



CASTLE CRAIG
HOSPITAL

Personal Responsibility

Christopher Burn

THE CASTLE CRAIG PAMPHLET SERIES





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In choosing to publish our resource material on recovery from all forms of addiction, together with other related therapeutic material, we hope to extend this part of the experience available at Castle Craig Hospital to the community at large.

Addiction is a complex illness, and understanding it is a critical part of recovery. The educational elements to our programme - whether they be pamphlets, videos, lectures, workshops, or books - are a fundamental part of everyone's recovery journey. Education or insight alone do not produce recovery but they serve to inform, validate and motivate those struggling to take responsibility for change.

These pamphlets are dedicated to all those affected by addiction, be they sufferers themselves, family members, close friends, or those working in the health, psychiatric, therapeutic or social work sectors. We also gratefully acknowledge the help and support given by the Twelve Step fellowships.

Our educational materials offer a variety of information on addiction and related areas. These publications do not necessarily represent Castle Craig Hospital or its programmes, nor do they officially speak for any Twelve Step organisation.

The personal stories in this material are composites of many individuals and any resemblance to a single person, living or dead, is strictly coincidental.

Dr. Margaret Ann McCann





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“Before coming to the Fellowship of NA, we could not manage our own lives. We could not live and enjoy life as other people do. We had to have something different and we thought we had found it in drugs. We placed their use ahead of the welfare of our families, our wives, husbands, and our children. We had to have drugs at all costs. We did many people great harm, but most of all we harmed ourselves. Through our inability to accept personal responsibilities we were actually creating our own problems. We seemed to be incapable of facing life on its own terms.”

From ‘How it Works’ - Narcotics Anonymous

Personal Responsibility

When we refuse to take responsibility for our lives, we give away our power to change. We need to remember that we are powerless over our addiction, but not powerless over ourselves. Most addicts who try to stop their addiction don't want to change themselves. Of course they don't say this outright, they just pretend: changing certain behaviours - snorting coke or getting drunk - that's fine, but actually changing themselves, that's quite different. How many times have you heard someone in the fellowships say

'I came to AA (or NA, CA etc.) to change my drug use and I ended up changing myself and my whole life.'

Well, that is what you have to do. If you think that you can sober up and stay sober simply by stopping your substance use, and changing nothing else, then you are hoping for a miracle, and that is not taking personal responsibility. Miracles happen, but you need to put in the effort first.

- So, what exactly is personal responsibility?
- Why is it important and how can we learn responsibility?

If we spend our money at the casino, is that responsible? If we drive a car too fast, is that responsible? If we use drugs or drink too much, is that responsible? Your answer to these questions is probably 'no'. Yet in all these cases we have a choice; it can be fun to gamble, to drive a car very fast and to over-indulge in food and drink and we may want to do things like that at certain times, but if done to excess, this behaviour can land us in jail, in hospital or worse. If we are mature, we will choose to do what is good for us - what we need to do in order to avoid negative consequences. That is the essence of personal responsibility - it is about making the right choices between what we want to do and what we need to do.

Addiction erodes our freedom to choose responsibly and we need to learn again how to exercise good judgment and how to make healthy choices. In short, in recovery we have to grow in maturity.

What we are really talking about here then, is the fundamental struggle between choices that mankind has gone through, from the Garden of Eden right up to the present day. This is of course especially evident in recovery from addiction of any kind.

The reason for this struggle is because we are all human. We know what choice we should make and we know the consequences of not making that choice. Yet we still resist making that decision. Deciding to do what we don't always want to do, but what we should do, is part of achieving maturity.

Why is it important to behave responsibly, meeting our needs rather than our wants?

Because meeting our needs on a daily basis will help us to achieve our main goals in life. And what are our goals in life? Well, for most of us these are few and simple, but vital for all that: health, happiness and freedom really covers it.

To achieve these goals we need to make the right choices consistently throughout our daily lives in a responsible manner. For example, going to parties every day may seem like fun but might stop us from studying enough to get a good qualification (and thus prevent us from achieving our goals by establishing a fruitful career). Spending time in a pub with friends who are drinking when we are trying to get sober is not a healthy choice. Many people seem to confuse pleasure and happiness - as a result, they end up making the wrong choices because they mistake the pleasurable quick fix for true happiness that comes from responsible choices. Thus they end up making a Faustian pact, sacrificing long term gain for instant gratification.

John's story illustrates the importance of becoming honest and realistic about our illness, dealing with our denial and challenging ourselves to take responsibility to get our lives back on track.

