WRESTLING WITH AMBIVALENCE

Sometimes our thoughts, values, and beliefs are in harmony with each other. And sometimes they are at complete odds, competing with each other. Ambivalence is that place where contradictory thoughts and feelings pull in opposite directions and leave no middle ground. And while it is not uncommon to hold competing beliefs and strong convictions, the tension, when forced to choose between them, can be paralyzing. Hopelessness and despair often set in. For example, when someone is drinking, using, or engaging in some other problematic behavior, they may recognize the cost and risks of the behavior, but also enjoy the experience and not be interested in quitting. They may feel pulled to stop, and also pulled to continue using. They may recognize the need to choose, feel overwhelmed by the decision, and end up doing nothing. Change is difficult and takes time, energy, and money, which are all usually in short supply.

WRITING YOUR STORY

Reflect for a few moments on your substance use story. Include times where you held competing beliefs such as wanting to use and wanting to stop. List some of the excitements and comforts of substance use as well as some of the drawbacks and consequences. Reflect on your confused feelings. Try to remember times where you wanted two competing outcomes at the same time. Did you feel stuck, held back, or paralyzed? How do you typically handle internal conflict?

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UNDERSTANDING AMBIVALENCE TO CHANGE - WORKSHEET 1

BE WILLING
Most people resist when they are commanded to do something and have no choice in the matter. If someone is forcing you to make changes, conflict is likely and your incentive to make the changes they want will be small. When change is your own choice, you will put forth greater effort and accomplish more. For you to achieve long-term recovery, it is important for you to decide to be involved and willingly engage in the process.

RECOGNIZING AMBIVALENCE
We all have places in life full of uncertainty. The following examples describe common tensions those in treatment for co-occurring disorders face. As you consider each, and if it applies to you, place an X along the dashed line to best describe where you fall.

I want to drink                                                                               I’m tired of the trouble alcohol causes
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Don’t tell me what to do                                                                                          I need somebody to guide me
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

I have to take care of myself                                                                                              I can’t make it on my own
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

I can’t deal with my family                                                                                          I have to deal with my family
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

I have to change                                                                                                                          I don’t hurt anyone so I don’t need to change
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

I’m willing to live without drinking or using                                                                              I don’t know how to live without drinking or using
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

I’m really trying                                                                              I can’t do it
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
UNDERSTANDING AMBIVALENCE TO CHANGE - WORKSHEET 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I really need to change</th>
<th>I don't want to change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t control me</td>
<td>I need help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do this alone</td>
<td>I can do this on my own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not equipped to quit</td>
<td>I need to quit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t live like this anymore</td>
<td>I can’t stop living like this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People often experience internal conflict when they want two competing things at the same time. Consider some difficulties you face concerning your substance use and mental health disorders. List a few examples where you want several different, yet competing things at the same time.

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_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What feelings go along with the examples you listed?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________