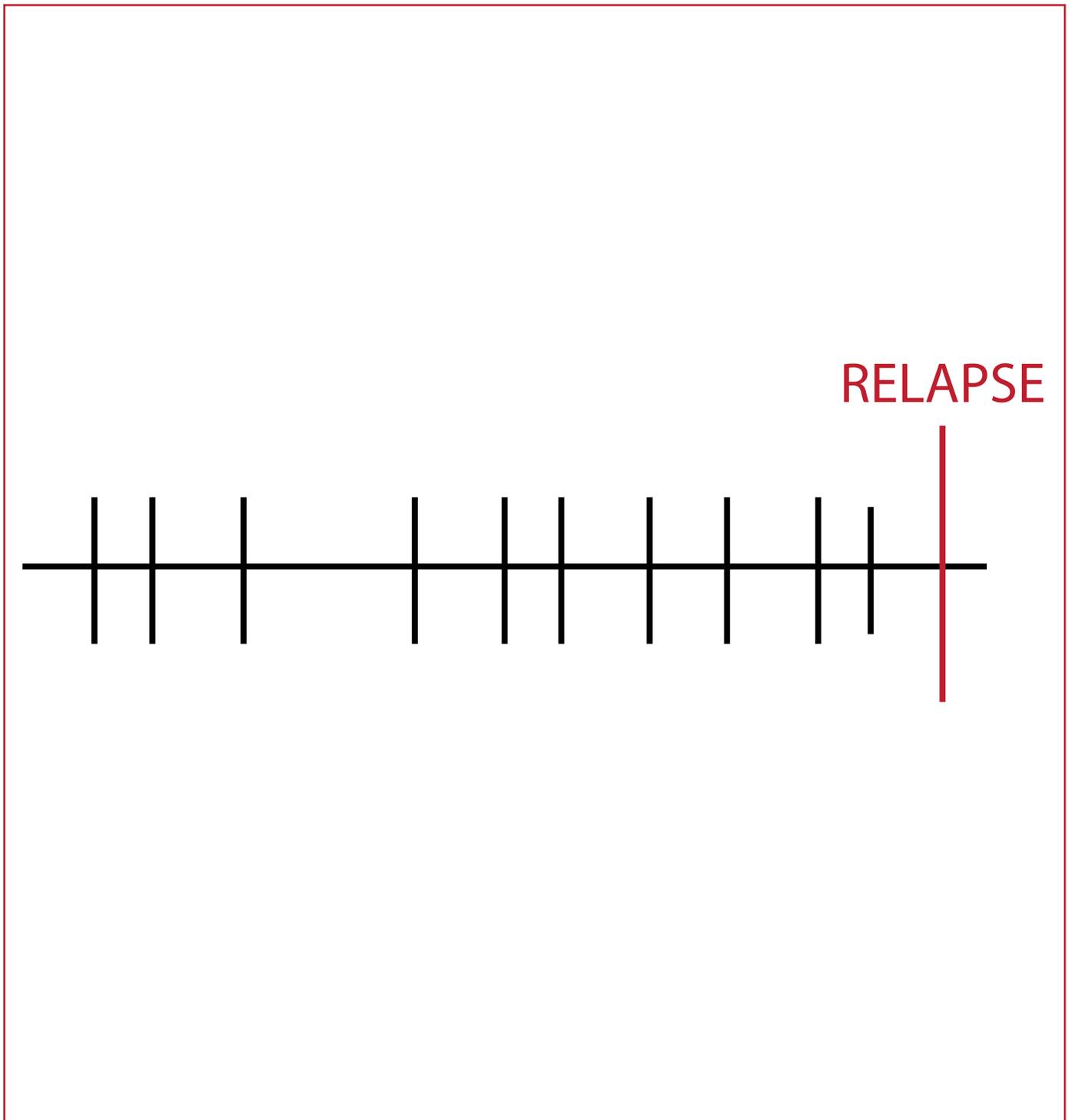
The diagram highlights how distorted the person's perceptions can be when they are under the grip of the problem. Typically the problem encourages the person to point the finger towards everything and everyone else besides addiction. After people get some distance from the problem can they start to more clearly see just how much influence it had over their actions, thoughts and feelings.

The Shit Pile.



The diagram shows the importance of purposely remembering the painful experiences that come from having the problem in their life. In fact, the more clear and richly described experiences the better for the person as the problem is continually trying to dismiss and discount the negative effects and instead encourages the person to focus on the positive ones. Clients have talked about the role of the shit pile (shame, regret, guilt, pain, etc) in helping them remember why they are taking steps to find freedom from the problem.

Relapse Deconstruction.