John's life had been going well until five years ago; that was when he started using cocaine. Before that, he had been happily married, a keen golfer and a rising star in the city investment bank where he worked - he had been well on the way to achieving his lifetime goals through working hard and making healthy choices. Although he had been a heavy drinker for many years, it was cocaine that did the damage. Very rapidly his life became chaotic and his routine of planned choices became one of crisis management instead.

Soon he was having to borrow money and tell lies to explain lapses in behaviour - his priorities changed from working to meet his healthy needs to simply getting what he'd wanted or (as he saw it), 'had to have'.

John found himself in residential treatment where he was at first arrogant, grandiose and defensive. A crisis came when his wife visited and gave him an ultimatum: 'make this work or don't come back'. John's defences collapsed.

He realised that he needed to be honest with himself and his

group and he started to engage in treatment. John worked with his therapist on learning to make healthy choices again. First he looked at how his attitudes might block him from doing this. With help from his therapist and peers he identified the following attitudes:

*'I want it now' (impatience),
'It's not my fault' (blaming others),
'I'm doing this my way' (grandiosity),
'I'm different from other addicts' (pride).*

John realised that his addiction had stopped him from making healthy choices and taking personal responsibility for those choices. He had to start the process again, with the little things.

Each day, he had to ask himself: "Is this choice, this decision I am choosing to make, a healthy one for my recovery?". He began to keep a diary recording his choices and he slowly developed the habit of making wise choices. Once the little choices were right, the bigger ones came more easily and John's life had started to get back on track.

Having defined personal responsibility in simple terms, such as making the right choices between what we want to do and what we need to do, so as to achieve our major goals in life - why is this so important for people who are chemically dependent?

Crucial to recovery from the disease of addiction is the realisation and acceptance that we have to do it ourselves. Nobody else can fix us. We have to change; it is not enough to need to change, it is not enough to want to change – obvious though it may seem, we actually have to experience change by taking action to bring about the positive change. It is perhaps understandable, if in rehab, that we might indeed expect someone else to fix us, after all they fix other diseases like tuberculosis or malaria where all we are expected to do is to lie in bed and keep warm. Not so with addiction however, where ‘I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul’ is the only possible rule.

We now come to the difficult bit. We actually have to make this change and learn to make healthy choices. Most people learn to be responsible naturally, as they grow up. Small children learn from being told and from observation that, for example, playing in the street or touching electric sockets are both dangerous things to do. Teenagers learn, often by example, that attending school will help them get a job or go to university when they leave school; most of them learn also, that using alcohol or drugs will seriously harm their chances of doing well in later life. Those who have become chemically dependent at an early age, on the other hand, often do not go through this learning process - they have got stuck in the childish ‘I want’ mode.

For some of us, other factors in our lives may have influenced our awareness of the importance of personal responsibility; childhood trauma for example, can severely hinder the natural progression towards maturity. Also of course, taking drugs at an early age, leading to addiction in one's teens, can hold back the developmental process considerably. For such people,

learning personal responsibility is a growing up process that they must face after sobering up, and after most other people have already finished.

Relating this to the recovery process is something that may take a bit of time but as we start to feel better and our minds start to clear, we should become aware that we are going through this process:

- We face the reality of our situation and become willing to change;
- We assess ourselves in relation to our needs and values, and identify what we need to change;
- We make a commitment to change and ask for help;
- We learn the need for spirituality;
- We practice making these changes until new ways become habits.

This progression of course is achieved by working the 12 Step Programme in a thorough and honest manner. A look at the twelve steps will quickly show that they are about taking action. You do not get better simply by reading them - you need to do them.

If that sounds easy - it isn't. Addiction is a cunning, baffling and powerful disease, as we all know. It doesn't want to give up on us and it produces all sorts of little devices to stop us taking responsibility for our recovery. In particular, it influences our attitudes; blaming others, playing the victim and self-pity. It is also evident in most of the denial that we display e.g. minimising, procrastination etc. which are really our addictive personalities saying that we don't want to grow up and start making changes. It's just so much easier to do nothing and stay the way we are; blaming others or playing the pathetic victim are the excuses we use.

Personal responsibility comes into the equation, in the manner in which we go about following the process – it goes back to choices. In every choice that we make each day, we must ensure that we choose for the right reason - to achieve our ultimate goals in life of health, happiness and freedom.

How could we achieve these without sobriety? Personal responsibility will require us to be honest in facing up to our situation, it will require us to be rigorous in assessing ourselves, firm in commitment to change and dutiful in practicing new ways. If we do so, we will at last start to recognise in ourselves the maturity that we previously lacked. However, if we fail to make the right choices, even in seemingly little matters, the cumulative effect can be disastrous.

