



Jan Winhall: Addiction From the Bottom Up: Integrating a Felt-Sense Polyvagal Model to Treat Addiction



Jan Winhall is a Toronto based psychotherapist in private practice and director of Focusing On Borden, a centre for teaching Focusing and Focusing-Oriented Therapy. With over forty years in practice, she has developed a model that understands addiction as an adaptive attempt to regulate emotional states. Watch this presentation and discover it for yourself.

TOP EMBODIMENT TIP: Daily practice of dropping attention down into the body, finding a felt sense by asking ‘How am I inside here today?’ and pausing to feel into that, in your body.

Addiction Happens in the Body: It’s Not a Disease

- Jan doesn’t agree with the pathologizing model: You CAN work your way through addiction.
- Addictive behaviours are things that help soothe you in the moment, but then they hurt you.
- Addiction is adaptive: **‘It’s a back-up plan that helps you survive.’**
- Jan sought an alternative to the ‘top-down’ approach (of discussing traumas) and found one that works with the body.

‘Focusing’: A Natural Process

- Trauma therapy works well when people are **connected to their bodies**.
- Focusing invites you to find a word/image/gesture that captures the essence of a felt-sense and works as an anchor.
- A **felt-sense** is made up of thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and memories in the body. **It carries meaning.**
- When we stay with it and listen, **a shift happens:** an autonomic nervous system (ANS) response, or a ‘moment of liberation’ where we shift into a different neurobiological state and we feel better.

The 6 F’s: Felt-Sense/Polyvagal Model of treating Addiction

- **Fight/flight-** sympathetic NS activity, **Fixate-** place of addiction, **Freeze/Fawn-** numbing out, (these first 3 are where addiction lives), **Flock-** grounding/connection/safety, **Fun-** play/enjoyment & **Flow-** like being safe in the arms of a loved one or doing an embodied practice like meditation or yoga (these last 3 are where we want to be).
- This model layers a neurobiological understanding of the body in the ANS with the Focusing process, integrating subjective experience with science.
- The importance of **Flock:** Polyvagal theory teaches us that none of us are safe unless all of us are paying attention to other people’s safety. We really need community, particularly embodied communities.

Resources

- ❖ **Books:** Addiction from the Bottom Up: A Felt Sense Polyvagal Model of Addiction by Jan Winhall (out Nov 1st)
- ❖ **Website:** Janwinhall.com (site under construction), www.focusingonborden.com
- ❖ **References:** Judith Herman’s book ‘Trauma & Recovery’, Bessel Van Der Kolk, Eugene Gendlin - founder of Focusing, Amber Gray, Dan Siegal/Bonnie Badenoch - Interpersonal Neurobiology, Dr Stephen Porges - Polyvagal Theory, Marc Lewis - Learning Model of Addiction, Harvill Hendrix & Helen LaKelly Hunt



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