

# How the Developmental Model Will Assist you in **Treating Addiction** **Much More Successfully**

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The Developmental Model  
Explains that marriage and  
long-term relationships  
**go through predictable stages**  
that parallel the stages of  
child development.





This provides a framework for us to understand where couples get stuck and the important developmental gaps that prevent partners from **creating a relationship that honors both the intimacy of the togetherness** alongside the need for individual autonomy and freedom.

This also helps us understand **what we are facing when one or both partners are struggling with addiction** and how best to proceed.



Here is **why**

# The first stage of development is referred to as the symbiotic stage.

This is a stage of bonding and where two become one. It's a necessary but temporary stage that establishes the love and commitment to one another.

Partners must move past this stage to have a robust and resilient life together. They must learn how to differentiate – both in terms of themselves and their partners. If they get stuck in symbiosis, their developmental is arrested.

*Addiction is by definition, 'symbiotic'.*

It is defined as the often unconscious but utter dependency on a substance or behavior to get through life.



Most alcoholics and addicts **begin their use early in adolescence.**




This is a time of great emotional growth and the **consolidation of a sense of self.**



It is also a time when **goals and dreams are taking hold.**



When individuals use addictively during this critical developmental stage, they **impede their emotional growth.**



Rather than learn to face the difficulties of life and get through them, building character and defining who they are—a process referred to as self differentiation—**they avoid these lessons and remain emotionally immature.**

**When it comes to relationships, their lack of self differentiation and symbiotic functioning leads to merging with others.**

They don't find partners based on a sense of true love. Instead, they take hostages. The aim of partnerships is self-serving.

This is because the characteristic most common in **addictive use is self-absorption.**

It has been said that self-centeredness is the **root of the problem in addiction.**

*The primary orientation in life and love being, "What about me?"*



# This prevents addictive partners from advancing their capacity for other-differentiation:

Which means a true interest in their partner and an ability to give to their partner, even when it's inconvenient. In addition, because their drug of choice is the primary attachment object, (i.e., they can't live without it), **it becomes the 3rd party in the relationship.**

The partner feels, even though it may not be consciously acknowledged, that **their wants and desires are not the priority with their partner.**

# Having the DM framework allows us to intervene

We can assist both the individual struggling with addiction, and the couple who are suffering because of the addiction. We see the developmental arrests caused and maintained by addictive use and we target our interventions accordingly.

**We both encourage growth and confront the regression.**



We can help the addicted partner grow themselves up, pushing their self and other differentiation to promote relationship skills.

**We validate the non-addicted partner's experience, while also pushing them for greater emotional growth.** Using this model, the entire system will shift towards healthy interdependency, rather than an unhealthy dependency and/or toxic independency.