Deconstructing Relapses/Honouring the knowledge that comes from it:

Relapses provide an embodied, experiential opportunity to learn about how particular thinking, actions, or inactions set the stage for the problem to return. A deeper respect for the strength of grip the problem has on the person.

Relapses are never random, "...and the next thing I knew I was at the casino." It doesn't work that way. There are a number of things a person does (eg. self-exclusion) or doesn't do (eg. not reaching out when struggling) that can set the stage for the problem to come back into the person's life.

How Therapists Can Get Duped by the Problem in Therapeutic Conversations:

Make sure not to go down rabbit holes and get lassoed by the problem!

- 1. People come into counselling with a strong desire to figure out the ‘why’?...Why did this happen?...Why am I struggling? Why can’t I stop?...Why me?** These questions are often brought forward right away – you can expect these questions in session one. We are not uninterested in having those conversations, we just assert that when to give those questions air time matters. It’s like bait and switch. The ‘why’ question can prematurely shift the focus towards trauma and away from responding to addiction through action. (If someone was running out of a burning house you wouldn’t entertain a conversation about how the house caught on fire before calling 911).
- 2. Trusting the client’s self-reported confidence that the problem is no longer in their life and they will be “fine”.** I can go to the party and not get loaded. I can go to the casino and only use the free coupons or I’ll just leave my credit cards in the car.
It’s like going on a hike with someone and there is a huge risky section of the track where people slip and fall down the hill injuring themselves and the person says... I’m going to do whatever it takes to stay safe....Then you start to talk about the section of track that is risky and they get irritated with you for pointing out the risky section of the road... The person would say I’m fine...I’ll be different...It won’t be like that for me...
It is important to challenge their report of safety and explore potential risks.
- 3. That all addiction is a response to trauma.** Trauma can be a part of the story of addiction, but people get caught up because of: habit, communities, fun, it feels good, a few bad decisions in a row, covering up pain that isn’t trauma, insecurities, contextual/geographical factors (port cities, northern locations, 90’s heroin, Hawaii no gambling or Vancouver pre 1995 no gambling)
- 4. Facilitating a conversation that prioritizes a preferred counterstory without exploring useful shame and useful guilt.** There is a direct relationship between the intensity of shame and guilt and the person’s willingness to make change. The person becomes more risk when those two feelings decrease and they can’t readily access memories of how bad it was. The painful memories do reflect their values (they feel shame because they hurt people and transgressed their own values and ethics)...however, people who struggle need to remember that the problem distorts their sense of clarity/awareness. Eg: client who had to sell the family home to cover debts decides to go back to the casino because it ‘wasn’t that bad’.
- 5. Engaging in conversations about blaming institutions.** The social context matters and people’s lives are political; however, privileging that topic too early in treatment can be detrimental - it is a distraction from focusing on what they need to do to get their life back. A discussion on the injustice of structural inequities can come at a later time. Blame is different than externalizing. With disordered eating, politicising their struggle can be helpful to create space from the problem. However, with substance misuse it can be incredibly detrimental as it fuels an aspect of the problem, which is blame.
- 6. Prioritizing alternative stories and exceptions at the expense of not exploring in great detail how the problem impacts them and operates.** Clients will commonly want to highlight the exception (eg: I went to the Casino but left after 30 minutes and then ate at the buffet without any issues). You could go two ways: what were you doing to stay outside of problematic gambling or more importantly exploring the risks associated with that decision and what they are doing or not doing that set the stage for the problem to creep in the back door. (*reminder: the population were are speaking about it at the far end of the continuum in a life and death struggle with addiction)
- 7. Not exploring and challenging shame/secretcy.** The problem thrives in secrecy and silence. Shame makes predictions about how people will respond to their struggles that are distorted. (Eg: I could never reveal to my family that I struggle with gambling because they would judge and reject me or I can’t time off of work for treatment because people will find out. I’d rather stay stuck than people finding out)
- 8. Working with the person individually and not involving supports from their community of concern.** I couldn’t live with anyone knowing about this problem in my life, so we need to do this without anyone knowing.

The Importance of Group Therapy

Groups are a practical resistance to privatizing and individualizing struggles. Dominant narratives of problems locate problems inside people. Groups resist that way of making sense of struggles. Problems are social in their construction and therefore the solutions are also social and shared.

Groups help expose the nature of the problem. People witnessing other people saying out loud what is secretly in their heads is powerful. It helps to uncover and undermine the nuanced influence the problem has on the person and the impact the problem is also having on those around them such as partners and family members.

Groups also help people share their hard won knowledge. Because addiction discounts support, hearing someone share painful knowledge acts like a portal that the person can potentially hear. There still might be a struggle with accepting or agreeing with it. “That might have been your experience but I’m different.”

