

Those Baffling BEEPS: How Can “Thriving: Recover Your Life” Help Me?

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If you would like more information about BEEPS and Thriving: Recover Your Life, please visit us online at www.ThrivingRecovery.org. You can also find us our Facebook page at [joy2thrive](https://www.facebook.com/joy2thrive).

The Attachment Center

Did you know that there is a specific area of the brain—the attachment center—that is responsible for helping you attach to another person in relationship? Amazingly, research suggests that this area of the brain is the foundation of the brain’s control center that helps us experience and regulate emotions. When this area of the brain is securely attached to others (including God) in healthy joy-filled relationships, we can have tremendous capacity to enjoy life and relationships. When life is characterized by joy— and positive emotions, it affects every region of the brain. When the attachment center is well developed, everything we think, do or say is changed.

The attachment center lies at the foundation for every other area of the brain that is responsible for emotions and relationship. It builds a foundation for the ability to feel—but not become stuck in negative emotions such as sadness, anger, fear or shame. When the attachment center is not working well, our ability to make decisions— and live from the hearts Jesus gave us is impaired. Life is painful, filled with anxiety and dominated by feelings of loneliness, shame, fear, isolation and sadness. Even our cognitive functioning is impaired.

God created the attachment center to attach to him and others in joy-filled and mutually fulfilling relationships. He designed us so that our entire brain functions best in joyful, honest and loving relationships. Without these attachments, the attachment center, and the entire brain function in a state of ongoing emotional and cognitive distress.

In this state of distress, and absence of secure attachment, the brain’s attachment center will “latch onto” anything that provides a sense of connection and pleasure. This complex neurochemical process takes without our conscious awareness. All we are aware of is that for some reason, we feel better—or at least don’t feel quite so bad. The problem is that once the attachment center attaches to someone or something, it does not want to let go, and begins to rely on the attachment to help regulate emotions and pleasure in the brain. When these attachments grow, they literally hijack the attachment center—and the entire brain. Does this sound a lot like addiction?

What is Addiction?

In Thriving, we describe addiction as “An attachment to a Behavior, Event, Experience, Person or Substance (BEEPS) that is used to regulate emotion, increase pleasure or decrease pain.” BEEPS is a very useful concept, because it describes the neurochemical process of attachment that is at the root of all addictions. In addition, BEEPS can have a variety of forms. To the attachment center of the brain, Sex, Food, Work, Performance, Alcohol, Drugs, Gambling or Thrill Seeking Behaviors can all help change how we feel, decrease pain or increase pleasure. Once the brain has attached to BEEPS and is using the BEEPS to regulate emotions, pleasure and pain, BEEPS then take on a unique life of their own. In this way, BEEPS literally hijack the attachment center of the brain—and eventually alter the functioning of the entire brain.

BEEPS is also useful because it does not stigmatize certain attachments – and excuse others as more “socially acceptable.” To the brain, attachments to work, performance or thrill-seeking behaviors function in the same way as attachments to cocaine or alcohol. The only difference is that attachments to cocaine or alcohol cause secondary problems that are much less socially acceptable, and potentially more destructive. In terms of the ability to have healthy, joy-filled relationships with God and others – the impact of BEEPS causes us all to miss the mark.

Lack of secure attachment and the experience of unresolved life trauma can make the brain highly vulnerable to BEEPS. The lack of pleasure and inability of the attachment center to consistently help regulate dopamine (the chemical that helps us feel pleasure) create optimal conditions for BEEPS attachment. Since we are unique individuals, BEEPS may all impact us to varying degrees, and what feels pleasurable to one person may not feel very good to another. But when a poorly developed attachment center encounters a BEEPS that does feel create strong feelings of pleasure, it is much more likely to attach to it.

Thriving, Attachment and Relationships

God created the attachment center to attach to other people and to Him in secure, loving and joy-filled relationships. In the context of this kind of relationship, the attachment center grows, properly regulates dopamine and helps regulate emotions appropriately. The brain heals from BEEPS attachments in the same way.