Here is an example of someone who did take personal responsibility:

Joanne's parents had separated when she was eleven years old; her mother returned to work to support Joanne and her older brother and this meant that she was often absent from the home. There was little contact with her father, leaving her feeling abandoned and insecure as she entered her teenage years. She became challenging at home and had difficulties with her teachers at school.

As Joanne became confused about life her rebellion led her to spend time with a group of young people who were using drugs. Soon she too was experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Despite passing her school exams and going to university her alcohol and drug use continued. As her addiction progressed, her deterioration and failing performance alerted her mother and family and they persuaded her to enter rehab.

Joanne loved her new sober group of friends in treatment but she still sought recognition through her immature rebellion. Almost

instinctively, she started breaking rules – spending too much time with one particular male, missing scheduled groups and smuggling in a mobile phone. Her therapist became concerned and an intervention was arranged.

Joanne was helped to examine and understand the origin of the negative patterns of behaviour and attitudes which she had developed over her life. She worked with her therapist with whom she had a trusting relationship and agreed new goals for the future, recognising the changes she would have to make in her attitudes and behaviour to achieve these goals.

It became clear to Joanne that she would have to evaluate her future choices and she was excited about the challenge of taking responsibility for decisions affecting her day to day life. She now felt more empowered and her self-esteem grew. She also had a better understanding of her real needs and how to meet these needs through a life in sobriety.

Personal responsibility is also a key to continued growth - even after we've been clean and sober for a few years, it still plays a big part in our recovery. Though we might stay clean and sober, some of us might fall into bad habits or be otherwise lazy and unambitious. How does this serve to make our life any better or help our fellow human beings? It doesn't. The price of happiness and sobriety is eternal vigilance.

I heard someone say at an AA meeting recently:

"I have to ask myself regularly: what can I do today to make sure that I never return to being the irresponsible person that I used to be? Whatever answers I get, I then have to follow through on the action."

Successful long term recovery demands action and enthusiasm. Those who are living proactively will build momentum through their sobriety and use their energy to reach out and help others.

This motivation and drive comes from a sense of personal responsibility, and the need to 'give back', 'carry the message' and be of service.

Making healthy choices begins with the first step of abstinence. This allows us to grow in maturity and self-efficacy. We are not perfect.

We only need an honest desire to do what is reasonable and right. If we fail at any point, as we inevitably will, we never lose hope. We are prepared to reflect and learn from our mistakes and move on. The measure of our success is our perseverance in our journey of recovery.

Remember that we are seeking 'spiritual progress not spiritual perfection'.

'Ultimately we are responsible for the choices that we make'
(Anonymous)



The 12 Steps



Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. 3

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. 6

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. 10

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 2

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. 5

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. 9

We admitted we were powerless over our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable. 1

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. 4

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. 8

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. 7

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our 12

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. 11

Exercises in Personal Responsibility

1.

Which of the following devices have you used in the past to avoid taking responsibility for your recovery?

- Making excuses or justifying behaviour ☐
- Blaming others ☐
- Not facing reality ☐
- Dishonesty ☐
- Minimising..... ☐
- Procrastination ☐
- Taking the victim role ☐
- Self pity ☐
- Other..... ☐

2.

Which of the above strategies do you still sometimes use?

- Making excuses or justifying behaviour ☐
- Blaming others ☐
- Not facing reality ☐
- Dishonesty ☐
- Minimising..... ☐
- Procrastination ☐
- Taking the victim role ☐
- Self pity ☐
- Other..... ☐

3.

**The twelve steps are a programme of action.
How are you putting the steps into action?**

4.

What steps will you take today to improve your recovery?

5.

Angela, aged 30 years, was brought up in care and never knew her alcoholic parents. Life has given her a raw deal and the only way she believes she can deal with the pain is by smoking marijuana. She has now become addicted. Angela accepts a referral to rehab for treatment of her addiction. She feels unloved, abandoned and insecure, and longs for someone to make her feel happy. She talks openly to her therapist but states that she does not trust her peer group enough to share her feelings. Unknown to anyone else, she starts a relationship with a male patient.

Identify how Angela is not taking personal responsibility for her recovery?

What are the attitudes and behaviours that she must change in order to 'face reality'?

6.

**At the end of each day, for the next week,
write in your diary:**

Today I was responsible when I chose to (itemise)

Today I was not responsible when I chose to (itemise)

**Review at the end of the week with your therapist
or sponsor**

Castle Craig Hospital
Blyth Bridge
West Linton
Peeblesshire
EH46 7DH

Tel. +44(0)1721 722763
Fax. +44(0)1721 752662
info@castlecraig.co.uk

www.castlecraig.co.uk



First published March 2016
ISBN 978-0-9954560-0-6
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Blyth Bridge West Linton EH46 7DH Scotland UK

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