



OneStepHope Resource

Understanding Addiction: Why Some People Can't Stop

Understanding Addiction - OneStepHope

There are people who question why those who struggle with alcohol, drugs, or compulsive behaviors can't just simply stop or change, especially when the consequences become clear. Don't they see how their behaviors are hurting their loved ones, their careers, and themselves?

Our deepening understanding of neuroscience has provided an answer: addictions, now known as substance use disorders, are a brain disease that requires intentional support for recovery.

In addiction, the brain is re-programmed so that unhealthy reward patterns, motivations, and memories become hard-wired into one's conscious and subconscious thinking. Chemicals released in the brain are responsible for the "good" or "bad" feelings we have.

Certain substances, or experiences like sex, gambling, bingeing and purging, or playing video games, create temporary positive feelings. Over time, the brain's reward system becomes rewired, as a person "learns" what gives feelings of pleasure or safety when faced with fear, uncertainty, or pain, causing an increasing dependency on those substances or experiences.

The strength and amount of the chemicals released, and their frequency, is significant in the development process of a dependency or addiction. The "high" can begin to crowd out other healthy sources of gratification and enjoyment. People can get so used to the short-term "high" that it becomes their dominant daily pursuit, to the point where the altered neural pathways make it incredibly difficult to make a different choice.

For many of those negatively impacted through substance use, support is needed.

Recovery consists of a range of services and resources that help peoples' brains heal, so that the patterns developed through a substance use disorder can actually change.

Practically, it can involve being part of community that actively encourages and supports new patterns through vulnerability and connection, learning how to process thoughts and emotions differently, accessing counseling or therapy to address underlying trauma, doctor-guided use of medical interventions that help reduce cravings, and limiting access to locations or settings that perpetuate these cycles, so healing can happen.



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There are a range of treatment types and levels of care available, depending on the severity of the substance use disorder. Some involve an individual spending extended time at a facility, while many offer support that can be accessed within one's community.

The reliance on the chemicals released through behaviors or use of substances can be shifted, thanks to the neuroplasticity of the brain. However, recovery often takes time and a shift of environment.

How can you help? It might start by reaching out for support yourself.

Loved ones of those dealing with substance use disorders need community and a safe place to process through their emotions, too. It can be painful to watch someone struggle with a substance use disorder, but there is hope: recovery is possible.

You can also be supportive of someone's recovery by getting educated about substance use disorders, or by helping connect individuals to treatment resources, communities, and professionals equipped to be supportive.

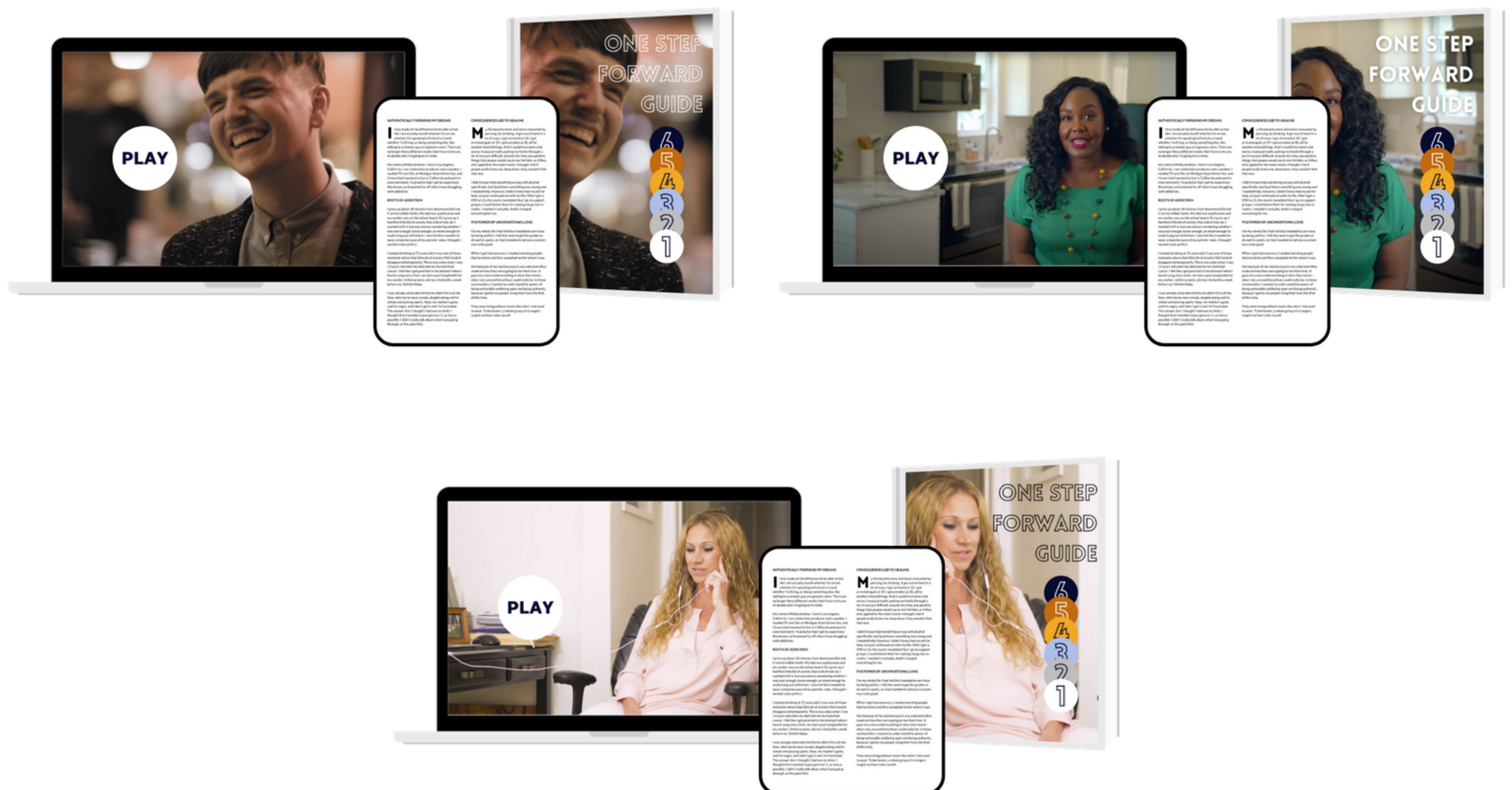
Many people struggling with a substance use disorder would like to change their relationship with drugs or alcohol, but don't know what's possible.

Others have a hard time believing that change is possible for them. You can be an encouragement by expressing your love for and belief in them; stories of hope can help you stay positive in these conversations.

Keep in mind that people may be uncomfortable talking about these personal issues - you may not be the best person to bring it up. Check out our related article on how to have a conversation with a loved one about substance use or mental health challenges.

Continue Your Journey

Check out our related article on how to have a conversation with a loved one about substance use or mental health challenges.



Thank you for learning more about recovery with OneStepHope. Know someone needing support?

GET HELP NOW

Questions for us?
Email contact@onestep.life