In Thriving, much of our focus is on the development of the relational/emotional skills that promote joyful and loving bonding. Sobriety—or the absence of BEEPS – is essential, but does not heal the attachment center. Sobriety is simply a condition in which BEEPS are not being used to regulate emotions, pleasure or pain. The attachment center heals only in the context of healthy relationships with joy-filled people who are glad to be with us. These joy-based relationships with God and others can help us build a healthy attachment center, allow us to regulate emotions consistently, improve cognitive functioning, and allow us to cooperate freely with the work of the Holy Spirit in us. This results in the development of ongoing maturity—and allows us to live freely from the heart that Jesus Gave us.

As a result, Thriving is very focuses on three essential areas that help us recover from the devastation of attachments to BEEPS – and help us grow the kind of abundant life and maturity that we’ve always wanted. Each of these areas is essential – and can only be built in the context of joy. Without joy, recovery and life quickly degenerate into duty, obligation, ritual and things we “should” do. This kind of joyless living tends to lead to chronic cravings, relapse and immaturity.

The first focus of Thriving is on Joyful Immanuel Healing. Thriving helps participants learn to develop an increased and ongoing awareness of Jesus’ presence so that they are able to interact with Him about all the issues of life. This type of awareness of Jesus’ presence is healing, because it provides us with the ongoing opportunity to talk with Him about our lives and struggles in real time – as things are actually happening. We discover life from His perspective – and this is healing to our heart and soul. As we learn to stay better connected with Him in the present, we are also able to talk with Him about issues from our past – and our responses to them – that help create blockages to life and relationships in the present. The development of an increased, interactive awareness of Jesus’ presence is an essential component of recovery – and life.

The second component of Thriving is the development of community and a place to belong. God never designed us to be alone – or to heal, recover and grow maturity by ourselves. To grow the kind of life and recovery that God intends, we need ongoing, interactive relationships with others rooted in joy. We need to belong – and to learn to create a joyful place in which others are free to connect with us. Every element of Thriving is designed to help us to become part of community – and to learn the skills to create belonging around us. Apart from joyful community, the growth of our life, maturity and recovery simply will be stunted – no matter how “spiritual” we think we may be.

The final focus of Thriving is on teaching the emotional/relational skills that we need to connect with God and with others – and to stay connected when things go wrong. These skills can truly only be learned in the context of joyful relationships with God and others. Every aspect of Thriving is geared towards helping participants learn and practice foundational emotional and relational skills that grow maturity, life and recovery. In fact, the vast majority of every Thriving meeting is spent practicing exercises that help us learn these new skills. Thriving is all about training!

By focusing on these 3 areas, Thriving is helping participants grow in joy, healthy identity and maturity. As joy builds in secure relationships, our capacity to handle the stress and problems of everyday life grow also. We are becoming mature—and growing up into the identity and life that Jesus gave us. And because Thriving promotes ongoing spiritual, emotional and relational maturity, it is useful as a small group model that can be used in recovery centers, support groups and as a discipleship strategy for the local church.

Are You Thriving?

If you would like to find out more about Thriving, please visit us at www.ThrivingRecovery.org. If you would like to find a Thriving group near you, please click the “Find a Group” link at the top of the page. You can order Thriving videos and workbooks by clicking on the “Shopping” link. You might also like to connect with us on our newest Facebook page, which is joy2thrive.

Because Thriving is a support group, you are always welcome! You are also welcome to bring a friend or your spouse with you. Practicing these exercise with a person with whom you share a bond is always best. But if you are coming to Thriving without a partner, you can still learn and practice all the exercises. We have found that practicing the relationship and joy-building exercises in groups of 3 people works well for those who do not have a friend or spouse with them.

Other resources that might be helpful to you include the Restarting Home License DVD and the Restarting Workbook. This is designed for personal use in your own home, and contains the teaching elements used in Restarting Groups. The workbook contains teaching notes and instructions for all of the 36 exercises used in Restarting groups. To find a good introduction to Thriving Recovery, the DVD “Wired for Relationships” is a great place to start. This was recorded during an all-day teaching session, and provides an excellent overview of Thriving’s approach to recovery from BEEPS, codependency, trauma and painful relationships. You can order this video through the “Shopping” link on the Thriving Recovery website.