Groups provide an opportunity for us to strategically use group member’s (l)earned knowledge to help support another group member who may be struggling. Eg: Interviewing someone about how they rebuilt trust with their partner so that someone else who is experiencing frustration about their partner not trusting them enough can see they are not alone and expose how the problem might be influencing how they are making sense of the support.

Groups provide an opportunity for accountability. “I couldn’t let the group down.” “I didn’t want to have to come to group and say I relapsed”. “I thought about what “x” said all week and it got me thinking about what I needed to do...”

Groups provide an opportunity for people to laugh in the face of despair – shared shame and really getting it and a false belief that you are the only one there is relief in hearing someone articulate a story or a feeling that the client is too embarrassed to share. Laughter is key. The problem becomes so predictable that it is laughable.

Groups provide a space to rebuild connections. People who struggle with addiction, get disconnected from important relationships. Disconnection is a by-product of not having close connections. Once isolated, there are then fewer people in their life to be accountable to....no one knows where you are or how you are spending time. Groups help people practice staying connected to people and practice sharing their thoughts and feelings. Letting people in or expressing thoughts and feelings is part of the process of recovery. Not sharing is a recipe for strengthening the grip of addiction. “When money is tight and I am talking about it with my girlfriend it helps to ease the stress which keeps me safe. Before I thought it was about reporting to her and now I see the benefit it has on my recovery.”

Groups are often free, accessible, and offer ongoing support.

Offering Candidate Questions for Therapists Working with People Caught in the Grip of Addiction

The following areas are possible places you could explore with the caregivers.

As conversations are discursive, the questions are meant to be generative places to springboard from.

Fear

- Does the way you think about things shift depending on how big fear is?
- Has fear influenced the way you relate to “X”
- Are there certain predictions that fear makes about your child’s future?
- Are there certain predictions that fear makes about what will happen to your child if you do “X”
- How believable are those predictions?
- Are the predictions always believable or do you have times when you disagree with fear?
- What’s the hardest part about fear?
- What do you do when fear is strongest?
- Are there people in your life that help you hold on in the face of fear? Who are they? What do they do? How does that impact you and your experience of fear?
- Does fear impact the way you think of yourself as a parent?
- Does fear impact what you say/do when it is strongest?
- When fear is not around does it change how you relate to ‘X’s’ use?
- Are there ways that drugs and alcohol benefit from fear?
- Does fear get in the way of action?
- Has fear gotten bigger or smaller over time?
- Has fear changed the more you have learned about the problem?
- Is it easier to speak back to fear and take action, the more you learn about the problem?
- Does fear ever get in the way of holding your lines?

Guilt

- How long have you been experiencing guilt?
- Has it gotten bigger or smaller since “X” has used?
- How do you think about yourself as a parent when guilt is close? Versus when it is further away?
- How does guilt influence how you respond to “X”? Does it encourage you to say or do things?
- Are drugs benefitting from you feeling guilty? Does it make it harder to say no?
- Does guilt ever encourage you to compare yourself with other parents? Do you sometimes imagine what “X” (another parent) would say or do? Does it recruit other people as examples of better parents?
- Are there times when guilt is quieter? How do you think of yourself as a parent in those times? When guilt is quieter do you say/do things differently with “X”
- Does guilt encourage you to be beaten up about the past?

- Does guilt assign responsibility? What is it saying? Who is at fault?
- Is your sense that your young person can tell when you are under the influence of guilt?
- Are there ways that guilt and fear work together?



Shame

- When shame is close what happens to you?
- Does it impact how you think of yourself? In what way?
- Does it impact how you think of you child/partner?
- From your experience does shame encourage you to speak or does it encourage silence?
- Why silence?
- When you are silent, does it make shame bigger or smaller?
- Are there times when you have stood up to shame and shared? Who was it? What did you do? What was your experience like?
- Are there people in your life where you feel less shame around? Who are they? What is in your relationship where there is less room for shame? What is it like to have less shame?
- Does the degree of shame going up or down influence how you make sense of what is happening?
- Are there times when shame is not around?
- Is shame connected to the substance they are using?
- Are there things your young person does that makes shame bigger?

Exposing the influence of the problem

- Who cares more about the problem, you or your child?
- What has it been like for you to care more?
- What impact does it have on you? Your relationship with your partner?
- Is there a difference in the way you and your child make sense of the problem?
- What have you tried to encourage “X” to see what’s happening as a result of them using?

- Has it worked? What has/hasn’t work?
- What supports have you explored so far? Who in your community stands with you?
- How has your kid’s use impacted your life? Vacations? Family Events? Etc
- Given that many parents talk about their young person being taken over by aliens, what keeps you from fully walking away from the relationship?
- How do you hold on to patience in the face of conflict?
- What was your child like before substances came into their life?
- What did they do?
- How were your interactions with them?
- What were you thinking was possible for their future?
- When did you start to notice a problem?
- Did you think substances were behind it right away? Over time?
- Has there been more conflict or less conflict over time?
- What role are substances playing in the conflict?
- Who supports you in the face of these struggles?
- What aspects of your life help you to hold on the face of despair/hopelessness?

