



Twitchy Trigger Finger

Reflecting the glow of recovery from Starlight at Tamassee

By Jon Holland, CEO of Tamassee DAR School

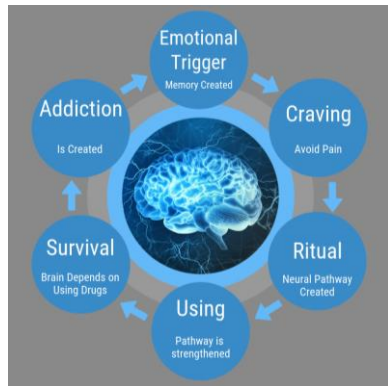


We've all seen the twitchy trigger finger scene in action movies. It's the scene where the bad guy has people at gun point, and the director zooms in on the gun. The bad guy's finger is shaky on the trigger while those at gun point beg for mercy and attempt to talk their captor out of firing.

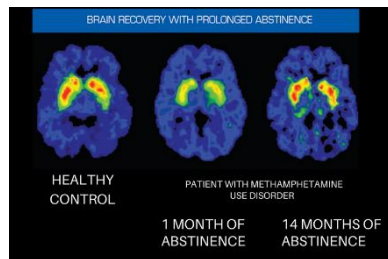
In many ways, an addicted brain is like that action movie scene. When a person who struggles with addiction is triggered, their brain gets twitchy. The trigger is a real or imagine threat to survival. It may be a memory of a past trauma or an emotion of fear, shame, or pain. It may be a stressful situation or an unmet need or desire. In this heightened state, a person craves something to make it better. The limbic system in the brain yearns to reduce the pain with something pleasurable – a release of neurochemicals to alter one's mood.

The cravings lead to a substance or behavior to do just that, and a neuropsychological pathway is formed. As the individual uses when they

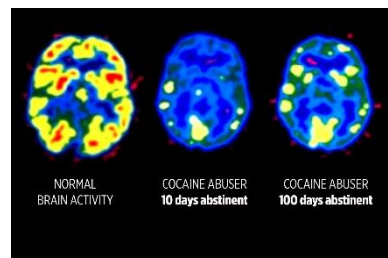
experience a trigger and a craving, the pathway is strengthened. What starts out as a narrow footpath become a two lane county road, then a four lane state highway, and even an eight lane interstate. The neuropathway is strengthened each time the neurochemicals alter the mood, and an addiction is created. Every time the twitch is felt, the trigger finger pulls.



But then brain begins to fight back. Our brains recognize these heightened neurochemical states are unhealthy, and so tolerance begins. For the one trapped in addiction, they need more and more to try and recapture the initial feeling, but increased use doesn't lead to the same euphoria. And so, the person caught in the cycle, uses more and more or reaches for a more intense drug. Ultimately, addicts don't use to get high; they use to feel normal – to try and quiet the pain within and feel some sense of release.



The good news for those suffering with the disease of addiction is the brain has neuroplasticity. The brain can heal itself. This is especially true into our late 20s, but even after that, the brain always retains a capacity to rewire, build new neuropathways, and learn to cope more effectively with natural, healthy doses of neurochemicals. This is the recovery process, healing the brain to address triggers and cravings, the trauma underneath them, and to learn healthy coping.



At Starlight at Tamassee, we believe the brain can heal from addiction. We believe mothers can in time learn to manage triggers and cravings with life-giving coping skills in loving relationships. We believe children do not have to repeat the brokenness in the next generation, and we offer a community to realize these aspirations. To learn more about Starlight, visit www.starlight.tdarschool.org, or contact us at starlight@tdarschool.org or 864-944-1390. If your church or civic group is interested in a presentation on recovery, contact Jon Holland at jholland@tdarschool.org.