Exploring the struggles with the plan

- What has gotten in the way of you doing “X”?
- What happened? What did you do?
- Were there differences and similarities with how you responded to “X”
- What were you thinking/feeling at the time?
- Looking back, do you think/feel the same way now?
- Does it change depending on what is happening?
- Are there times when you are captured by their substance misuse?
- Have you ever tried to figure out why this is happening?
- Given that it will look ugly at times, how do you want to respond to the struggle?
- What values do you hold that help you stay with patience in the face of being stretched and tired?
- How prepared are you to respond/cope with the push back from the line?
- What’s your prediction of how it will go? How do you want to respond?
- Is it helpful to remember that what you are experiencing is them under the influence of the problem? How do you remember that? Who helps you remember? Who are your allies?

Just like drugs, there are different promises for different games:

Club drugs: promise to make you happy, energetic, connected to others. LSD promises to connect you with the world around you, claims to help you move past your own 'ego', etc.

The casino: can be a safe place for people to feel entertained without commitment or a place that promises excitement. It can also be a place to escape your family struggles or work stresses.

Slot machines: promise a zone out, a numbness, and an escape/vacation from life
Poker: promises a glory, you are a big shot, an interpersonal bravado, brings a swagger/assertion that you have a social read better than others, skill versus luck.

Sports betting: It's connected to sports culture and identity and skill versus luck.

Backarat: excitement and fast win.

Blackjack: it's barely gambling, you can play slow and just be good at math, it's the pot of the casino and the slots are the crack.

Online: don't have to deal with people, easy access, easy money

Keno and pull tabs: Intersects with mental health and social marginalization when problem Keno or pull tab use occurs

VIP / exclusive offers / free spins: the allure of getting something for free consistently draws in our clients to gamble. Online and brick and mortar casinos know how to manipulate their clients and capitalize on the illusion of offering something for free to their customers. (glossy brochures and free hotel rooms, free buffets, free food, spa treatments). It is important to deconstruct /challenge the concept of free as clients will pay for those services tenfold over or more.

The Chitter Chatter of Problem Gambling:

- If you don't play, you can't win
- You are feeling lucky today, yesterday wasn't your turn, today it must pay you back
- You forgot to bring your lucky gloves, that's why you lost
- They won't catch you at the door if you take the bus, leave your car at home (Voluntary Self Exclusion members are tracked by their license plates as well as photo id)
- It's a way to make money fast – in fact, it's the only option you have at this point because you are so far in the hole
- They are drawing for the car tonight, you can't miss that opportunity, you'll just go for the draw
- There's a new casino that you haven't tried yet, you'll just go check it out for an hour
- You can just go to the buffet and not be at risk of gambling
- You will just bring your one bank card and leave your credit cards at home
- You're going with your good friend, and they won't let you gamble irresponsibly
- You'll just cross the border and go to Bellis Fare (for people who are VSEd in BC)
- There has been enough time that has passed, you've gotten out of debt and so going to Las Vegas will be fine.
- You need the money – it'll be easy money – your friend won the other night so you might as well try
- You deserve to have a night out/ not to not deal with these feelings/people/situations – you can't cope without me.
- You're on vacation, it's a one off, there is no risk of repeat playing because you are out of town...you won't get back addicted if you gamble here. Just don't gamble at home.
- Nothing is going to be as interesting or as exciting in your life going forward
- You need to cut these dinner coupons because you spent your pay cheque last night
- It's your money anyway, she can't tell you what to do (it is gendered).

Problem Gambling Severity Index

This self-assessment is based on the Canadian Problem Gambling Index. It will give you a good idea of whether you need to take corrective action.

Thinking about the last 12 months...

Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?

0 Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Still thinking about the last 12 months, have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?

0 Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

When you gambled, did you go back another day to try to win back the money you lost?

0 Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Have you borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?

0 Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling?

0 Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Has gambling caused you any health problems, including stress or anxiety?

0 Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Have people criticized your betting or told you that you had a gambling problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true?

0 Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household?

0 Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?

0 Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

TOTAL SCORE

Total your score. The higher your score, the greater the risk that your gambling is a problem.

Score of 0 = Non-problem gambling.

Score of 1 or 2 = Low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences.

Score of 3 to 7 = Moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences.

Score of 8 or more = Problem gambling with negative consequences and a possible loss of control.



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(graduate and post-graduate practicums available)
- **Clinical supervision** (individual & group)



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